

Tuva

More than 250,000 Tuva people inhabit the region where the three nations of Russia, Mongolia and China intersect. The majority (215,000) live in the Tuva Republic of Russia, radiating out from the capital Kyzl. More than 34,000 Tuva live in north-west Mongolia, especially in the Hövsgöl and Hovd Aimags. An additional 3,000 Tuva people live across the border in the Xinjiang Region of north-west China, primarily in the Burjin, Habahe, Fuyun and Altay counties of Altay Prefecture.

Tuva was declared an independent state by the Tsarist government in Russia in 1912. At the same time, Mongolia gained independence from China. Freedom was short-lived, however. Tuva became a Russian protectorate in 1914. In 1944 it was integrated into the Soviet Union. The Tuva live in a 'harsh mountainous region that has an intense climate. The summers are hot and dry with temperatures reaching 43 degrees Celsius (110 °F). The winters are bitterly cold with temperatures dropping to -61 degrees Celsius (-78 °F).'¹

The Tuva in Mongolia and China are diaspora groups who migrated to their present locations in the early 1800s. In the late 1800s the Tuva in China started to call themselves Mongolians

'to avoid oppression by the then ruling Qing Dynasty, and to enjoy the favored status of the Mongolians, who were allies of the Manchurian court'.²



Asian Report

Tuva is a Turkic language. Because of contact with other peoples, 90 per cent of the Tuva in China can speak Kazak and 30 per cent can speak Kalmyk-Oirat.³ Most can also speak Mandarin. In Mongolia, the Tuva are bilingual in Mongolian. 'The use of the [Tuva] language is rapidly declining on both sides of the China-Mongolia

border',⁴ although it is reportedly still spoken by most Tuva children.

The majority of Tuva in all three of the countries they inhabit believe in Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan missionaries converted them in the 1700s.⁵ In the 1930s the Soviets destroyed nearly all Buddhist monasteries, and a number of monks were put to death. The persecution caused a decline in Buddhism among the Tuva. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Buddhism has experienced a renaissance among the Tuva in Russia, aided by visits by the Dalai Lama and other high-ranking Buddhist leaders.

The Buddhist faith of the Tuva is coupled with the strong influence of shamanism. 'Ceremonies are held on the 7th and 49th days after someone's death. The soul is believed to remain in the body of the deceased for seven days, then depart for the "kingdom of the dead," reaching its ultimate destination on the 49th day. The Tuva believe that all natural elements contain spirits that must be appeased with offerings. The people are dependent on shamans to cure the sick by magic and communicate with the spirits.'⁶

In Russia there are a reported '17 registered evangelical Tuva churches'.⁷ One Tuva believer in Russia was recently martyred. His death was reported on television, causing a growth of interest in the gospel among many people.⁸



Population:

- 252,300 (2000)
- 258,800 (2010)
- 266,400 (2020)

Countries: Russia, Mongolia, China

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: 2,000

Overview of the Tuva

Other Names: Tuvin, Uryangkhai, Altai Uryangkhai, Altai Uriangkhai, Altai Tuva, Tuva, Monchak, Monjak, Soyon, Shor, Urinkhai, Uryangkhai-Monchak, Tuvinian, Tuba, Tannu-Tuva, Soyod, Soyot, Tuvan, Tuvia, Diba, Kök, Mungak, Tuva-Uriankhai, Tuwa-Uriankhai, Tyva, Tofa, Tokha

Population Sources:

- 215,000 in Russia (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])
- 34,000 in Mongolia (2001, P Johnstone and J Mandryk [2000 figure])
- 3,000 in China (1993, J Janhunen)

Language: Altaic, Turkic, Northern

Dialects: 7 (Kokchulutan, Khowsogol Uigur, Central Tuvin, Western Tuvin, Northeastern Tuvin [Todzhin], Southeastern Tuvin, Tuba-Kizhi)

Professing Buddhists: 90%

Practising Buddhists: 55%

Christians: 0.8%

Scripture: Portions 1996; work in progress

Jesus film: available

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: TUN

Status of Evangelization

