



## TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS IN THE CLOTHING OF SOUTHERN ALTAIANS

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**ABSTRACT:** The study deals with the traditional clothing of the Southern Altaians – Altai-Kizhi and Telengits, living in the territory of the Altai Republic in the Russian Federation, its common features, ethnic specifics and, above all, the changes it has gone through since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. During this period, there were several major political developments that had a significant impact on traditional Altai culture, including clothing. Attention is focused on the influence of Russian and Chinese textile production, the transformation of the material used in the production of clothing, its forms, decorative elements, colour as well as its role and use at present.

**Key words:** clothing – Altai – Southern Altaians – Altai-Kizhi – Telengits – Russia – China

### Introduction

Clothing of the Altaians was well adapted to the harsh mountainous climate of southwest Siberia and reflected the way of life of its bearers. The Southern Altaians, including the so-called “proper Altaians”, or the Altai-Kizhi,<sup>2</sup> and the Telengits,<sup>3</sup> were mainly engaged in extensive cattle farming – nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism.<sup>4</sup> The animals raised, including sheep, horses, cows, goats as well as yaks and camels,

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<sup>2</sup> Altai-Kizhi mainly live in the territory of Ongudaysky, Ust-Kansky, Ust-Koksinsky, Shebalinsky and Mayminsky District of the Altai Republic.

<sup>3</sup> Telengits currently live mainly in Kosh-Agachsky and Ulagansky District of the Altai Republic.

<sup>4</sup> As late as the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Altai-Kizhi were still moving from place to place in the valleys of the rivers Bukhtarma, Narym and Kurchum – the right tributaries of the Irtysh River, and some of them moved to the left bank of the Irtysh for the winter where they travelled along the Ablaietka River (Потанов 1953: 5).

also provided basic raw materials for clothing production. Hunting wildlife, especially the maral deer (*Cervus elaphus sibiricus*), does, sables, foxes, and otters, was also of great importance in this context.

There were no big differences between the Altai men's and women's clothing in the past. The underwear of both sexes consisted of a longer shirt and a pair of simple-cut wider trousers, the outer garment of several types of overcoats and fur coats. Significant garments included various types of headwear, belts, shoes, pouches and cases worn on the belt, and specific hair ornaments for women. Children's clothing was more or less a miniature of adult clothing. While sewing clothing was one of the duties of every married woman, in the case of *chedek* (*chedek*) – a specific dress of married women of the Southern Altaians, making the garment was a privilege of specialists (ус кижѝ), which were older esteemed and experienced women (Плотапов 1951: 50). The Altai clothing was significantly marked by social differentiation. Unpropertied people had clothes of ordinary and cheapest materials and wore them practically until they fell apart, the wealthy class liked to wear garments of expensive and commonly unavailable materials.

In addition to purely practical and aesthetic functions, clothing and its accessories also had a strong semiotic function. In this context, the Southern Altaians clearly defined first and foremost women's clothing, according to which it was possible to visually determine social status, age, marital status, number of children and also their gender.



Altaians. The period between 1907 and 1914 (postcard, photo by S. I. Borisov<sup>5</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> Sergei Ivanovich Borisov (1867–1931), a Russian photographer who made a series of photographs between 1907 and 1914 during the Altai expedition. Part of this series was used for postcards that were then distributed to Europe.

## Clothing materials and the role of Russian and Chinese textile production

The main material for clothing was mainly leather and fur of domestic and wild animals. The most popular material was sheepskin and lambskin as well as goat and horse leather. Sheep wool was also used for making felt (кийис). As far as wild animals are concerned, the most commonly used was the skin of the maral deer and doe, with fur as well as without it. Sable, fox and otter fur was used to adorn mainly the collar and hem of the outer garment. The material used for making clothing was cut with a sharp knife and sewed together with a steel needle or an awl, using strong, homemade threads made of dogbane fibres (*Аросунум*), horsehair or tendons of the maral deer (шили учук). The needle was highly valued and, if it broke, it was sent to the blacksmith for repair as it was very expensive to buy a new one. For example, it was paid for with one sheep, calf or several pieces of fur (Потанин 1951: 50). Animal skins, furs and felt were mainly used to make winter and summer outerwear, especially fur coats and overcoats, headwear and shoes. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, pants made of homemade suede made from maral deer or roe deer doeskin were no exception (Потанин 1951: 13). To make clothing, the Southern Altaians also used cotton and silk fabrics, which they mainly acquired in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in barter exchange. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>6</sup> the Altaians exported fur and cattle to Russian mines and fortresses. For example, between 1747 and 1752, 131 sable furs, 22 fox furs, 4 lynx furs, 18 wolf furs, 255 sheepskins, and 40 lambskins were exported by the Kan and Karakul Altaians from the Altai Mountains to Russian mines and fortresses. The exported cattle for this period comprised 794 horses, 3590 cows and 900 sheep. Cotton fabrics were acquired by the Altaians from Russian Cossacks, who also brought the much valued needles to the Altai region, from Dzungarian tax collectors as well as from Bukhara merchants. The Southern Altaians often travelled to Ust-Kamenogorsk, where they offered the maral deer skins for barter exchanges (Потанин 1953: 126, 127).

In the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Russian merchants began to enter the Altai region on a larger scale. The first Russian merchant centre was established on the Sema River, where the Russian village of Shebalino was founded in 1860. Later, Russian merchants moved to the valley of the Chuya River, where their products were mainly bought by Telengits. The main trade items of Russian buyers included the Russia leather, cloth and iron items that were exchanged with the Altaians for marmot furs and cattle (Потанин 1953: 192, 193). The Telengits, who had been subjects to both Russia and China until 1864,<sup>7</sup> were given, among other things, silk and cotton fabrics by the Chinese government as a gift for paying taxes. Telengit *zaysans*<sup>8</sup> paid the Chinese once a year taxes in the form of two sable fur or sixty squirrel skins for every man, which they personally brought to the town of Kobdo (Khovd). In turn, they received 12 silver bars,

<sup>6</sup> In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the Southern Altaians were still part of the Dzungar Khanate. In 1755, Chinese troops invaded the Dzungar Khanate and began exterminating its population, which fled to the borders of Russia. Among them were some of the Southern Altaians, who asked Russia to protect them against China. As a result, in 1756, they became subjects to the Russian Empire.

<sup>7</sup> In 1864, the so-called Treaty of Tarbagatai (or Chuguchak) was signed, a border protocol between China and Russia that defined most of the western extent of their border, making the Telengits subjects to Russia only.

<sup>8</sup> *Zaysan* – the highest representative of the Altai aristocracy. The *zaysan* collected taxes, had jurisdiction, and commanded troops.

12 archines<sup>9</sup> of silk for their high officials and 90 pieces of cotton fabric for ordinary residents of each administrative unit<sup>10</sup> (Радлов 1989: 127–128, Вербицкий 1893: 7). Radlov reports the Chinese did not benefit from this servitude, all the more so as the Telengits sent the worst-quality sable furs to China (Радлов 1989: 128).

Chinese silk and cotton fabrics enjoyed great popularity with the Altai population. The most used Chinese fabrics included *daba*,<sup>11</sup> which was a cheap cotton cloth, dark blue, purple or brown, which was transported to the Altai region through Mongolia. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a dark blue cotton fabric from Russian textile factories, which was brought to the area by Russian merchants, began to displace the Chinese *daba* (Потапов 1951: 12).



An Altai man wearing the *ton* fur coat and the *sürü böriük* cap (*kuraan böriük*). The period between 1907 and 1914 (postcard, photo by S. I. Borisov).

No less popular Chinese cotton fabric was *dalimba*,<sup>12</sup> (талима in Altai), which was usually dark blue in colour. It was not only used for sewing clothing, although it was its most common use, but also for embroidery. The Altai women pulled out individual threads from this fabric, which were then dyed and used as stranded yarn in embroidery (Бабрашева – Боконокова 2010: 18).

The Consul General of the Russian Empire in Mongolia, Yakov Parfenievich Shishmarev, mentioned the significant importance of this fabric in the document *Записка действительного статского советника Шишмарева* of 1886: “Only second to tea,

<sup>9</sup> 1 archine = 0.711 m.

<sup>10</sup> The Southern Altaians were divided into seven administrative units, headed by *zaysans*. They were not territorial units, they consisted of different numbers of clans belonging to a particular *zaysan*.

<sup>11</sup> From Chinese – 大布 (*dabu*) – big cotton fabric.

<sup>12</sup> From Chinese – 褡裢布 (*dalianbu*).



*China's main export item for sale in Mongolia and the neighbouring places is dalimba [...] No Chinese bu (cotton fabrics), nor Russian canvases, can compete with the sales of dalimba. Dalimba is commonly used in Siberia, in Transbaikal, in the Semipalatinsk region, in the border area of Tomsk Governorate. This fabric was exported from China by Chinese traders in at least 4 million archines in large pieces, it is torn into small pieces of 8 archines per one Mongolian or Chinese overcoat. Dalimba is not only used for clothing in Mongolia, but it becomes a valuable item replacing silver, tea." (Шишмарев 1886).*

Cotton fabrics were mainly used in the making of undergarments, especially men's shirts, women's shirts and trousers. Cotton fabrics also served to cover leather jackets and headwear, which was a habit of wealthier people. Representatives of the Altai "aristocracy", *zaysans* and *bays*,<sup>13</sup> wore coats covered with precious Chinese silk or velvet, girded with a long silky moiré effect belt (Потапов 1951: 18, 24). In particular, brocade was very popular. On the whole, the *zaysan's* clothing was very opulent. In addition to the expensive Chinese silk fabrics, the collars and hems of the *zaysan's* overcoats were adorned with the most expensive and most valuable fur (sable, otter). The wives of *zaysans* and *bays* also wore silk cloaks, silk chegedeks, black sable hats, and imported Bolgar leather shoes<sup>14</sup> (Потапов 1951: 10). Expensive Russian and Chinese fabrics were not available to the general population. The common Altaian only got a limited amount of fabrics. The fabrics trade was in the hands of Russian, Chinese, and Mongolian merchants who sold them at high prices (Потапов 1951: 47). Overcoats were also made of cloth. Unpropertied Altaians usually procured a homemade cloth from Russian peasants, richer Altaians bought a higher quality Russian factory-made cloth (Потапов 1951: 14).



An Altai woman wearing the *chedek* and the cap *sürü böriük* (*kuraan böriük*).  
The period between 1907 and 1914 (postcard, photo by S. I. Borisov).

<sup>13</sup> *Bay* – a member of the wealthy class of population, usually an owner of large herds and land.

<sup>14</sup> High-quality leather imported to the Altai region from Bolgar in contemporary Tatarstan.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shortly after the advent of Bolshevism, besides various factory-made fabrics, ready-made garments began to be imported to the Altai region on a larger scale, which, of course, gradually began to show in the form and use of traditional clothing. Due to the raw climate of the area, the Altaians especially retained fur coats and warm overcoats, whose length was beginning to shrink at that time though. The original long overcoats designed for comfortable horse riding were no longer relevant as the Altai people were leaving the nomadic way of life and subjected to forced sedentarization.

In the times of the Soviet Union, Russian-style urban clothing was increasingly used in the Altai clothing. Potapov states in this regard: *“The conditions of the socialist system have ensured the progressive development of the Altai culture and way of life. This has also affected their clothing. The progress is reflected not only in the fact that the Altaians has begun to wear underwear and wash clothes, but also in being allowed to wear garments made of a durable, beautiful and pleasant factory fabric, incomparably more hygienic than the primitive maral deer leather, or foal skin, as well as acquire and wear ready-made dresses of a more comfortable cut and more practical in everyday life.”* (Потапов 1951: 56).

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in addition to fur coats and overcoats, traditional clothing also included fur hats and leather boots made of maral deer skin with fur, which also spread among the Russian population. (Левин – Потапов 1956: 365). The Russian type of clothing was more used by men. Particularly popular was a military-style clothing produced by Russian textile factories. Women usually refashioned the purchased clothes at home to their own image. Although, due to the Russian fashion, the specificities of individual ethnic groups gradually began to obliterate in the Altai clothing, traditional clothing had still been preserved in the Altai region to a certain extent. In that period, it predominated particularly in Ongudaysky, Ust-Kansky, Ust-Koksinsky, Kosh-Agachsky and Ulagansky districts. In Shebalinsky and Elikmonarsky<sup>15</sup> districts, traditional forms prevailed only in women’s clothing. In the other districts of the Altai, purchased ready-made garments of Russian production had already prevailed (Потапов 1951: 56).

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while Western-type clothing prevailed in the Altai, traditional clothing had not completely disappeared. It was preserved mainly by older generations in villages, being worn during major family events, especially at the time of the wedding, in various national holidays and festivals, which has survived to the present day. Such garments are now made from Russian textile production fabrics and imported fabrics from Turkey or Taiwan. However, the fabrics imported from China are the widest-spread in the region. Of course, the most popular fabrics include Chinese silk, especially brocade. At present, shops with a wealth of Chinese silk fabrics of various colours and patterns can be found in the Altai Republic, which are used in the making of traditional dresses. Unlike in the past when fabrics of a single, subdued colour were preferred and multi-coloured were considered ugly, nowadays, not only monochrome fabrics of distinctive, bright colours but also multi-coloured, patterned fabrics are used to make traditional clothing. In this case, it is mainly brocade with a variety of patterns and colours. Also popular are Chinese patterned ribbons currently replacing the embroidery, which originally decorated mainly hems of the outer garment. Using these ribbons makes it easier for

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<sup>15</sup> Now Chemalsky District.

professional tailors (according to their own words) to sew traditional garments to order. Tailor's workshops are mainly concentrated in the capital, Gorno-Altaysk, but they can also be found in larger villages in different parts of the Republic.<sup>16</sup>

## Traditional and innovative elements in the clothing of Southern Altaians

To date, several types of outerwear and headgear have been preserved from the entire complex of traditional clothing of the Southern Altaians. Most of them have undergone many changes, but some of them have, to some extent, retained their original form.

A specific dress of married women of the Southern Altaians was a long sleeveless cloak called *chegedek* (чегедек) by the Altai-Kizhi, *chedek* (чедек) by the Telengits. In the past, *chegedek* was a wedding, informal and funeral garment. The woman took it off only in the event of her husband's death, but she was buried in it after her death. *Chegedek* was worn over a long-sleeved shirt-type dress, but also over an overcoat or fur coat. In general, it was considered indecent for a married woman to show herself without the *chegedek*, she could not in any way be seen by her father-in-law and her husband's older brother without it (Потапов 1951: 27).



Women of Altai-Kizhi wearing the *chegedek* and the cap *sürü börük*. Ongudaysky District, present.

<sup>16</sup> Field research data, 2018.





Telengit women wearing *chedeks* and *kaptal* overcoats. Kosh-Agachsky District, present.

The upper part of the *chedek* was made of two or three layers of stronger cotton fabric, which were glued together. It was then covered with another fabric, a high-quality velvet (килин), or silk (торко, мандык) in the case of the wealthy,<sup>17</sup> a cheap velveteen in case of the poor, or a dark blue *daba*. In the past, the *chedek* was also made of a black fabric, which was considered a positive colour. Its hems were adorned with broader brocade ribbons (чинмери) and an embroidery with coloured silk threads in rows that were arranged in a certain rainbow-based colour sequence (yellow, red, green, blue). That is also what this embroidered coloured band is called – солонгы – rainbow. According to the Altai faith, Umay the Goddess, the protector of mothers and children, descended from the heavens on a rainbow bridge. (Потапов 1973: 272).

The *chedek* did not fasten, nor was it girded with a belt. There were only two dark red buttons called *куйка* (куйка)<sup>18</sup> sewn for decoration on the left side, which were imported from China through Mongolia and cost two to five Russian rubles per pair. As they stopped importing them during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *куйkas* became a highly valued item and were kept as a family treasure (Потапов 1951: 27). In addition to the buttons, the *куйка* was decorated on the upper part with pearl buttons (тана) and large green and blue beads.

<sup>17</sup> In Altai торко – silk, silk fabric, мандык – silk fabric with woven pattern. In Kosh-Agachsky region, this word refers to an expensive patterned silk fabric from China (Бабрашева – Бокконокова 2010: 47).

<sup>18</sup> These were buttons made of acorn-shaped resinous material, decorated with bead caps on both sides, and a loop on one side. Due to the high price they were also imitated using various available materials, bone, horn, boiled tendon, etc. At present, some Altai workshops make them in many colours from Siberian pine wood (*Pinus sibiricus*).





High degree of stylization in Altai-Kizhi clothing.



Preservation of the original color in Telengit clothing.

An important part of the *chedek* was the *beldoosh* ornament (белдууш, бел) worn on the left side. The *beldoosh* consisted of a wide strip of leather, or a squared fabric and a silver or copper buckle, which was usually hung with leather pouches with children's umbilical cords (кинкап), decorated with amulets in the form of strings of beads and cowrie shells (јаланбаш, јыламыш).<sup>19</sup> Depending on the number and form of these pouches, it was possible to know at first sight how many children the woman had and what their sex was. The girls' pouches were in the shape of a triangle or diamond, the boys' pouches were in the shape of a powder flask or a specific leather container for liquids (тажуур). The more children a woman had, the higher her status was in society. Especially the Altai-Kizhi women's *beldooshes* were also hung with a tinderbox, pincushions, leather tobacco pouches<sup>20</sup> and keys for chests. The metal buckles were distinguished by high-quality art work. They were mainly sourced from Chinese and Mongol merchants (Дьяконова 2001: 94).

In the 1930s, a massive rebellion against the wearing of the *chedek* took place among Altai women since with the onset of Bolshevism it was perceived as a reminder of gender inequality in the family and society. ((Потапов 1951: 27–28, Дьяконова 2001: 90). As a consequence, the *chedek* was slowly put out of use, but it did not vanish completely. Especially amongst the women of older generations who kept it as a funeral garment and sewed it for their daughters to their marriage. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *chedek* underwent changes mainly in terms of material and decoration. Nowadays it

<sup>19</sup> Cowries (*Cypraea moneta*) were considered to be the most powerful magical amulet, a charm protecting especially against being bewitched. They were highly prized and expensive; one cowrie could reportedly be worth one bull (Бабрашева – Бокконокова 2010: 6).

<sup>20</sup> Altai women commonly smoked a pipe.

is sewn from many kinds of fabrics, such as silk, crepe, velvet, the lower part sometimes also from chiffon, organza, etc. As far as colours are concerned, most used are fabrics of bright shades of blue, red, green, purple and others. The Telengits prefer a red-colour fabric in the making of the *chegedek* (Кичекова 2010: 170).



*Beldoosh* with pouches for umbilical cords, around 1900.



Pouch for umbilical cords, present.

The cut of the *chegedek* has not changed much, however, unlike in the past it now often has a collar decorated with bead strings, especially among the Altai-Kizhi. The reason for this is that in the past the *chegedek* used to be worn with shirtwaisters, which had a richly decorated collar, but it is now worn over plain clothes. Most of the modern *chegedeks* lack the rainbow band, hems are decorated with brocade ribbons and most often with gold or silver ornaments that are either cut out of fabric or machine embroidered.<sup>21</sup>

The *beldoosh* ornament has virtually disappeared from use. Today, only a single pouch is attached to the right side of the *chegedek*. It is usually made of the same fabric, the same colour as the *chegedek*, and most often serves as a mobile phone case. The tiny pouches for children's umbilical cords are currently not part of the *chegedek*, but are still produced and used. They are mostly made of fabrics or felt, decorated with coloured beads, embroidery or cowrie shells and retain different forms for boys and girls. Women currently keep them at home, often in a visible place. They are still perceived as a symbol of the continuation of the family.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Field research data, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Field research data, 2018.





Altai-Kizhi bride (centre) wearing the *chegedek* and *böriük*. Ongudaysky District, present.

Nowadays, the *chegedek* is worn on festive occasions, at the time of various national holidays, but also family holidays, most often at the time of the wedding. Along with them, dresses, most often the white colours of the traditional style, are made for the wedding, or the *chegedek* can also be worn over western-type wedding dresses. In Ulagansky and Kosh-Agachsky districts, it is the bride's family that has the *chegedek* sewn, in Ust-Kansky and Ongudaysky districts it is made by the groom's family (Кичекова 2010: 170–171).

As already mentioned, typical outerwear included fur coats and overcoats, generally called *ton* (тон). Especially the Telengit women's *emen ton* (эмееһ тон), including its summer variant *kaptal* (каптаһ) with a characteristic rectangular cut-out at the top on the left half, has retained its original form and rich decoration. The winter variant was made of sheepskin that was coated with a cotton or silk fabric on the outside. The summer *kaptal* was usually made of cotton fabrics. The *ton* was a married woman's dress, made for the bride by her mother to be worn at the wedding. If possible, the best and most expensive materials were used in the making of the wedding *ton*. Like the *chegedek*, the *emen ton* was also used as a funeral garment (Дьяконова 2001: 85, 92).



A close-up of *kadyrma* on a contemporary Telengit overcoat.



Decorated collar on the Altai-Kizhi *chedek*.

The specificity of this outer garment is rich decoration, especially on the chest part called *kadyrma* (кадырма), the main element of which is wide stripes of black velvet (or stripes of cotton fabrics of different colours, most often red) trimmed with otter fur and decorated with a distinctive coloured yarn. The main motif of the embroidery here is sea buckthorn berries (чычыргана), and a rainbow band, the same as on the *chedek*. *Kadyrma* was also decorated with pearl and metal buttons or beads. The winter variant's collar was made of sable or fox fur. Also distinctive were horse-hoof-shaped cuffs on the sleeves, most often made of black, brown or white lambskins (Дьяконова 2001: 85, Потанов 1951: 35). Unlike the fur coats and overcoats of the Altai-Kizhi women where these cuffs covered the back of the hand, the cuffs of the Telengit outerwear were worn turned up.

As the *emen ton* has a collar and the chest part is richly decorated, the Telengit *chedek* is currently not made with a collar and retains its original cut. Most often it is made of fabrics of subdued red shades, the bead is decorated with brocade ribbons, which are adorned with laces of various colours on the upper part of the *chedek*. The beauty of Telengit overcoats and *chedeks* stands out especially at various festivals where everyone cares to wear a traditional dress, not only adults but also children.

As for headwear, currently the most popular is a cylinder-shaped fur cap, mostly called *altai börük*,<sup>23</sup> or just *börük* (алтай бөрүк). It is sewed from fox or sable furs, the lower part is decorated with a brocade ribbon, the wider hem of otter fur, with a narrow hem of white lambskin at the very edge. A long, mostly multi-coloured silk tassel is attached to the centre of a flat crown. This cap is worn by both men and women on any solemn occasions, it also serves as a wedding headdress for the bride and groom. It is sold in specialist shops or tailored in tailor's shops. The tassel is sold separately, with various colour combinations to choose from, and it is up to the owner to place it on the

<sup>23</sup> Potapov mentions the name *altai börük* also as a synonym for *sürü börük* (Потанов 1951: 18).



cap or not.<sup>24</sup> This cap is now considered to be the Altai “national” headwear and can be found in all ethnic groups of the Altai Republic. Although the cap is very common, there is relatively little information about it in the literature. Potapov mentions that it was made of sable and otter fur and worn by wealthy Altai men in the past<sup>25</sup>, and also that: “These festive hats are made by the present-day Altai kolkhozniks.” (Потопов 1951: 19). On photographs from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can see this type of cap only worn by men, however, there is a series of photographs from 1946–1950 where it is apparent that it was also commonly worn by women at that time.<sup>26</sup> As women’s headwear, this cap probably caught on shortly after the onset of Bolshevism.

Worn in the past by married men and women of the Altai-Kizhi, the *sürü böriik* (сүрү бөрүк) headgear has undoubtedly gone through the biggest change.<sup>27</sup> It was characterized by its specific form and material. It was made of black lambskins with fur on the outside, the lining was made of coarse cloth. The crown was covered with a cotton fabric of red, yellow or green colour, and adorned with two long, wide red silk ribbons hanging loose in the back of the cap. (Потопов 1951: 18, 37). In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the hem of this cap was also decorated with coloured feathers from the neck of wild drakes (Вербицкий 1893: 11). Its popularity significantly dropped after the advent of Bolshevism and, over time, men have stopped wearing it, but to some extent it has survived among women. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it changed significantly, particularly in terms of material and decoration.



Telengits in traditional clothing (*ton, böriik*). New Year celebrations (Chaga Bayram).  
Kosh-Agachsky District, present.

<sup>24</sup> Field research data, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> This cap does not appear in the descriptions of the women’s 19<sup>th</sup> century headgear. Potapov only mentions the ancient sable cap *kish böriik* (“sable cap”) used by the Teleuts, but it had a completely different, intricate cut and the fur was combined with the red cloth (Потопов 1951: 39).

<sup>26</sup> See <https://photochronograph.ru/2017/10/25/altaj-v-1946-50-godax/>

<sup>27</sup> We can also come across the name *kuraan böriik* – “lambskin cap”. *Sürü böriik* – “pointed cap”.



Altai-Kizhi in traditional dresses (*chedek*, *sürü börük*, *börük*), El-Oyin Festival. Onguday District, present.

Currently, it is sewn from a variety of materials, both natural and synthetic, in various colour versions (black, red, blue, green, purple, etc.), which matches the colour of the *chedek*. The colour of the ribbons usually corresponds to the colour of the cap, but it is not a rule. From the decoration point of view, it is often only circumferentially trimmed with a narrow decorative ribbon, but popular are also distinctive ornaments in the "Altai style", concentrated either in the front or on the sides, cut out and sewn most often from a gold or silver fabric. These richly decorated caps are mainly worn by brides or are used in various stage performances. There are also light-coloured felt *sürü börük* with dark ornamentation and a fur trim, but they are mainly used in fashion shows at various ethnic festivals. They are made by local fashion designers working with traditional materials such as felt and fur. Like the other clothes listed, these caps can also be purchased in specialized stores and tailored to one's liking and taste.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

Naturally, the clothing of Southern Altaians has gone through many changes during the period under consideration. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, materials of own production predominated in clothing, especially leather, fur and felt. The use of cotton and silk fabrics was rather limited, depending primarily on barter trade and being a matter of wealthy people in particular. The most widely used were Chinese and

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<sup>28</sup> Field research data, 2018.





Telengt women in traditional dresses (*ton*, *böriük*). Celebrations of Chaga Bayram, Kosh-Agachsky District, present.

Russian fabrics. With the onset of the socialist establishment at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent dramatic changes in the Altaians' way of life, ready-made Russian town-type clothing began to be widely used, compared to the past. Yet it did not disappear completely. Even during the Soviet era, the Altai people maintained some of the original clothing types, including sheepskin coats and headgear, which were the best to protect against the harsh mountain climate after all.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Altaians began to return to their traditions, and before long various projects to support the original crafts as well as the first specialized workshops began to emerge (Москвина – Октябрьская 2016: 81–82). The efforts to revitalize traditional crafts continue to be made even today. There are many tailor-made workshops in the Republic of Altai, specializing in the production of «national clothing». Therefore, sewing clothing is currently entrusted to professionals, unlike in the past when every woman was able to make a dress. As far as the material used is concerned, Chinese textile production plays an important role today. Particularly popular is brocade; Chinese patterned ribbons and the Chinese imitation of gold embroidery, which is sold in the form of various ready-made ornaments corresponding to the Altai's taste, are also widely used in garment decoration. They are just ironed on, stuck on with glue, or stitched on clothes. Leather, fur and felt are still used in the garment. Making traditional clothing is not cheap, but most Altaians make efforts to procure it, not only for adults but also for children. At present, the Altaians do not use traditional clothing for everyday wear, but interest in it is particularly noticeable at

national festivals (such as El-Oyin, Chaga Bayram), attended by large numbers of people and it is difficult to find a Western-dressed person. Some traditional garments are more stylized, others seek to preserve their original form from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Clothing manufacturers often turn to historical sources and endeavour to reconstruct them according to their original designs. If we should compare this preservation of the original form of clothing among the Altai-Kizhi and the Telengits, we can see that it is more noticeable in the latter, especially in Kosh-Agachsky District.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, in the clothing of the Southern Altaians – Altai-Kizhi and Telengits – there has been a certain degree of stylization, however, there is still a certain variability and ethnic specifics preserved. Today, traditional clothing is an important part of Altai material culture and one of the strongest expressions of ethnic identity.

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