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Location: Although their numbers in China are reported to be a mere 13 families or approximately 50 individuals,¹ the Teleut speak their own language and have their own historical and cultural identity. They are located in the Altai District in the extreme northernmost point of China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The area, which suffers from extremely cold winters, is situated at the juncture of China, Russia, and Mongolia. The vast majority of Teleut live in Russia, especially in the Kemerovo and Novosibirsk Oblasts in the Northern Altai region. There are 71,600 speakers of both Northern and Southern Altai on the Russian side of the border.²

Identity: The tiny Teleut group in Xinjiang view themselves as a separate

people group and have officially registered their existence with the Chinese authorities. Historically, the Teleut were also known as the *White Kalmuck* and are called *Tielingute* by the Chinese. The authorities in China have probably counted the Teleut as part of the Kazak nationality.

Language: Teleut is a Turkic language from the Altaic family. Teleut is described as "endangered" in Russia, even though it is still being taught to children, and it is still spoken in many homes.³ Recently there has been a revival of Teleut culture among the Teleut in Russia, which has also caused the use of their language to be invigorated. The Teleut in Russia have a written script using the Cyrillic alphabet. There is little information about the use of the Teleut language in China; it may

have been linguistically consumed by the Oirat and Kazak languages long ago.⁴

History: The Teleut were dispersed throughout Russia by political developments in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The tiny Teleut group in China are thought to be the descendants of a diaspora group who migrated south into China, probably in the early 1800s.⁵

Customs: The Altai region is one of the most inhospitable and harsh in all of China. Temperatures regularly plummet to minus 40° Celsius (-40°F) during the long winter months. Rich, virgin forests cover the slopes of steep mountains that rise over 4,000 meters (13,120 ft.) above sea level. Teleut men spend the summer months hunting and fishing to store up supplies for the winter.

Religion: The Teleut have long been under pressure from the Mongols, Tuva, and Kazaks who inhabit the Altai area, to convert to Tibetan Buddhism or Islam. The Teleut in Russia practice traditional animism and shamanism. Many have become atheists in recent decades.

Christianity: There are no known believers among the Teleut in China. Indeed, except possibly among the Russians, there is not a single known church fellowship in the entire Altai region of northern Xinjiang. Missionaries in Russia translated portions of the Bible into the Teleut language in 1910, but these are now out of print. Work has commenced in recent years to translate the Teleut

Bible. While it will greatly benefit the small number of Teleut believers living on the Russian side of the border, the unevangelized Teleut in China are not able to read the Cyrillic script.



Population in China:
 50 (1993)
 59 (2000)
 76 (2010)
Location: Xinjiang
Religion: Animism
Christians: None Known

Overview of the Teleut

Countries: Russia, China
Pronunciation: "Tel-oot"
Other Names: Telengut, Tielingute, White Kalmuck, Altai, Southern Altai
Population Source: 50 in 13 families (1993 J. Janhunen); 71,600 in Russia, including Northern Altai
Location: *N Xinjiang:* Altai District
Status: Probably officially included under Kazak
Language: Altaic, Turkic, Northern Turkic
Dialects: 0
Religion: Animism, Shamanism, No Religion
Christians: None known
Scripture: Portions 1910
Jesus film: None
Gospel Recordings: None
Christian Broadcasting: None
ROPAL code: ALT00

