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## BRIDE KIDNAPPING IN KYRGYZSTAN

DIRECTED BY PETER LOM

COLOR, 51 MINUTES, 2004

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**K**yrghyz society, like societies in all the emerging states in former Soviet Central Asia, is struggling with the clash of “traditional” values and modernization. The tradition of *ala kachuu*, or bride kidnapping, has received a considerable amount of attention by both Western and Kyrgyz scholars in recent years. *Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan* opens this controversial practice to direct scrutiny, revealing how young women in rural areas are frequently pressured into marriages they have not chosen.

The video follows the kidnapping of five Kyrgyz girls: Ainagul, Nurkyz, Kyal, Kaigul, and Gulmira. In the case of Kyal, only the girl’s family is interviewed, as tragically she has recently died as a result of her kidnapping, the victim of either suicide or possibly murder. Several families who have decided to kidnap a bride for their son are interviewed, and in three cases the process of pressuring the girl, undertaken by the prospective groom’s female relatives, is revealed in detail. Two girls refuse to marry, while two others accept their fate. All four girls are interviewed after their kidnapping, allowing them to explain their decision. In the midst of the video, a short segment appears showing young Kyrgyz men playing *ulak tartysh*, a contest played on horseback in which two teams attempt to control the carcass of a goat—this insertion serves to remind the viewer that

Kyrgyz society continues to straddle the divide between tradition and modernity.

The video is ideally suited for the college level, and for high school students in their junior or senior year. It is appropriate for any class directed at the social sciences, and will fit especially well in classes focused on themes of cultural studies, modernization, social transition, or gender issues. Many American students, especially girls, will find the practice the video illustrates disturbing—being forced into a marriage is a notion completely foreign to Western sensibilities. Yet as the video points out, fully one third of women in rural Kyrgyzstan enter married life as kidnapped brides, and many come to not only accept their fate, but are apparently happy in their marriages. On the other hand, suicide among kidnapped young women is tragically too common. An excellent companion reading for this video that will provide background information as well as additional data is a recent article by Russell Kleinbach, Mehriqiul Ablezova, and Medina Aitieva, entitled “Kidnapping for marriage (ala kachuu) in a Kyrgyz village” in *Central Asian Survey*, Volume 24, Number 2, June 2004.

Overall, the production quality of the video is good. The vignettes that address the fate of each girl are introduced with Kyrgyz proverbs, and the interviews and local footage present an accurate and stark picture of life in rural Kyrgyzstan. I have only a single quibble—the subtitles are rather small, and in a large classroom, it will be difficult for students sitting far from the screen to follow the dialogue. In spite of this technical shortcoming, *Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan* is an excellent teaching tool for illustrating the contradictions, controversy, and cultural cleavages that mark Kyrgyz society. ■

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