

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the status of women in Central Asian society, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, and the phenomena of the Kyrgyz family that is the central part of daily living of Kyrgyz people. We provide an introduction to the region, followed by an analysis of a social stratification of Kyrgyz society and a various types of families. The next chapter describes the three major historical periods and changes in women's position in the society. The first period spans up to 1917, its end marked by the Bolshevik coup. Until that time, The Kyrgyz society was nomadic, organized into tribes, clans, and large patriarchal families. The 1920's were tumultuous times for the Central Asian region, at that time newly dominated by the Soviet rule, undergoing industrialization, public education, experiencing improvements in health care, but on the other hand also confiscation, forced resettlement, and russification. New rights have been granted to women, however local patriarchal and feudal traditions persisted and continued in the local societies. After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Kyrgyz people started returning to their national traditions and discrimination against women started to be openly discussed in the society. Our historical retrospective analysis explores the major types of Kyrgyz weddings, the wedding ceremony, the bride kidnapping phenomena (*ala kachuu*) and *kalym* – the bride compensation tradition. We will describe several other women's and family issues characteristic of the Kyrgyz society: child adoptive care by kin (*usynovlenye*), the fertility cult, as well.

The second part of this dissertation focuses on evaluating the results of qualitative research (questionnaires) conducted in selected regions of southern and northern Kyrgyzstan, and in the country's capital, Bishkek. The north and south regions are very distinct and it is conducive to compare social trends in the two regions.

