

TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY WEBSITE RESOURCE EXAMPLE

Author Name: Katie Nelson, PhD

Author Affiliation: Inver Hills Community College

Short Author Bio (approx. 100 words): Katie Nelson, PhD is Instructor of Anthropology at Inver Hills Community College. Her research focuses on identity, belonging and citizenship(s) among migrant and undocumented populations in the U.S., Mexico and Morocco. She is also working on four-field research related to migration as a central human adaptive strategy. She serves as the chair of the Teaching Anthropology Interest Group of the General Anthropology Division of the American Anthropological Association. She is one of the managing editors of a forthcoming open access biological anthropology textbook and recently authored a chapter in the new open-access textbook *Perspectives: An Open Introduction to Anthropology*. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6350-8475>

Resource Type: Film

Subdiscipline(s): Cultural Anthropology

Key Words (2-5): Marriage, Family, Kinship, Culture Change, Mosou

Submission Title: Teaching Marriage, Family and Culture Change with The Woman's Kingdom Film

Accompanying Ancillary Materials (if applicable): NA

Resource Submission Text (approx. 500-1000 words): I regularly use the short PBS/Frontline documentary film *The Woman's Kingdom* in my introductory anthropology courses to introduce material on marriage, family and kinship. The film presents the matrilineal ethnic minority of southwestern China the Mosou, focusing on the practice of "walking marriage" and the Mosou matrilineal family structure. I oftentimes use the film to begin units on kinship and family in order to introduce the diversity of cultural kinship structures, highlighting the fact that the cultural patterns of fatherhood and cohabiting marriage are not cultural universals. I have found that this is an impactful and memorable introduction to these topics for many students.

The film also discusses the pressures that are affecting change among the Mosou including environmental degradation, tourism, and the penetration of the cultural values of the Chinese Han majority. The film can be used to compare and contrast the struggles that many ethnic minorities face in large nation-states. Students can appreciate that while culture change is inevitable and no cultural group remains static, some change can be more harmful than others.

I have also used the film to highlight the theme of human agency. Near the end of the full-length version of the film we learn that the main protagonist in the film, Chacuo, resists her own cultural norms by choosing to live with her daughter's father, a Han man she met when he visited her community as a tourist. The couple have no plans to marry, yet remain committed to one another, bucking the expectations of both of their families and cultures. Their non-traditional partnership is an illustration of how in all societies people have the ability to conform to, resist and even transform their culture's expectations of them. This idea, that people have agency and are not "slaves" to their culture is something that I introduce early on in my cultural anthropology courses. This film allows me to reinforce this concept several weeks into the semester, which helps aid with retention by providing a cultural context onto which students can conceptualize this idea. In discussions that follow, students oftentimes explore ways in which their own family conforms or doesn't

conform to their own culture's norms and expectations. Students can also discuss cultural and societal mechanisms (i.e. shaming, gossip etc.) as well as governmental mechanisms (i.e. bigamy laws, child support, housing design etc.) that work to (re)enforce certain marriage and family structure norms.

The short length of the film (20 minutes) is long enough to provide sufficient cultural context and depth yet it does not take up the entire class period. There is also a shorter (10 minute) broadcast version available.

Link to the film: http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2005/07/introduction_to.html

Quick Tip: Try searching for the film on YouTube. The image quality seems better on the YouTube versions and the PBS site no longer appears to be supported.