

# Analyzing Domestic Women Trafficking in China

Chenhui Lyu<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, 210046, China

\*Corresponding author. Email: <sup>1</sup>08200111@njnu.edu.cn

## ABSTRACT

Women trafficking in China has always been a serious problem. The trafficked women are exploited as baby factories or are abused, which is a pity. Many factors account for the selling and buying of marriage. This paper reviews several reasons leading to the domestic transaction of women in China. Hierarchy and patriarchy which treat females as goods are rooted in the Chinese society during the long period of feudal society. Both of them create an atmosphere where it is normal for people to regard women as fertility machine that belongs to a male. It aims to look down on growing girls and to take for granted trafficking and abducting. The policies of China are also responsible for abduction problems. One child policy leads to a large number of missing girls, most of whom are abandoned and sold. As a result, unbalanced sex ratios exist. The inequality in the number of men and women as well as the uneven economy between different religions in the country affect the trafficking market as well. Moreover, defects of law in China concerning trafficking about the punishment of buyers and the rescue of victims enable the trafficking market to become profitable and safe, which is attractive to people. Corruption within the system along with inefficient law enforcement in abolishing the trafficking of women constructs a net reducing the possibility of eradicating abduction. Social expectations in morality for victims are invisible obstacles set up for the rescue of the trafficked women. All these things lead to the present situation of abducting in China and should be paid attention to.

**Keywords:** *Women Trafficking, Abducting, Marriage, China*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Trafficking is a profound problem worthy of research. It is hard to know how many people are transported and sold in this kind of transaction for the secrecy of this illegal market. But the huge interest chain in the abduction market does exist for a long time all around the world. Over 7 billion dollars are piled up on the basis of human trafficking annually worldwide and it is estimated that about ten thousand to twenty thousand domestic people are trafficked in China. Trafficking of females between different religions in China is a complicated problem that has many contributing factors.

## 2. HISTORY

### 2.1. Hierarchy

During the long years of dictatorship, China has a strict hierarchical system, requiring the majority of people to keep silent and to follow the unequal power system constructed by the upper class [1]. Penalties for killing people, intentional injuries and so on are quite different between people in different classes with the

same improper behaviors [1]. This inequality is rooted so deeply in mind that people in current China, especially those in rural areas who are poorly educated, are in the knowledge poverty of the awareness of legislation and modern morality. It is difficult for them to understand the fact that trafficking or buying the trafficked is illegal. Chinese people are lack due understanding of and enough respect both for the laws and their rights [2]. They do not regard actions against women's will as illegal or wrong. They take actions like trafficking or selling people that violet somebody's freedom along with human rights for granted and turn a blind eye to these actions happening around them, claiming to have a pearl of so-called wisdom to protect themselves.

Ancient China has a long tradition of polygamy and concubinage. Buying females as household servants, concubines, or secondary wives used to be feasible and common to see in Chinese families [3]. The number of these bought women is even things that can be used as a way to show off people's wealth and status. The legal of the Qing Dynasty forbade selling common people as slaves, but the popular custom of the bride price for wives or concubines was allowed. And almost every ban in the

regulation on the sale of human beings has various exceptions [4]. It results in the relevant laws being superficial. As a result, the selling and buying market of women in China has never disappeared in history.

Ransmeier uses “transactional families” as a term to describe women including wives and concubines, who are thought to be the property measured by money [4]. The pattern of transactional families in China constructs a structure of hierarchy in a big household, potentially forcing the lower class especially females do domestic labor of less value. Marriage has become a low-cost way to gain lifelong labor. Women are grown up to do homework such as sewing, hosting, or pleasing males. Thus, trafficking is closely connected to the thriving slavery market in ancient China.

## **2.2 Patriarchy**

In a patriarchal society, women are thought to be accessories for their families. Male takes full control over female. Women are seen as their fathers’ commodities before marrying and their husbands’ goods when married. In this way, brides, concubines, slave girls and prostitutes all have their prices [4]. Sommer claims that there is no difference in trafficking, marriage, and sex work for the poor in Qing Dynasty [5]. It is hard to distinguish marriage from abducting as money, which is also paid in the process of marriage.

The patriarchy in Chinese culture can trace back to Shang Dynasty. The character representing females evolves from the figure of women kneeling down. On the contrary, the pictograph means the male is connected to labor [6]. There are many popular sayings such as “The husband sings and the wife follows” and “only women and petty men are difficult to deal with” that let people have discrimination toward women. Chinese people have been deeply influenced by these patriarchal thoughts on gender basis for many years.

Under the influence of traditional patriarchal thoughts, females are regarded as labor force, which is measured by their ability to reproduce. They are just a product to continue the lineage surname and generate a certain kind of household. The fact that women are inferior to men and the disparaging attitudes towards females throughout hundreds even thousands of years in history lead to the trafficking of women being tolerated [2]. Under this discourse system, the feeling and safety of abducted females are neglected not only by society but also by themselves. What thoughts they have are not important, the only thing that counts is children, especially boys they can bear. With all these in mind, the so-called selling and buying marriage is just a way to get a machine that can give birth to children. Under such a patriarchal system, against trafficking campaigns face large difficulties. People around the abducted women will try their best to prevent possible escape [3] [7]. Even policemen also do

not pay much attention to trafficking, some of which turning a blind eye to the trades of women [8]. All these people around abducted women weave net chaining trafficked women physically and spiritually. Also, being armed is a must for people who want to rescue kidnapped brides [9].

Patriarchy thoughts are rooted in the family and society, which has a large influence on girls’ growth as well. It develops a “son preference” in the whole society. A girl may find she needs to do much housework and has less time to learn than boys of her same age, which means she has less chance to succeed and is likely to remain in the poverty. Entering the period of adolescence, girls are sexualized, limiting their awareness of sex and choices in marriage. They are instilled with the idea that their values rely on reproduction and sexuality [10]. Those ignorant girls who are used to the inequality as they grow up in a patriarchal environment tend to resign themselves to adversity when they are confronted with kidnapping and trafficking.

## **3. POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

In 1980, the Chinese government put forward the one-child policy for the sake of curbing the population. The central policy is above everything else including laws. The sex ratio at birth has increased rapidly from then on. In 1982, there are about 107 males compared with every 100 females, while there are around 120 males compared with 100 females in the year 2000. And the percentage of missing girls increases [11]. When only one child is allowed to be born in a family, many people in China hope that the one child will be a boy. Products that claim to be capable of telling the sex in embryos along with abortion technologies and abandoning baby girls are popular at that time. According to the University of Kansas, it is believed that about 30 million to 60 million girls miss because of sex-selective abortions. Also, there are some cases of lack in the birth register due to the one-child policy. Although the policy has been revised in 2015, its impact is profound and far-reaching. In the 1980s, plenty of cases of women abducting is reported by the police. From 1986 to 1994, 48,100 females are sold in Xuzhou Municipality reported by Police and the Women's Federation. More kidnappings happen nationwide. Only a few of the cases are reported and so do the rescue of the trafficked [9].

Trafficking in women is a lucrative business. To some extent, human trafficking is more profitable and safer compared to trades in drugs in China. It takes almost no cost and has much lighter legal penalties. The starting point of punishment for trafficking women and children is five to ten years’ imprisonment. The China judicial document website, which is established and released by China's Supreme Court, imputes the abduction and trafficking of women [12]. The result shows that many cases have a light sentence and include probation as well

as commutation. The example of Sweden shows that one useful way to prevent trafficking is letting the buyers pay the corresponding price [12]. While up to three years in prison are penalties faced by buyers, few people are prosecuted for buying women. It seems to be relatively safe and has little input for traffickers and is nearly costless for buyers, being attractive enough for both of them, which makes the prosperity of the trafficking market. Legislations in China about trafficking are lacking in support for mental damage compensation or indirect losses [13]. These cases should be paid attention to in the location of abduction which may be a long way and difficult enough to come for the victims and their family members.

Generally, the victim is a young girl who is ignorant and is easy to be cheated by traders in human beings by the excuse of finding jobs or making money. In some cases, the trafficked woman may not be the so-called perfect victim whom most Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) are unable to help. They think completely innocent victims are worth all their attention [14]. Therefore, flawed victims are neglected and marginalized. This pursuit of morality is also reflected at the beginning of abduction and trafficking. Criminals use excuses like blaming the victim for being a mistress to cover up possible conflicts in the process of trafficking. Unethical victims and women who are being trafficked are neglected in this situation.

Another dilemma for rescuing victims is to decide whether women are willing to become married or would like to continue to stay in the buyers' homes of their own will. The Ministry of Public Security provides guidelines to clarify that if both sides want to stay together, an unmarried woman can still be a man's wife [3]. Considering that she may be beaten, threatened, influenced by her family's attitudes and social environment or the children, her will may not be her true thoughts. Then, the guidelines have become a false proposition.

As for the relevant people and departments in the implementation of action against abducting and trafficking, there are still many problems. Lack of required equipment and professions is often troubling the police. The absence of specialists leads to the failure to offer victims proper services such as accommodations and transportation to send them home. In addition, corruption as well as human relationship makes local administrative department keep silence about this. Information about the police along with relative search is leaked by relevant executives. In some cases, villager leaders even encourage people to hide the trafficked women [13]. The incompetence and maladministration of local officials cause place barriers to the cover of cases. In short of the public facilities gives no protection and support to the trafficked women. Immaturity of the system leads to the grim situation to crack down on

trafficking. Many trafficked people are never found. The lucky-founded one suffers a lot in going back to her home and going back to normal life.

As a campaign is preferred to solve the structural problem, which means within a period, one or more criminal acts become the focus of search and attack. The same is true for the punishment of abduction and trafficking. In the period of campaigns focused on one crime, committing it will pay a relatively high price and controls on other criminal acts will be relatively loosened. Taking advantage of this weakness in execution as well as complex and changeable terrain, it is hard to catch people who sell women.

#### **4. THE UNBALANCED STRUCTURE**

Infanticide, abandonment and other son preference actions cause an abnormal ratio of men to women. The Seventh National Census in 2020 records that the female to male ratio is 105.07 which is said to be similar to the ratio in 2010. The birth rate of gender has a larger gap. The World Economic Forum reports that there are 88 female birth for a hundred men being born in 2020 in China. The data shows a huge gap in the gender structure. As a result, a great number of marriage-age men are incapable of finding their wives at present and in the near future in China.

Traditionally, females tend to marry men who have a higher social status than themselves in China. Therefore, in some rural places, few women are willing to marry men in the same place. Also in these places, people are less educated and influenced greatly by the hierarchy as well as patriarchy. Female infants are sold or abandoned, causing an enormous gender gap. Moreover, according to the traditional culture, marrying needs a certain economic foundation with money, which is used as a bride price. As a result, a great number of males in poor areas are unable to get married as they have neither money nor suitable females around. In 1990, the proportion of poor farmers who do not get married by the age of 40 is 19 percent. 44.8 percent of men with the least education had never married in 2000. For these people, buying a woman is cost-effective. Three years from the year 1986, a village in Baoding Municipality buys over eighty women for an average of 3,000 yuan [10]. Buying the trafficked women is a great deal for these single and poor males.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Being influenced by the traditional hierarchy and patriarchy in ancient China, there has always been the selling and buying marriage in various forms and Chinese people are greatly influenced by the traditional culture. Today Chinese abducting market still exists and the trafficked women suffer a lot. The unbalanced sex ratio of men and women in China provides a need for women. Laws about buying the trafficked are weak and the

enforcement of legislation is periodical. The corruption of local magistrates and the assistance given by them as well as the local people exacerbated the difficulties in combating trafficking. There comes a long way to go in the war against abduction and that needs changes from both institutional and individual parts.

## REFERENCES

- [1] H. Hua, *Concubinage and Servitude in Late Imperial China*, Lexington Books Press, 2014.
- [2] S. Biddulph, S. Cook, *Kidnapping and Selling Women and Children: The State's Construction and Response*. *Violence Against Women* 5(12)(1999) 1437–1468. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778019922183462>.
- [3] G. M. Zhao, *Trafficking of women for marriage in China: Policy and practice*. *Criminal Justice* 3(1) (2003) 83–102. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466802503003001457>.
- [4] J. S. Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China*, Harvard University Press, 2017.
- [5] M. H. Sommer, *Polyandry and wife-selling in Qing dynasty China: Survival strategies and judicial interventions*, University of California Press, 2015.
- [6] A. Kennedy, *Gender Bias And Sex Trafficking In China*, University of California Press, 2018.
- [7] P. Zhuang, *The traffic in women for marriage in China: Problems and perspectives*, University of Regina Press, 1998.
- [8] Z. Ping, *On the Social Phenomenon of Trafficking in Women in China*, *Chinese Education and Society* 26(3) (1993) 33–50. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/CED1061-1932260333>
- [9] H. Gates, *Buying Brides in China-Again*, *Anthropology Today* 12(4) (1996) 8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2783507>.
- [10] S. Ferrell-Schweppenstedde, J. Hunt, T. Matekaire. *How Lifelong Discrimination and Legal Inequality Facilitate Sex Trafficking in Women and Girls*, In J. A. Winterdyk, J. Jones (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, Springer International Publishing, 2019, pp. 1–18. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63192-9\\_125-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63192-9_125-1).
- [11] Q. Jiang, S. Li, M. W. Feldman, J. J. Sánchez-Barricarte, *Estimates of missing women in twentieth-century China*, *Continuity and Change* 27(3) (2012) 461–479. DOI: 10.1017/S0268416012000240.
- [12] J. G. Raymond, *Prostitution on Demand: Legalizing the Buyers as Sexual Consumers*. *Violence Against Women* 10(10) (2004) 1156-1186. DOI: 10.1177/1077801204268609.
- [13] Federation, Y. P. W. S., *Yunnan Province, China Situation Of Trafficking In Children And Women: A Rapid Assessment*, 2002.
- [14] T. Zheng, *Sex Trafficking, Human Rights and Social Justice*, Routledge Press, 2010.