



Mechanical Solidarity and Social Anomie. A Case Study on the Chained Mother Fengxian County

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Abstract. Trafficking in women is a criminal act in law, but there are still great obstacles to combating this criminal activity. The video of the mother of eight children chained in Fengxian County once again highlights the rampant crime and the terrible situation of female victims trafficked to rural areas. This paper makes an attempt to analyse the origin of women trafficking through the theoretical lens of social solidarity by Emile Durkheim, and argues that the reason for its unquenchable existence is concerned with the interior mechanical solidarity in the villages. The shared values and norms establish the greenhouse for the incident and harmonize the attitude and behaviors of the villagers in the same villages. Therefore, the task of eradicating trafficking in women needs to be done in a moral and cultural aspect. This paper then proposes that the possible solution for it could also be found in culture and morality. This study will make an original contribution to providing a new angle of view into the research of trafficking in women.

Keywords: Social solidarity · Mechanical solidarity · Trafficking in women

1 Introduction

Recently, there has been renewed interest in women trafficking caused by the incident of the chained mother of eight in Fengxian county of Jiangsu province in China. On 27th January 2022, the video posted by a blogger visiting the family of the eight children in Fengxian county to advertise charity efforts in rural areas showed a woman standing in a small shed has sparked a wave of public anger directed at authorities for failing to protect vulnerable women. The raising furor has broadened into a wider discussion of the treatment of women and of bride trafficking. In this video clip, the woman wore a thin sweater, standing in a corner of a shed outside her home in the middle of winter. She was shackled with a metal brace locked around her neck and connected inside the hut and appeared unable to communicate with the blogger. It is reasonably suspected that she has cognitive impairment and has suffered mental and physical abuse [1]. It led to speculation that she had been forced to have so many children and had been trafficked into her circumstances.

Trafficking in women has existed as a social problem for a long history in Chinese society, especially in rural areas. The main cause of it is the declined proportion of women. The traditional preference for boys combined with the decades of the now-abandoned one-child policy has skewed china's gender ratio and left a surplus of men trying to find wives. This situation becomes even worse in rural areas which are economically backward compared to the urban areas. Women trafficking violates the law and the value of human rights and is recognized as a new model of slavery in the modern era. The rampancy of the criminal activities of abduction of women puts the safety of all women and the well-being of all families in peril. Based on the adverse effect on society, there is an urgent need to address the safety problems of women caused by trafficking in women.

Factors found to be influencing trafficking in women have been explored in several studies. The fact that women trafficking still happens and fails to be prohibited can be ascribed to patriarchal values, state-tolerated sex discrimination, the vulnerability of women, and the transformation of socio-economic situations [2]. Therefore, the task of eradicating the trafficking in women needs to be executed at the policy level intervention, including governmental support, legal systems, economic systems, and education. According to Gracie, the current criminal justice policy of the Chinese government against trafficking practices is insufficient and ineffective. Coercing a woman into marriage has long been against the law but buying a wife didn't become a criminal offense until 1997. The low crime cost and high economic returns entice more criminals to commit trafficking in women.

Similarly, the assertion proposed by Nath tends to draw attention to the policy-making level [3]. Unlike G. Zhao's, this study set out from analysing conscious human behaviour and parameters that control or affect crimes such as trafficking in women. Nevertheless, different forces from distinct sides relevant to the issue indicated the identical point - a flawed legal system.

Existing research also recognized the critical role played by the industrial chain and buyers' market in women trafficking [4]. Due to the gender imbalance, there was significant demand for trafficking in women in the buyers' market. Driven by huge profit, human trafficking groups were increasingly characterized by collectivization and specialization which made the attempts of fighting women trafficking tremendously difficult.

Research on the subject has been mostly restricted to the external environment of the crime scenes, such as larger communities, institutions, and government. However, very little is currently known about how the cultural background inside the villages is related to the trafficking of women. Those local villages practically underlie the buyers' market of trafficked women, for this reason, can be viewed as the origin of the crime. This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of the people in rural areas who tend to buy the trafficked women from the human traffickers. What kind of belief makes them regard women as goods that can be treated? What cultural traditions reconcile the villagers to flout juristical regulation and ethics? This paper attempts to show how the interior social solidarity in the villages is related to the trafficking of women and therefore to unravel why the rural areas connive and tolerate uniformly the occurrence of women trafficking. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding

of the cause of the formation of trafficking in women and generate fresh insight into this social issue. This is the first study to define how social solidarity foments and abets the crime of women trafficking.

2 Mechanical Solidarity within the Villages

In reviewing the literature, the reason for the emergence of the crime of trafficking in women is associated with policy intervention, the legal system, and the industrial chain. But there is a prominent feature that tends to be neglected existing in most of the reported cases of trafficking in women. It is found that the villagers in the villages of rural areas, where the victims are “trafficked”, reveal a degree of unity and connivance upon this issue. A possible explanation for this may be the mechanical solidarity within the village.

According to Durkheim, the term “social solidarity” indicates the presence of social order in society. Different types of society generate different types of solidarity [5]. Mechanical solidarity derives from a simple division of labour. The villages where the victims are transported basically lie in remote rural areas. Because of inaccessibility and isolation, these areas are economically and culturally backward compared to urban areas. And the local economy is mainly based on agriculture. There are so few choices of living to make that all villagers live very similar kinds of lives. In the same village, villagers farm together, dine together, raise their children together and have conversations with each other on daily basis. Therefore, social solidarity is automatically obtained. The need for the society’s members to see the world in the same way - to share a collectively held set of rules about how to behave - is satisfied without much difficulty [5]⁶³.

This collectively held set of rules constrains and defines the behaviour each individual performs. Hence, what this set of rules consists of is of great importance. Given the underdevelopment in both economy and culture, the values circulated among the villagers continue to seriously accord with the feudalism and patriarchal culture exactly around which the Confucian culture centres. It is not unusual to find ideas that manifest male dominance and male supremacy in the household chef oeuvres. Confucianism prescribed wifely submission and virtue, where the three obediences stipulate the purpose of a woman’s life is to serve three people, the father before marriage, the husband during marriage, and the sons in widowhood [6]. The four virtues include fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech and efficiency in needlework [7]. These norms and rules are coined into a famous set phrase, the three obediences and four virtues. They utilize morality and culture to trap women into the plight and guarantee undoubtful male ascendancy over females. Besides, there is a household sentence, “only women and vile characters are difficult to coexist” [8]. It directly associated the character of women with unpleasant implications. In the Eight Diagrams of “The Book of Changes”, which is revered as the sacred book of Confucianism and has engendered tremendous influence on china’s politics, economy, culture, and other fields for thousands of years, “Qian is the sky, thus regarded as the father; Kun is the land, thus regarded as the mother” [9]. As it combined the ethical value with the noumenon value, endowed nature with the humanized feature, extended the natural values of sexes to the social values, it negated in the concrete the equal status of men and women, hence constructing the root of the sexism theory in the Chinese traditional culture [10].

Along with the Confucian values deeply infiltrated into the Chinese ideology and culture, the values extracted from masterworks have become some kind of axiom and have been profoundly embedded in the soil of Chinese history and culture. These values belittled women in every aspect and make them appendages of their husbands. Notwithstanding that in urban areas in China, these fusty and pedantic thoughts have been discarded, the values in rural areas remain essentially set in stone. From the perspective of Chinese traditional culture and most areas of Asia, women are the birth-giving machines to carry on the family line that is traditionally passed via men, the properties of the patriarch - her husband. The families that don't have male posterities will become the derision of the whole village. Consequently, wives who are unable to bear a son would suffer from mental and physical abuse from the families. The traditional preference bonded with the family planning policy resulted in an overabundance of men who can't find wives. Additionally, men with mental or physical disabilities and men in extremely poor economic conditions also find it difficult to get married. The accessible method for them to continue the ancestral line to fulfill their family mission is to buy trafficked women as their wives and to have their sons. As far as they are concerned, women are not independent individuals who share the same entitlements as men. Women are considered as tradable goods that they purchase in order to have male heirs. The vulnerability of women and the absence of civilized cognition induce the brutal circumstances one step further the victims are confronted. Seen from this perspective, the trafficking of women has its deeply embedded cultural and historical roots. The reason for the trafficking in women is not clear but it may have something to do with the cultural background and shared rules and values.

The values of male superiority and the traditional preference for boys become trammels of individuals' behaviour and perception. On the other hand, they effectively solidify the villagers mentally and physically. The villagers are constrained by this set of values and standards rather than by the legal provision which recognizes it as an offence. Furthermore, in consideration of the piteous local educational level, the villagers probably don't regard women trafficking as a transgression of the law. In their cultural context, it is appropriate behaviour defined by the norms and values. That's why in most cases of trafficking in women, the victims couldn't get help from other people in the village who cognize the situation since they live next door to the family who imprisons them. Because it is to some extent rightful and conventional for them. And outsiders don't have the authority to get involved in other families' affairs. For the sake of harmonization and amity among the village, the villagers will help the purchasers to keep an eye on the trafficked women, to obstruct their escape. Since the established rules in the village have existed for a thousand years, long before the villagers were born, their consciousness and behaviours which were shaped by them seem inconceivable to be reformed. Otherwise, who don't obey this set of standards will be considered as being disloyal to the tradition of the ancestors and will be condemned by their elders and other people in the village. In the film called the *Blind Mountain* (2007) and some reported cases, when the police managed to rescue the victims, the villagers even dared to obstruct the way to stop the operation. The powerful solidarity brings diapason within the range of the village, whereas crosses boundaries of the statute. It can therefore be assumed that the

extermination of trafficking in women may be a moral task rather than a political or economic one.

3 Social Solidarity and Anomie

From the stratification plane beyond the interior of the villages, the shared moral beliefs inside the village, in spite of acting “as a social ‘glue’” and creating “a sense of harmony” inside those villages [6]⁶⁰, generates “anomie” in the whole society. In Durkheim’s words, “anomie” indicates the lack of a sufficiently secure framework by which people are provided with a sense of moral regulation and social integration” [6]⁶⁴.

Seeing that the “shared moral beliefs” are merely shared among the villagers in the same villages, and “a sense of harmony” barely rests in the narrow sense, the inside mechanical solidarity, as a matter of fact, disintegrates the social solidarity in the overall situation. Because of the different levels of social development, the villages in rural areas divide economically and culturally from urban areas. The common values in the villages have been tossed away in the outside world where equality between the sexes and feminism are being progressively supported. The shared beliefs outside are much more civilized and enlightened to the extent that the two sets of values contradict one another. If the outside world and the inside world of the villages are respectively recognized as two communities, they turn into two distinct forces separating and dividing people that are so profound that social disintegration is a real threat [6]⁶⁴. These findings provide some support for the conceptual premise that slightly different from what Durkheim believed, the common rules and values only constrain individuals who have collectively learned them. And on top of that, they reinforce the disintegration with other groups and contribute to the “anomie” from the macroscopic point of view. However, in this specific case, caution must be applied, as the findings might not pertain in other cases.

4 The Potential Solution to Trafficking in Women

Since these findings suggest that women trafficking is rooted in the traditional culture and history, the most efficient and radical solution needs to tackle the problem at the source. In the theory of Durkheim, strengthening social cohesion and reducing anomic tendencies can be achieved within the existing stock of moral beliefs [6]⁶⁴. Considering the existence of almost thousands of years in Chinese historical endless flow, the traditional values have been occupying an unshakable position in Chinese common ideology. An implication of this is the possibility that the traditional values and rules in china might be both the poison and the cure for women trafficking.

It raises an intriguing question regarding what existing shared values and norms might be adopted to promote cohesion and interdependence among members of the society. It has been witnessed through the case of women trafficking how substantial impact the values and norms of Confucianism could have upon the behaviours and consciousness of individuals of a community. Thus, Confucianist ideas may be enabled to underly the integration among sexes and between rural areas and urban areas. For instance, in the book of changes, it is also recorded that “The pneuma of the sky and the pneuma of the land mingle with each other, then all things on earth are cultivated; the pneuma of Yin

and the pneuma of Yang mingle with each other, then all things on earth are bred” [9]⁶²⁵. It contains the basic values which confirm that only if one pair of opposing forces in the universe interacts, such as sky and land, yin and yang, man and woman, it is possible to engage in the new activities of producing value. Otherwise, pure yin pure yang, or a pure man, a pure woman is insufficient to produce new individuals. The natural value of genders is confirmed, and so is the value of women. It is thus obvious that although men and women are distinguished in sexes, they are originally equal in value [10]. Based on the promotion of the value of women, such idea can display the essential mutual interdependence of sexes, and of all members of the society to all the citizens whether in rural areas or in urban areas, as the traditional values are commonly shared in Chinese society.

There are still many unanswered questions about the concrete strategy to advocate the values of the “cure”. The existing research focuses more on the legal system [11–13], so it is suggested to further study the rural values and ethics.

5 Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to discuss the reason for the trafficking of women in the cultural stratification plane. The research on the traditional values and norms has shown that they resulted in a unanimous attitude inside a community, and they act effectively as a social glue to solidify the communities inside and separate the communities from outside.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that these values and norms could underlie the origin of the emergence and the eradication of women trafficking. Taken together, these findings suggest a role for the theory of social solidarity by Emile Durkheim in analysing women trafficking in contemporary society and provide insights into it in the moral and cultural dimensions. This is the first study that examines associations between the theory of social solidarity and the crime of trafficking in women. This approach will prove useful in expanding our understanding of how the incident came into being in the first place and how society can react to it.

The scope of this study was limited in terms of data analysis since the collection of the information needs to be done on a national scale. Therefore, it is unknown what precise impact the culture had and would have on this case. What is now needed is the proposition of a specific tactic of promoting the essential values and norms to advocate the values of women and the interdependence among members of societies. This would be a fruitful area for further work, which could also be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the exact measure.

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