

# **Shackles on China's Soul: Marriage Trafficking in China**

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# I. ‘The face of such exploitation’<sup>1</sup>

‘Is she China’s mother?

Is she China’s reproductive organ?

The bloody leash she wears around her neck is ringed with your coldness

The chains she wears are the shackles on your soul

On this mystical land

She is multitudes...’

—— Jingrong Yang, *Heavy Moments*<sup>2</sup>

## i. The tip of the iceberg

In late January 2022, a video of a middle-aged woman chained by the neck to the wall of a doorless shed, shivering, whilst muttering ‘the world has abandoned me’ went viral on Chinese Tiktok.<sup>3</sup> It was alleged that she suffered from mental illness, and was therefore chained to the wall by her ‘husband’, named Dong Zhimin, with whom she had eight children.<sup>4</sup> The disconcerting video raised many questions: Why did the blatant violation of China’s One Child Policy go undetected? Under what circumstances did she ‘marry’ Dong? Why is a woman deemed too mentally ill for basic human liberties nevertheless considered fit for marriage and childbirth? And above all, is she a victim of human trafficking, the age-old hideous crime plaguing China?

The video sent shockwaves across China, and the ‘chained woman’ soon became the face of the egregious exploitation that is marriage trafficking to the Chinese public. On Weibo<sup>5</sup>, discussions about the ‘chained woman’ became top-trending in a matter of hours, and in a few days,

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<sup>1</sup> Courtesy to Vice News for the chapter title

<sup>2</sup> Jingrong Yang/杨景荣. “沉重时刻”, 女权学论. 2022. translated by SCMP, url: <https://www.scmp.com/economy/article/3172020/trafficking-violence-and-poverty-remain-issues-despite-women-making-great>

<sup>3</sup> Viola Zhou. “Chained Mother of 8 Exposes Horrors of Human Trafficking in China.” Vice News, 2022. url: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dypkvq/chained-woman-human-trafficking-china>; Lily Kuo. “Plight of Chinese mother of eight chained outside in winter causes public outrage despite official explanations.” The Washington Post (Washington, D.C.), 2022. url: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/09/china-chained-xuzhou-mother-human-trafficking/>

<sup>4</sup> Chaguan, “A story of a trafficked bride shocks China.” The Economist, 2022. url: <https://www.economist.com/china/2022/02/26/a-story-of-a-trafficked-bride-shocks-china>

<sup>5</sup> The Chinese equivalent of Twitter

relevant hashtags attracted billions of engagement.<sup>6</sup> The New York Times termed it an ‘online revolt’, whereby citizens from all walks of life became united by indignation, and collectively expressed outrage at her abuse and at the government’s inaction — an extremely rare sight in a highly digitised authoritarian state.<sup>7</sup> In comment sections of popular commentators on Weibo, the plight of the ‘chained woman’ sparked a ‘sort of #MeToo’ movement, as countless users shared stories about relatives and family members who became victims of human trafficking.<sup>8</sup> For a while, it seemed as if the dormant Chinese civil society had woken up from the enforced slumber: retired investigative journalists dug up the woman’s marriage certificate to Dong; lawyers and academics gave ‘crash courses on human trafficking, forced marriage, and demographic statistics’; and two brave activists ventured into Feng County to visit the chained woman and investigate human trafficking in the area.<sup>9</sup>

As the online movement gathered momentum, the public discovered that the plight of the ‘chained woman’ was merely the tip of an iceberg of horrors. Days after the initial video went viral, it was revealed that next door to the ‘chained woman’, there were two other women living in abject condition who seemed to have undergone similar abuse: one woman was wrapped in thin old quilt and unable to walk, and the other was living in a shed seemingly for animals; both had chains around their necks and few teeth between their lips, bearing an eerie resemblance to the ‘chained woman’.<sup>10</sup> A couple more weeks later, another incident of marriage trafficking surfaced in the northwest province of Shaanxi, whereby a man allegedly forced a homeless woman into ‘marriage’ by locking her in a cage and forced her to give birth to a boy and a girl who was subsequently sold.<sup>11</sup> Such repeated exposure to its horrors centre-staged the problem of marriage trafficking in China. Amidst the public outrage, a seemingly insignificant book named *Ancient Sins*, published in 1989 by two journalists investigating marriage trafficking in the Jiangsu province,

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<sup>6</sup> Yuan Li. "Seeking Truth and Justice, Chinese See Themselves in a Chained Woman." The New York Times (New York, N.Y), 2022. url: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/01/business/china-chained-woman-social-media.html>

<sup>7</sup> The New York Times

<sup>8</sup> The New York Times

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Guo, "Chained Woman and Bride Trafficking in China." Glimpse from the Globe, 2022. url: <https://www.glimpsefromtheglobe.com/regions/asia-and-the-pacific/chained-women-and-bride-trafficking-in-china/>

<sup>10</sup> Heather Barr and Yaqiu Wang. "Chained Woman Has Become the Face of Bride Trafficking in China." Women’s eNews, 2022. url: <https://womensenews.org/2022/04/chained-woman-has-become-the-face-of-bride-trafficking-in-china/>

<sup>11</sup> Barr and Wang.

briefly resurfaced.<sup>12</sup> The authors noted that in the 1980s alone, around 48,100 women were trafficked into Xuzhou, the medium-sized city administrating the Feng County.<sup>13</sup> Whilst their estimation might not have been highly accurate, their conclusion on the pervasiveness of marriage trafficking is supported by Sixth Tone's recent research: researchers noted that between 2000 and 2010, over 80% of migrants to Xuzhou are female (around 60,000), an overwhelming majority of whom migrated for marriage.<sup>14</sup> And whilst the researchers could not attest how many of these women were trafficking victims, they noted that elsewhere in Jiangsu, the great majority of female migrants came for work, making Xuzhou's migration patterns a highly abnormal and troubling one.<sup>15</sup> As Financial Times reported, in the wake of the 'chained woman' incident, the Chinese society 'learnt, for the first time, on such enormous scale, of the true horrors and pervasiveness of bride trafficking in China.'<sup>16</sup>

Further adding to the horrors, the Chinese state, despite rhetorics of being tough on human trafficking, seemed to have been complicit in the crime. Upon the 'going viral' of the video of the 'chained woman', the local government of the Feng County claimed, in blatant disregard of all evidence, that there has been 'no abduction or trafficking', that the woman was violent and mentally ill and therefore needed to be chained, and that the government has offered 'further assistance so that the *family* can enjoy a warm lunar new year'.<sup>17</sup> As the initial statement failed to quell the online furor, in the following weeks, the government of Xuzhou and Jiangsu Province issued several further statements containing multiple self-contradictions, which admitted that the 'chained woman' had been a victim of marriage trafficking and laid out how she was bought by the Dong family.<sup>18</sup> However, all statements failed to address the elephant in the room, namely

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<sup>12</sup> The New York Times

<sup>13</sup> Xie and Jia, *Ancient Sins*, quoted by Yahan Luo. "China's Human Trafficking Problem Goes Far Beyond the 'Chained Woman'." Sixth Tone, 2022. url: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1009813/chinas-human-trafficking-problem-goes-far-beyond-the-chained-woman>

<sup>14</sup> Sixth Tone

<sup>15</sup> Sixth Tone

<sup>16</sup> Elena Olcott. "China's chained woman exposes horror of Beijing's one-child policy." Financial Times, 2022. url: <https://www.ft.com/content/50590ab4-ae3-419d-86b6-8523341b0ded>

<sup>17</sup> Huanqiu Net/环球网. "徐州丰县通报“生育八孩女子”情况：患有精神疾病 已对其进行救治". 2022. url: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1723195848365629605&wfr=spider&for=pc>

<sup>18</sup> Yuan Ye, "Investigators Release Trafficking Details of Woman Chained to Wall" Sixth Tone, 2022. url: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1009739/investigators-release-trafficking-details-of-woman-chained-to-wall->

how such flagrant abuse and reproductive enslavement of a mentally ill woman escaped the omnipresent eyes of the party-state for decades.

And it was not only the local government. Since 17th February, state-backed censors deleted billions of engagements on Weibo regarding the ‘chained woman’ which questioned the questionable official narrative.<sup>19</sup> The two activists who went to visit the chained woman were detained and abused in custody, before disappearing from public view altogether, and many Weibo users across China reported to have received threats from their local police.<sup>20</sup> Books and bookshops were not spared either: *Ancient Sins* was banned, and bookshops across the country were forced to take down sections promoting awareness on systematic gender based violence.<sup>21</sup> As Weibo eventually banned the hashtag ‘Trafficking of women is a global issue’ by a stroke of irony under state pressure, what began as a tragedy turned into a travesty. Onlookers were eventually forced to sober up to the enormity of the crime: beneath an enforced veneer of silent harmony, countless women have been forced into wedlock, subjected to reproductive enslavement, and enduring prolonged abuse, all with acquiescence if not active complicity of the Chinese state.

## ii. The blindspot of Palermo

Human trafficking is a form of modern slavery violating basic human rights,<sup>22</sup> but how women experience human trafficking and endure distinct forms of exploitation is understudied. The Palermo Protocol defined human trafficking as the ‘coercion and deception of individuals for the purpose of exploitation’, which includes both sexual and ‘slavery-like practices’.<sup>23</sup> However, as Xiaochen Liang pointed out, the Protocol had a critical blindspot: it failed to identify domestic violence as a form of exploitation in trafficking, because it overlooked marriage trafficking as a distinct form of trafficking.<sup>24</sup> Although arguably marriage trafficking can be included in sexual

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<sup>19</sup> Barr and Wang

<sup>20</sup> The New York Times

<sup>21</sup> The New York Times

<sup>22</sup> Weidi Liu, Geping Qiu, and Sheldon X Zhang. "Easy Prey: Illicit Enterprising Activities and the Trafficking of Vietnamese Women in China." *Asian Journal of Criminology* 16, no. 4 (2020): 320; Yiwei Xia, Yisu Zhou, Li Du, and Tianji Cai. "Mapping Trafficking of Women in China: Evidence from Court Sentences." *The Journal of Contemporary China* 29, no. 122 (2020): 239.

<sup>23</sup> Article 3, UN Office of the High Commissioner. "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime" (the Palermo Protocol), 2000. url: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ProtocolonTrafficking.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Xiaochen Liang. "Marriage Trafficking: Demand, Exploitation, and Conducive Contexts-A Study in China-Vietnam Border Areas." *Violence against Women*, 2022. 13.

exploitation or slave-like practices, as she argued, the lack of clear definition resulted in systematic under-detection of female victims of trafficking and under-estimation of the scale and seriousness of such exploitation, especially in East- and Southeast Asia.<sup>25</sup>

But what do we mean by marriage trafficking, and what differentiates exploitation in marriage trafficking from exploitation in other forms of human trafficking? Kaye Quek defined marriage trafficking in 2018 as ‘a more complex and multilayered matrix of abuse, encompassing sexual exploitation, reproductive slavery, and forced domestic servitude.’<sup>26</sup> Building on which, Liang argued that due to the long-term, personal, and private nature of the institution of marriage, marriage trafficking is more exploitative than sex- or labour trafficking.<sup>27</sup> Long term, as marriage trafficking tends to last for decades if not a lifetime whilst other forms of sexual exploitation might end sooner; personal, as violence in marriage trafficking are more personally bound to their abusers and cannot choose their sexual partner; and private, as exploitation in marriage trafficking trends to go undetected under the guise of ‘family matters’.<sup>28</sup> Liang then further identified three distinct dimensions of marriage trafficking: domestic violence, labour servitude, and reproductive exploitation, as victims lose control over their bodies and their fertility.<sup>29</sup>

Adopting such definition, I shall present the scale, patterns, and nature of marriage trafficking in China in Section II. Then, in Section III, I shall analyse how the social supply and demand, alongside state actions, perpetuated marriage trafficking. This shall be followed by Section IV whereby I discuss potential solutions to marriage trafficking and their limitations, before eventually concluding in Section V.

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<sup>25</sup> Liang, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Quek, 2018, 21-24.

<sup>27</sup> Liang, 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> Liang, 7-12.

<sup>29</sup> Liang, 13.

## II. The depths of the crime

### i. The numbers

Given that much of marriage trafficking goes undetected, it is difficult to accurately assess the magnitude of the problem.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, as Liu et al. added, qualitative evidence on marriage trafficking is overwhelmingly biased towards trafficked women who had successfully escaped due to the nature of the crime, making precise estimation even more difficult.<sup>31</sup> However, we may nevertheless catch a glimpse of the scope and patterns of marriage trafficking in China through police reports, court documents, and research literature.

Regionally, East Asia and the Pacific is a hotspot for the trafficking of women and girls, and China is at the centre of trafficking activities. As UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported, in East Asia and the Pacific, women disproportionately fall prey to human trafficking, making up 68% of all victims, and most victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, China is a major source and destination of human trafficking, and cross-border trafficking of women has been increasing in China.<sup>33</sup> Whilst UN reports did not differentiate between marriage trafficking and trafficking for sexual exploitation, Wanru Xiong estimated that more than 80% of female victims of trafficking in China have been trafficked for forced marriage.<sup>34</sup>

Police reports can hint towards the number of women being trafficked. Tiefenbrun and Edwards noted that between 1991 and 1996, Chinese police claimed to have freed 88,000 kidnapped women and children, and arrested 143,000 individuals for participating in the slave trade; and in 2000, they claimed to have rescued another 100,000 women and children from trafficking gangs.<sup>35</sup> Gracie Zhao estimated that on average, at least 12,000 women were trafficked per year in

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<sup>30</sup> Tiantian Zheng. "Human trafficking in China." *Journal of Historical Archaeology & Anthropological Sciences* Volume 3 Issue 2 (2018): 172.

<sup>31</sup> Liu et al. 319.

<sup>32</sup> UN Office on Drugs and Crime. "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons", 2020. url: <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210051958/read>, 151, 155

<sup>33</sup> UNODC.

<sup>34</sup> Wanru Xiong. "Does the Shortage of Marriageable Women Induce the Trafficking of Women for Forced Marriage? Evidence From China." *Violence against Women* 28, no. 6-7 (2022): 1443

<sup>35</sup> Susan Tiefenbrun and Christie J Edwards. "Gendercide and the Cultural Context of Sex Trafficking in China." *Fordham International Law Journal* 32, no. 3 (2009): 6-8

China between 1990 and 1999.<sup>36</sup> Between 2000 and 2013, as Zheng's study revealed, another 92,581 women were registered as victims of trafficking, and Xia et al. noted that Chinese courts tried 7,710 cases of human trafficking during this period, involving 12,963 traffickers.<sup>37</sup> And in 2019, according to the Ministry of Public Safety, a months-long targeted action in the Southwest have rescued 1,130 foreign trafficked women.<sup>38</sup> These figures already paint a shocking picture of pervasive trafficking, but according to Tiefenbrun and Edwards, due to widespread under-reporting and obstacles to enforcing anti-trafficking laws, estimations made based on these figures will inevitably be under-estimations of the true scale of the crime.<sup>39</sup>

## ii. The patterns

A significant proportion of victims of marriage trafficking in China are of foreign origins. Bincun Wen found that in his sample of trafficking victims, 39.5% were foreign.<sup>40</sup> Huang and Weng's subsequent study returned a similar result, whereby 39.3% of victims came from abroad.<sup>41</sup>

Between domestic and international victims, one shared pattern is that most tend to be trafficked through deception. According to UNIAP, around 37% of victims were trafficked by fraud and deception, 26% by kidnapping, 17% by abuse of position of power, and only 5% by physical violence.<sup>42</sup> Xia et al. subsequently found that in her sample, across domestic and international victims, a similar majority have been trafficked after being deceived or lured by promises, and only a small proportion by violence.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gracie Zhao. "Trafficking of Women for Marriage in China." *Criminal Justice* (London, England : 2001) 3, no. 1 (2003): 91.

<sup>37</sup> Xia et al. 238-239.

<sup>38</sup> State Department News Office/国务院新闻办公室网站. "公安部举行六国联合打击拐卖人口行动发布会", 2019. url: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/xwfbh/gbwxwfbh/xwfbh/gab/Document/1657645/1657645.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Tiefenbrun and Edwards, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Bincun Wen/温丙存. "被拐卖妇女的类型分析." *山西师大学报 (社会科学版)* 44, no. 4 (2017): 55-56.

<sup>41</sup> Huang and Weng, 6.

<sup>42</sup> UNIAP. Quoted by UNODC 2018 Report.

<sup>43</sup> Xia et al., 243.

However, domestic and international patterns of trafficking differ overall. Xia et al. noted that international victims tend to be much younger, with 70% of whom being below 30, compared to 42% amongst domestic victims.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Wen and Huang and Weng remarked that a significant proportion (around 30%) of domestic victims are mentally ill, a pattern not present amongst international victims.<sup>45</sup> Lastly, Huang and Weng pointed out that spatial patterns of trafficking varied significantly according to the victims' mental state and countries of origin.<sup>46</sup> Due to these variations, it is worth to now distinguish between domestic and cross-border cases in more detailed analyses of spatial and demographic patterns of marriage trafficking.

### ***ii.(i). Domestic patterns***

Geographically, populous and underdeveloped provinces tend to become hotspots of marriage trafficking, and victims are generally trafficked from mountainous border areas to inland regions. Xia et al. found that much of China's domestic trafficking (73.5%) occurred between Henan, Anhui, Shandong, and Hubei, four adjacent provinces encompassing swathes of densely populated rural areas (see: Appendix, figure 1).<sup>47</sup> After distinguishing between in- and out- trafficking, Huang and Weng further discovered that Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Jilin are also hotspots of trafficking, as many women were trafficked out of these provinces (see: Appendix, figure 2).<sup>48</sup> This led Huang and Weng to conclude that most marriage traffickings in China flow inwards from border regions (see: Appendix, figure 3).<sup>49</sup>

Most victims, as Zhao pointed out, were from impoverished families in under-developed, often mountainous regions.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, as mentioned, many of whom were identified as mentally ill. In Wen's sample, 26.5% of domestic victims were designated as mentally ill, whilst Huang and Weng noted that in their sample, a staggering 32.9% of the victims suffered from mental illnesses.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Xia et al., 243.

<sup>45</sup> Wen, 57; Huang and Weng, 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Huang and Weng, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Xia et al. 242.

<sup>48</sup> Huang and Weng, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Huang and Weng, 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> Zhao, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Huang and Weng, 7.

Demographic profiles of traffickers in domestic cases are diverse, therefore it is difficult to identify generalisable patterns. Cindy Chu noted that in Yunnan Province, many traffickers operated in gangs,<sup>52</sup> whilst Wen and Xia et al., stressed that women were more often lured into trafficking by persons of trust or even relatives.<sup>53</sup> The only consistency is that traffickers tend to be under-educated and under-employed.<sup>54</sup>

### ***ii.(ii). International patterns***

Geographically, the borders between China and the various origin countries are hotspots of trafficking. As Huang and Weng identified, Hekou at the China-Vietnam border, Ruili at the China-Myanmar border, and Changbai at the China-North Korea border were three centres of cross-border marriage trafficking (see: Appendix, figure 4).

Demographically, Vietnam is the number one country of origin, followed by Myanmar and North Korea, and more recently by Cambodia and Pakistan. In Wen's sample, 62.5% of foreign victims were from Vietnam, 18.4% from Myanmar, and 17.1% from North Korea.<sup>55</sup> Huang and Weng similarly found Vietnamese, Burmese, and North Korean women accounting for 55.7%, 22.3%, and 18.9% of all victims respectively.<sup>56</sup> However, the Ministry of Public Safety in 2019 reported that 440 out of the 1130 (39%) victims rescued in a targeted action against human trafficking are Cambodian, making the country the second largest country of origin after Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> In the same year, the Associated Press reported 629 cases of Pakistani women being trafficked into China for forced marriage.<sup>58</sup> Although it is difficult to assert whether the proportions of Cambodian and Pakistani victims have risen overall, it is nevertheless reasonable to list these two countries as additional key countries of origin.

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<sup>52</sup> Cindy Yik-Yi Chu. "Human Trafficking and Smuggling in China." *The Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 68 (2011): 48.

<sup>53</sup> Wen, 58; Xia et al. 245.

<sup>54</sup> Xia et al. 246.

<sup>55</sup> Wen, 56.

<sup>56</sup> Huang and Weng, 7-9.

<sup>57</sup> State Department News Office/国务院新闻办公室网站. 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Afzal, 2.

The profiles of cross-border traffickers are as diverse as domestic traffickers, but most tend to be undereducated and underemployed Chinese nationals organised in dispersed networks.<sup>59</sup> Liu et al. noted that many of the traffickers arrested at the China-Vietnam border tends to be Chinese nationals of minority ethnicity frequently crossing into Vietnam, and like Chu, they found that these traffickers are often members of small-scale transnational criminal networks.<sup>60</sup> Qiu et al. noted that traffickers of Cambodian women are often affiliated with small matchmaking agencies.<sup>61</sup> And Kathleen Davis noted that traffickers of North Korean women tend to be Korean Chinese colluding with North Korean defectors and border guards.<sup>62</sup>

### **iii. The exploitations**

Victims of marriage trafficking are almost always subjected the three-fold exploitations of domestic violence, labour servitude, and reproductive enslavement. Stockl et al.'s study records that over 90% of their sample of women trafficked into China experienced prolonged physical and sexual violence at the hands of their 'husbands' and traffickers, many amongst whom were also forced to give birth.<sup>63</sup> But quantitative evidence does not even begin to capture the magnitude of suffering or the horrendous nature of exploitation in marriage trafficking; for which, we must turn to qualitative evidence.

#### ***iii.(i). Domestic violence***

Evidence of domestic sexual and physical violence is everywhere in survivor's testimonies. Liang records that all trafficked Vietnamese women in China she interviewed described repeated rape and continued physical violence, often due to their resistance of coercive sex or physical labour.<sup>64</sup> For example:

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<sup>59</sup> Liu et al, 323; Qiu, Geping, Sheldon X Zhang, and Weidi Liu. "Trafficking of Myanmar Women for Forced Marriage in China." *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 72, no. 1 (2019): 35.

<sup>60</sup> Liu et al, 328; Chu, 41-42.

<sup>61</sup> Qiu et al. 36-37.

<sup>62</sup> Kathleen Davis. "Brides, Bruises and the Border." *SAIS Review* (Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies) 26, no. 1 (2006): 136.

<sup>63</sup> Stockl et al. 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Liang, 11.

Trafficked woman 5: I was raped by my husband in his house the first night. Then I was locked up by my husband's family in a room with a big iron door... My husband often beats me.<sup>65</sup>

The memoir of Yeonmi Park, a North Korean defector who survived human trafficking in China, also told a story of violent abuse:

Park: The bald broker threw my mother on the ground and raped her right in front of me, like an animal. I saw such fear in her eyes, but there was nothing I could do except stand there and shiver, begging silently for it to end.<sup>66</sup>

Victims of domestic marriage trafficking experienced similar sexual and physical exploitation. Aside from the aforementioned examples of the 'chained woman', her neighbours, and the woman in cage, the story of Xiaoqing Cao is yet another testimony to the horrendous nature of marriage trafficking: after being drugged and trafficked from Sichuan to Inner Mongolia, Cao was thrice re-sold and repeatedly raped and beaten by the three men who claimed to be her 'husbands', their fathers, and their brothers, resulting in multiple pregnancies against her will followed by violence-induced miscarriages.<sup>67</sup> Under prolonged violence and captivity, Cao became severely mentally ill and ended up being imprisoned in a cave for animals for fifteen years before her eventual rescue.<sup>68</sup>

### ***iii.(ii). Labour servitude***

As Liang identified, in marriage trafficking, exploitation of victims 'almost always involve forced labour'.<sup>69</sup> This is because on the one hand, in the patriarchal institution of Chinese marriage, wives are expected to undertake unpaid domestic work and assist in agricultural work,<sup>70</sup> and on the other hand, seen as 'chattels and sources of potential profit', purchasing families regularly

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<sup>65</sup> Liang, 12-13.

<sup>66</sup> Yeonmi Park, quoted by Garcia, 66-69.

<sup>67</sup> Wangyi News/网易新闻. "20岁少女曹小青历经4次拐卖, 囚窑洞15年受尽欺辱, 被救后怎样了". 2022. url: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/H0TI8GDF05528XXO.html> & Sohu News/搜狐新闻. "四川女孩曹小琴: 17年被拐4次, 得救时已被折磨得认不出". 2020. url: [https://www.sohu.com/a/434471418\\_241009](https://www.sohu.com/a/434471418_241009)

<sup>68</sup> Wangyi News/网易新闻.

<sup>69</sup> Liang, 15.

<sup>70</sup> Liang, 16-17, Zhao, 87.

seek to squeeze values out of trafficked women to make up for how much the family has paid for her.<sup>71</sup>

For example, Kyunghye Kook noted that Chinese husbands and their families often assert because they ‘bought’ North Korean brides, as ‘wives’ they must ‘play the role of a “proper” wife worthy of the price’, which often means being suppliant in serving their husbands and undertake unpaid housework.<sup>72</sup> One example of whom is Yeonmi Park’s mother, who was sold to a Chinese farmer for \$2,100.<sup>73</sup> As she records:

Park: My mother was expected to be not just a wife to this Chinese farmer but a slave for the whole family. She had to cook and clean and work in the fields.....  
To them, she was like one of their farm animals.<sup>74</sup>

### **iii.(iii). Reproductive enslavement**

Reproductive enslavement is one of the hallmarks of marriage trafficking. This is not only because victims of marriage endure prolonged sexual violence, but also because the birthing of sons and the ‘continuation of the lineage’ is a crucial reason for purchasing trafficked women.<sup>75</sup> Outrageous stories of forced pregnancies and childbirth are everywhere to be seen in reported cases of domestic marriage trafficking: the ‘chained woman’ mentioned at the beginning gave birth to eight children in captivity; Cao, the aforementioned woman imprisoned in a cave, likewise had two children against her will after several violence-induced miscarriages;<sup>76</sup> and as reported in 2021, a disabled woman in Shandong sold by her mother to a syphilitic man had nine children from the forced marriage.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Liang, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Kyunghye Kook. "I Want to Be Trafficked so I Can Migrate!" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 676, no. 1 (2018): 129.

<sup>73</sup> Park, quoted by Garcia, 137.

<sup>74</sup> Park, quoted by Garcia, 138.

<sup>75</sup> Zhao, 90; Liang, 17-18. This phenomenon shall be further discussed in III.

<sup>76</sup> Sohu News/搜狐新闻.

<sup>77</sup> China News Daily/中国新闻周刊. “男子染梅毒与脑瘫女子连生9孩”, 2022. url: <https://archive.ph/WoB7L#selection-347.121-377.11>

Moreover, as Liang pointed out, families who had purchased trafficked women often exploit their emotional attachment to their children by leveraging it to keep them in captivity.<sup>78</sup> For example:

Trafficked woman 1: The villagers here persuaded me: “You’re a mother now, and you can’t leave your children. You now have a family that depends on you, so just try to settle down here.”<sup>79</sup>

As their wombs become family property, trafficked women become entirely dehumanised. The combined weight of the physical and psychological trauma of forced pregnancies alongside enduring emotional and social burdens following childbirth should qualify reproductive exploitation as the ‘most severe aspect of their experience of trafficking’.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Liang, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Liang, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Liang, 17.

### III. The roots of the problem

#### i. Supply

What makes women vulnerable to marriage trafficking? In this section, I shall argue that the intersection of poverty, gender-based inequality in opportunities, patriarchal conventions, disability, and ethnic marginalisation makes some women easier prey for marriage trafficking.

The aforementioned demographic patterns indicate that, as Qiliang Wang argued, the structural underdevelopment of certain rural areas made impoverished women more vulnerable to traffickers' luring.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, as many researchers have pointed out, most foreign women trafficked come from impoverished backgrounds. Stockl et al. pointed out that most Vietnamese victims are from poorer families in underdeveloped areas in Northern Vietnam.<sup>82</sup> Human Rights Watch identified most victims of trafficking from Myanmar as coming from the war-torn state of Kachin where women are often desperate.<sup>83</sup> Davis pointed to hunger and extreme poverty as the key factors behind North Korean women's decision to flee the country, which put them in extremely vulnerable situations easily exploited by traffickers (who are often fellow defectors).<sup>84</sup> And the Brookings Institute noted that Pakistani victims of marriage trafficking came overwhelmingly from impoverished Christian families near the China-Pakistan economic corridor.<sup>85</sup> The fact that most victims of marriage trafficking are deceived by promises of jobs or a good arranged marriage (as mentioned in II.ii) also reflects that women from impoverished backgrounds tend to be more vulnerable. Moreover, as Zhang pointed out, structural poverty traps women in marriage trafficking for longer, since some might consider their captivity be more tolerable than poverty at home and therefore choose to endure the exploitation.<sup>86</sup>

Poverty and gender-based educational and employment inequality often intersect, exacerbating women and girls' vulnerability. Zhao pointed out that women disproportionately made up China's illiterate population (around 75%) as of 1990, which led to more limited employment opportunity, greater dependence, and less access to information. This in turn made them more vul-

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<sup>81</sup> Wang, quoted by Wen, 55.

<sup>82</sup> Stockl et al. 3-4.

<sup>83</sup> Barr, Heather. "China's Bride Trafficking Problem", Human Rights Watch, 2019. url: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/31/chinas-bride-trafficking-problem>

<sup>84</sup> Davis, 133.

<sup>85</sup> Afzal, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Zhang, quoted in RFA.

nerable to deception, and less likely to escape once trafficked.<sup>87</sup> As Abigail Murphy pointed out, this disproportionality is because in underdeveloped areas of China, poorer families overwhelmingly choose to prioritise sons' education over that of daughters, and often compel their daughters to drop out of schools early to assist in agricultural work as free labourers.<sup>88</sup> The consequence of which, as she pointed out, is that on average girls fall years behind than boys from similar socio-economic backgrounds in education and therefore have worse career prospects.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, even when girls get through education, often they are disadvantaged by their gender in seeking employment. This pattern is also replicated in the aforementioned countries of origin.

Women's vulnerability perpetuated by poverty and gender-based inequality is again exacerbated patriarchal conventions, namely early marriage, matchmaking, and dependency on husbands and male relatives. As Zhao pointed out, in much of rural China, girls are often deemed a burden that should be rid of as soon as possible due to their 'inability to pass on the family name'; consequently, parents sometimes choose to arrange marriages for their daughters at a young age.<sup>90</sup> This then exposes young girls to traffickers disguising as matchmakers.<sup>91</sup> This pattern is also present in Vietnam, North Korea, and Pakistan: Stockl et al. identified that in impoverished regions of Vietnam, traffickers often deceive parents under the guise of arranging cross-border marriages for their daughter;<sup>92</sup> Kook noted similar incidents whereby once in China, North Korean women found themselves dependent on matchmakers (Seon) who are in fact traffickers; and Afzal reported that much of the Pakistani marriage trafficking victims in 2019 were young girls whose parents were deceived by matchmaking agencies.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, in such patriarchal societies, women's dependency do not end with marriage in itself but continues throughout their lives.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, in a state of desperation, women are vulnerable to being sold and trafficked by their husbands and male relatives. For instance, Asma Masood found that Kachin women were

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<sup>87</sup> Zhao, 87.

<sup>88</sup> Abigail Murphy. "Gender-based Education Inequality in China and India." *Global Majority E-Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (June 2018), 18.

<sup>89</sup> Murphy, 19-20.

<sup>90</sup> Zhao, 87-88

<sup>91</sup> Zhao, 88-89.

<sup>92</sup> Stockl et al. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Afzal. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Zhao, 92.

often trafficked by fellow displaced migrants because of their dependency and inability to resist.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, Davis recorded that a staggering 80%-90% of female North Korean illegal migrants in China became trafficking victims, because their fellow defectors (including family members and husbands) often sold them off to sustain the family in desperation, and forced arranged marriage were often presented to them as the only possible option.<sup>96</sup>

Mental illness and disability further worsens the aforementioned vulnerabilities. Mentally ill women are both overrepresented amongst domestic victims and vulnerable to being re-sold, because they are more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, and more prone to being deemed a burden to be rid of by their families. Wen found that most mentally ill victims (62.8%) were 'picked up by the roadside' by traffickers when they were homeless, which is corroborated by several cases mentioned in II.iii;<sup>97</sup> and the rest were sold by their families when they were deemed a drain on the family's resources due to their inability to engage in labour or due to high costs of care.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, being of a marginalised ethnic minority also makes women easier prey for traffickers, because ethnic minority women are more likely to be impoverished and sociopolitically powerless. For example, the reason why Burmese victims of marriage trafficking were disproportionately Kachin is not only because the state was torn by civil war, but also because the minority-dominated Kachin state had been systematically neglected and underdeveloped by the central Burmese government for decades.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, as Miriam Berger noted, trafficked Pakistani women overwhelmingly came from Pakistan's Christian community, because they are simultaneously disproportionately impoverished, and because Pakistan's leaders prioritised building bilateral relationships with China over protecting these marginalised and politically insignificant Christian women.<sup>100</sup>

## **ii. Demand**

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<sup>95</sup> Masood, 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> Davis, 136.

<sup>97</sup> Wen, 57.

<sup>98</sup> Wen, 57.

<sup>99</sup> Lwin and Sam, quoted by Kamler, 209.

<sup>100</sup> Miriam Berger. "An Investigation Found Pakistani Christian Women Being Trafficked to China as Brides. Then Officials Shut It down." *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C), 2019. url: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/12/05/an-investigation-found-pakistani-christian-women-being-trafficked-china-brides-then-officials-shut-it-down/>

The primary driver of marriage trafficking, however, is not women's vulnerability: without the buyers, the system of marriage trafficking and enslavement would not have existed at all. Hence, we turn now to examining why there exists a demand for trafficked brides. It shall be argued that the demand driving marriage trafficking stems from both the drastic demographic imbalance resulting from sex selective abortion and female infanticide, and an archaic system of beliefs designating marriage and reproduction as a social demand deep-rooted in much of China.

Most researchers writing on marriage trafficking in China have pointed to sex selective abortion and female infanticide as the cause of the demographic imbalance which in turn fuelled demand for trafficked women. Tiefenbrun and Edwards argued that female infanticide is an age-old social ill plaguing patriarchal China, because since only boys are considered able to continue the patrilineal line, girls are rendered burdens, which fuels infanticide when the family is unable or unwilling to feed them.<sup>101</sup> This was exacerbated by the One Child Policy: since 1979, as women were pressured into undergoing sterilisation or forced abortion after one child or else face high fines, parents who strongly preferred a son resorted to sex selective abortion or female infanticide, despite the illegality of both practices.<sup>102</sup> Certain provinces' conciliatory policies of allowing couples whose firstborn is female to have another child further exacerbated the demographic imbalance: amongst second births the imbalance sometimes reached 160 boys to 100 girls.<sup>103</sup> These practices and policies collectively perpetuated what Jingbao Nie termed the '40 million missing girls in China', referring to the highly distorted sex ratio at birth (SRB) at around 120:100 nationwide.<sup>104</sup>

The effect of demographic imbalance is worsened by increased rural-to-urban migration since the 1980s. As tens of millions of men and women migrated to cities in search of employment following China's economic reform, young women from rural areas achieved greater financial and social independence in cities where gender inequality was less rife.<sup>105</sup> Consequently, many

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<sup>101</sup> Tiefenbrun and Edwards, 5-6.

<sup>102</sup> Therese Hesketh, Li Lu, and Zhu Wei Xing. "The Consequences of Son Preference and Sex-selective Abortion in China and Other Asian Countries." *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)* 183, no. 12 (2011): 1374-1375.

<sup>103</sup> Hesketh and Zhu 2006, quoted by Liu et al., 322.

<sup>104</sup> Jing-Bao Nie. "Non-medical Sex-selective Abortion in China: Ethical and Public Policy Issues in the Context of 40 Million Missing Females." *British Medical Bulletin* 98, no. 1 (2011): 9.

<sup>105</sup> Liu et al., 322.

female migrants chose to settle in cities, shrinking what Liu et al. termed ‘the pool of eligible mates for the village man’.<sup>106</sup>

Whilst Hesketh et al. optimistically hoped that the demographic imbalance might improve women’s marriage prospects and status,<sup>107</sup> in reality, instead of confronting the consequences of its own doings, the patriarchal Chinese society more often resorted to buying trafficked women. Resonating with Hudson and Boer’s theory that males’ demand for marriage and sex tends to ‘stimulate crimes against females, such as rape, forced marriage, and modern slavery’,<sup>108</sup> researchers concluded that the distorted sex ratio created a market for marriage trafficking. Xia et al. found that the provinces with the most distorted SRBs are the largest hotspots for marriage trafficking;<sup>109</sup> and Lhomme et al. pointed out that as marriage costs skyrocketed to around \$20,000 in rural China, spending on average \$5,500 to buy a trafficked woman was increasingly seen as the ‘economical and practical option’ for bachelors.<sup>110</sup>

However, demographic imbalance makes up only a half of the story: attributing marriage trafficking solely to demographic imbalance overlooks the elephant in the room that is the patriarchal value system which mandated marriage as essential. Wanru Xiong argued that the relationship between distorted SRB and marriage trafficking is more complicated than assumed to be, for patriarchal value serves as a key confounding variable.<sup>111</sup> But interestingly, this obviously questionable premise of marriage being essential has been overlooked and uncritically accepted by some researchers of marriage trafficking. For example, Jinling Wang, the chair of Sociology at the Social Science Research Institute of Zhejiang Province, went so far as to suggest that because ‘getting married is a must’ to rural Chinese, buying trafficked women should be seen as a ‘strategy of survival’ and a ‘necessity of life’.<sup>112</sup> Such impartation of legitimacy onto the egregious exploitation by a high-ranking social scientific researcher aptly reflects the deep-rooted nature of such archaic belief system.

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<sup>106</sup> Liu et al., 323.

<sup>107</sup> Hesketh et al., 1375.

<sup>108</sup> Hudson and Boer, 230.

<sup>109</sup> Xia et al. 244.

<sup>110</sup> Lhomme et al., 2.

<sup>111</sup> Xiong, 1460.

<sup>112</sup> Jinling Wang/王金玲. "收买/收纳被拐卖妇女成婚：一种生存策略." 云南民族大学学报. Journal of Yunnan University for Nationalities. 哲学社会科学版 33, no. 4 (2016): 33.

Why then, are women's lives and basic dignity sacrificed for men's 'necessity', and what bestowed upon men such a sense of natural entitlement to a wife's body, service, and fertility? Zhao recognised that because across Chinese society, women have been traditionally devalued and 'looked upon as a resource for production and reproduction', socially it is 'not considered a disgrace for a man to buy a wife, but rather a inherent right to do so.'<sup>113</sup> This is echoed by Lhomme et al. who pointed out that despite China's economic development, social progress lags significantly behind as many Chinese men kept fetishising women's 'traditional virtues' of docility and obedience.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, marriage is not only considered a man's 'inherent right' but also his duty in this value system. Liang recorded that her respondents regarded marriage as a 'social demand', for unmarried man are often socially stigmatised and discriminated against as 'problems', and families in the rural area tends to pressure their sons to marry and reproduce for succession of family name and family property.<sup>115</sup> Such a value system, in other words, eliminates individual dignity and mandates marriage trafficking through the worshipping of dutiful reproduction.

This devaluation of women and worshipping of reproduction not only imparted upon men a sense of entitlement to a wife, but also created a social climate of permissibility which nurtured marriage trafficking. As Maochun Liang and Wen Chen noted, across the China-Vietnam border, villagers were often aware of the trafficking and kidnapping of Vietnamese brides, but most of the time nobody reported the situation to the police, as they were more sympathetic to bachelors with no access to women's bodies than to women in domestic enslavement.<sup>116</sup> Alvin Hung termed this the 'collective social normalisation' of bride-buying across rural China, whereby neighbours of buyers, or even local police, perceive buying trafficked women as legitimate despite illegal.<sup>117</sup> And complicity often goes further than normalisation, as the village community form a network of accomplices in keeping trafficked women in captivity and thwarting rescue attempts. As Xiong acknowledged, anti-trafficking efforts usually encounter strong and violent local resistance, as villagers are 'loyal to their patriarchal clan in the community', and share 'the interest in preventing the trafficked women from being rescued'.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Zhao, 90.

<sup>114</sup> Lhomme et al., 3.

<sup>115</sup> Liang, 10-11.

<sup>116</sup> Liang and Chen, 120-121.

<sup>117</sup> Hung, 4.

<sup>118</sup> Xiong, 1443-1444

Worse still, such pervasive sense of entitlement and normalisation of trafficking seems to be mixing with rising ethnonationalism in China, creating a toxic narrative which discursively conditions ‘marrying foreign women’ as a matter of both necessity and virile nationalistic glory. For instance, Colville et al. reported that many male users of Chinese social media have been celebrating Chinese men who married ‘Ukrainian beauties’, and certain popular WeChat accounts have, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, advocated for ‘welcoming underaged girls and adult single marriageable Ukrainian female refugee’ to solve the problem of ‘bare branches’ (bachelors) in China.<sup>119</sup> A Zhihu<sup>120</sup> user sardonically coined this trend of Chinese men framing sleeping with foreign girls as ‘winning glory for the country’ as ‘crotch nationalism’.<sup>121</sup> Underlying such objectionable discourse is a chauvinistic patriotism based on objectification and sexualisation of domestic and foreign women. As Guanjun Wu argued, Han Chinese ethnonationalism’s chauvinistic language belied an ‘obscene core’, which he summarised as ‘ensuring that Chinese women are ours whilst screwing foreign women to make us proud’.<sup>122</sup> This logic is concerningly reminiscent of what Kelly and Aunspach identified as ‘incels’ fascist masculinity’ whereby the preoccupation with satisfying the male sex drive and reproduction drives political aggression.<sup>123</sup> Whilst it is yet too early to say whether the rise of ‘crotch nationalism’ will have significant bearings on prevalence of marriage trafficking, it is certain that as the sense of entitlement to women’s bodies is augmented by chauvinistic ethnonationalism, the social permissibility of marriage trafficking is likely to increase, which will likely enlarge the demand for trafficked brides.

### **iii. State permissibility and complicity**

The obvious solution to the illicit market of marriage trafficking seems to be the state. However, despite anti-trafficking rhetorics, the omnipresent leviathan that is the Chinese state seems little interested in fundamentally addressing marriage trafficking. As shall be argued, legal leniency, police and local government complicity, and state level silencing of civil society anti-trafficking initiatives together made the Chinese state an acquiescent accomplice in perpetuating marriage trafficking.

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<sup>119</sup> Colville et al.

<sup>120</sup> Chinese equivalent of Quora.

<sup>121</sup> Coined by Pikazhanche on Zhihu, translated by Colville, Alex, Hatty Liu, Anita He, and Siyi Chu. “Below the Belt: Ukraine Crisis Triggers “Crotch Nationalism” in China” 2022. url: <https://www.theworld-ofchinese.com/2022/03/below-the-belt-ukraine-crisis-triggers-crotch-nationalism-in-china/>

<sup>122</sup> Wu, Guanjun. *The Great Dragon Fantasy*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Pte., 2014. 245.

<sup>123</sup> Casey Ryan Kelly, and Chase Aunspach. "Incels, Compulsory Sexuality, and Fascist Masculinity." *Feminist Formations* 32, no. 3 (2020): 155

There are two ways whereby legal leniency fostered fertile soil for marriage trafficking: firstly, under current Chinese Criminal Law, whilst the traffickers could be sentenced to five to ten, or more years in prison, buyers could only be sentenced to up to three years;<sup>124</sup> secondly, the absence of marital rape laws makes rape a blindspot for prosecution.<sup>125</sup> As legal scholar Liyan Wang points out, before the 2015 amendment, under the Criminal Law of 1997, buyers were not criminalised at all.<sup>126</sup> The intention behind the design, as Wang points out, had been utilitarian, since it was assumed that not criminalising the buyers would make rescue attempts easier; however, this assumption had not been substantiated by evidence.<sup>127</sup> Even after the amendment, according to Art. 241 of the Criminal Law, buyers are to be sentenced to up to only three years, and they might not be investigated for criminal liability at all if they do not obstruct rescue attempts or trafficked women's attempts to return to their original residence.<sup>128</sup> As Xiang Luo, a leading Chinese legal scholar and popular commentator, sardonically remarked, the punishment for buying a trafficked woman does not even amount to that of selling a couple of parakeets.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, despite Art. 241 states that raping bought women constitutes aggravating circumstance, the fact that marital rape is not formally criminalised, and that amongst legal scholars, it is widely believed that rape does not exist between married couples, makes rape in marriage trafficking nearly impossible to prosecute.<sup>130</sup> Given that already, as mentioned in III.ii, marriage trafficking tends to be viewed as illegal but legitimate, the disproportionately light sanctions on buyers and their families arguably constitutes acquiescence to the egregious practice.

More importantly, the permissibility and complicity of local governments and sometimes even the police force makes it difficult to exact any punishment at all. This is usually the result of local government/law enforcement personnel being co-opted or corrupted by the patriarchal societal networks. For instance, Liang noticed that local Women's Federation (WF) were not only

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<sup>124</sup> Chinese Criminal Code. <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgvienna/eng/dbtyw/jdwt/crimelaw/t209043.htm>

<sup>125</sup> Shuting Wu/伍淑婷. "论婚内强奸犯罪化." 法制博览, no. 7Z (2014): 56-57

<sup>126</sup> Liyan Wang/王理岩. "浅议收买被拐卖的妇女、儿童罪——以《刑法修正案(九)》为视角." 黑河学院学报 8, no. 2 (2017): 32.

<sup>127</sup> Wang, 32-33.

<sup>128</sup> Criminal Code <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgvienna/eng/dbtyw/jdwt/crimelaw/t209043.htm>

<sup>129</sup> Luo, Xiang/罗翔. "我为什么始终主张加重收买被拐妇女儿童罪的刑罚?", 网易新闻. 2022. url: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/GVNH19MQ052100BV.html>

<sup>130</sup> Sixth Tone: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1009040/mans-sentencing-underscores-absence-of-marital-rape-law-in-china>

institutionally powerless, but also heavily constrained by local networks, as its personnel had internalised a ‘patriarchal rationalisation process’, prompting them to prioritise pacifying trafficked women and keeping them in captivity instead of rescuing them.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, as Jing Zhang, leader of the anti-trafficking NGO ‘Chinese Women’s Rights’<sup>132</sup>, stated, local governments frequently obstructed civil society attempts at rescuing trafficked women by thwarting anti-trafficking campaigns and arresting activists.<sup>133</sup> Zhang further argued that under such obstruction lies a network of illicit interest, in which police departments, doctors, family planning offices, and local government personnel systematically assist marriage trafficking by doling out fake documents and Hukou arrangements at a price.<sup>134</sup> Although it is impossible to estimate the prevalence of such illicit interest due to lack of transparency, Zhang’s statements are corroborated by many reports. For instance, Davis records cases whereby Chinese border guards abuse their power to traffick North Korean women;<sup>135</sup> and the aforementioned story of the ‘chained woman’ aptly reflects institutional collaboration in concealing marriage trafficking as well as prevalence of the harassing of activists.

Such pattern of permissibility and complicity is replicated at the state level. As the USTIP Report 2021 states, the Chinese government ‘does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so’.<sup>136</sup> Although some might dismiss the assessment as politically motivated, the designation is substantiated by evidence. Firstly, there is an unspoken institutional consensus that although marriage trafficking is an evil, it is a necessary one for the sake of stability. For example, as Li and Fu, two leading scholars at the National People’s Police Academy, stated, although trafficking of Vietnamese women alongside illegal immigration are against existing laws, to an extent they ‘positively complement’ the gap in marriageable women in local society, and hence should be partially tolerated where buying brides is conducive to social stability.<sup>137</sup> Secondly, as Tiefenbrun and Edwards pointed out, the Chinese state’s crackdown on civil society initiatives, increasingly strident restrictions on foreign anti-traf-

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<sup>131</sup> Liang, 17.

<sup>132</sup> “中国妇权”.

<sup>133</sup> RFA.

<sup>134</sup> RFA.

<sup>135</sup> Davis, 133-134.

<sup>136</sup> USTIP, 174.

<sup>137</sup> Li, Dairong and Zhifei Fu/李代荣 伏智飞 “关于越南新娘问题的再研究”, 中国人民警察大学, url: <http://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-JMDL201907044.htm>

ficking organisations, and systematic lack of transparency, as exemplified in mass censorship in the ‘chained woman’ case, significantly impede anti-trafficking efforts.<sup>138</sup> As law enforcement is systematically co-opted and as grassroots anti-trafficking thwarted, then, marriage trafficking has practically received an implicit go-ahead from the state.

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<sup>138</sup> Tiefenbrun and Edwards, 25-26.

## **IV. The possibilities of solutions**

### **i. Limitations of prevention**

Researchers have recommended improving systems of reporting for missing persons as ways to prevent marriage trafficking.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, existing organisations such as Baobeihuijia, an NGO-operated website for reporting missing children, have contributed to early detection and sometimes prevention of trafficking. Hence, a more efficient reporting system in the mould of the AMBER alert, which broadcasts, emails, and texts everyone next to a reported case of abduction, could be helpful in some cases.<sup>140</sup>

However, this is only useful in preventing trafficking in cases of violent abduction where the victims' friends and families are eager to find them. But as established in II, the vast majority of victims of marriage trafficking were not abducted but deceived by traffickers or sold by carers. Moreover, the effectiveness of a reporting system is limited in cases of cross-border trafficking. Therefore, whilst implementing an efficient alert system could prevent trafficking in a few cases, we must look to more comprehensive solutions to tackle marriage trafficking on a broader scale.

### **ii. Improving targeted actions?**

It is intuitive to look to law enforcement and expect targeted actions to be the solution to the crime of marriage trafficking. However, whilst targeted action could be improved based on, it shall be argued that it remains a critically limited recourse in the Chinese context.

According to the patterns of marriage trafficking established in II.ii, targeted actions could be improved by putting more emphasise on recognised hotspots of marriage trafficking, by investigating matchmaking agencies and persons in areas of concern, and be more alert to abnormal demographic patterns. Geographically, targeted actions should prioritise the area between Henan, Anhui, Shandong, and Hubei, as well as mountainous border regions in Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Jilin. Additionally, law enforcement should also be highly alert towards abnormal patterns of migration, such as the ones in Xuzhou with disproportionate female in-migration for marriage.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, any registry of marriage with a mentally ill woman, or any village with an abnormally high percentage of foreign brides, should prompt concerns.

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<sup>139</sup> Gang Zhou/周刚. "防止拐卖妇女儿童犯罪问题研究." *农村经济与科技* 28, no. 9 (2017): 272

<sup>140</sup> And it should be rather easy to implement in a highly centralised and digitised state such as China

<sup>141</sup> Sixth Tone

Collaboration with governments and law enforcement of origin countries is critical in targeted actions against cross-border trafficking (except in the special case of North Korea). Given that most traffickers of foreign women are Chinese nationals with local connections who often move across borders, any attempt at arresting traffickers would take shared expertise and cross-jurisdictional mandate. The Chinese Ministry of Public Safety's 2018 targeted action against human trafficking, for example, was conducted together with law enforcement in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia,<sup>142</sup> and the Chinese State Department's recently-issued *Anti-Trafficking Action Plan 2021-2030* recognised the importance of such collaboration.<sup>143</sup>

However, there are four significant issues and limitations to targeted actions. Firstly, heavy-handed targeted action without sensitivity to many foreign victims' vulnerability as illegal immigrants would only exacerbate their plight. This is especially the case for North Korean victims. As Kook pointed out, the worst perpetuating factor of North Korean women's exploitation in marriage trafficking is the threat of being repatriated to a country which will imprison if not execute them upon return.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, because in North Korean women's multidimensional desperation, traffickers/matchmakers (seons) are often considered a lifeline, their trafficking is unlikely to be eradicated through targeted actions.<sup>145</sup>

Secondly, as Zhao argued, the 'campaign style approach' to eradicate marriage trafficking has not been effective historically in the long-term.<sup>146</sup> Since the early 1950s, the Chinese government had carried out a series of campaigns to eradicate the trafficking of women, including the Anti-Six Evils campaign in 1989, and the hard-strike campaigns in 1996, 1997, 1999 and 2000.<sup>147</sup> However, such an inconsistent approach was easily exploited by traffickers, and can therefore do very little towards the eradication of marriage trafficking. To improve, as some has suggested, law

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<sup>142</sup> State Department News Office/国务院新闻办公室网站. “公安部举行六国联合打击拐卖人口行动发布会”, 2019. url: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/xwfbh/gbwxwfbh/xwfbh/gab/Document/1657645/1657645.htm>

<sup>143</sup> State Department/国务院办公厅. “中国反对拐卖人口行动计划（2021—2030年）”. 2021. url: [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content\\_5603574.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content_5603574.htm)

<sup>144</sup> Kook, 130.

<sup>145</sup> Kook, 131.

<sup>146</sup> Zhao, 96.

<sup>147</sup> Zhao, 96.

enforcement should include trafficking prevention and rescue into regular assessment and be more consistent in their effort to tackle marriage trafficking.<sup>148</sup>

Thirdly, given the evidence presented in III.iii of border guards, local police, and government personnel being implicated in marriage trafficking, and of law enforcement institutionally prioritising stability over the dignity, safety, and lives of women, it would be naive to look to targeted actions to eradicate marriage trafficking. Some researchers have suggested that increasing the proportion of female law enforcement agents could mitigate complicity through reducing sympathy for buyers.<sup>149</sup> However, because the corruption is systematic, and the aforementioned patriarchal value system permeates the entire society, such remedy could hardly significantly improve the situation.

Lastly, even if targeted action is perfectly effective and law enforcement entirely just, without the support of legal infrastructure and social remedies, targeted actions would prove little useful in eradicating marriage trafficking. If legal sanctions on buyers remain ineffective, even if all traffickers are arrested, the market driving marriage trafficking will continue to exist; likewise, if hearts and minds of buyers remain unchanged and vulnerability of women unmitigated, both the market for marriage trafficking and the co-optation of law enforcement will continue. Therefore, we now turn to examine legal and social remedies.

### **iii. Legal remedies**

To better tackle marriage trafficking in China, domestic lawmakers should take a three-pronged approach to more effectively punish buyers and to contain the demographic crisis. Firstly, greater punishment of buyers is essential in both moral and pragmatic terms. Heeding Luo's recommendations, there should at the very least be parity between punishment for illegally purchasing protected animals and for buying trafficked women, meaning that punishment for buyers should be raised from up to three years of imprisonment to up to ten years or more.<sup>150</sup> Given that the utilitarian consideration of minimising resistance to law enforcement by being lenient to buyers has not been substantiated by evidence, and given that globally, it is generally the norm to equally punish the buyers and the traffickers, there should be few arguments against greater punishment for buyers.

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<sup>148</sup> Anon officer, RFA

<sup>149</sup> Nguyen and Mills, 489-490.

<sup>150</sup> Xiang Luo/罗翔. “论买卖人口犯罪的立法修正”, 网易新闻. 2022. url: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/GVNH19MQ052100BV.html>

Secondly, lawmakers should better define and criminalise marital rape. As of now, as Rihong Dang pointed out, Art. 241 only considers rape during trafficking as aggravating circumstance, hence, buyers' rape of trafficked women are prosecuted independently.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, in the absence of established criminalisation of marital rape, the prolonged rape of women in marriage trafficking usually go unprosecuted. To address this, as Wu recommends, defining and criminalising marital rape is essential, both for the sake of effectively punishing buyers, and for the sake of recognising women's rights and basic human dignity.<sup>152</sup>

Lastly, stricter ban on sex selective abortion alongside better implementation is necessary to contain the damages of demographic imbalance. Although sex selective abortion has been illegal for decades, as Nie pointed out, law enforcement has been inconsistent, and state effort to tackle deep-rooted son preference remained limited.<sup>153</sup> As Jiang and Zhang noted, as government policy opens up to allowing couples to have up to three children, SRB for second and third births is likely to be more distorted.<sup>154</sup> Consequently, more rigorous enforcement of the ban and potentially greater punishment for sex selected abortion is necessary to control demographic imbalance and prevent future marriage trafficking.

However, all three remedies are unlikely to be realised in the deeply patriarchal societal context. Firstly, as legal scholar Hao Che pointed out, considering that law enforcement in rural China is often friendly with and sympathetic to buyers, legally mandating greater punishment for buyers would likely result in less rescue actions and fewer convictions.<sup>155</sup> Although arguably this is a defeatist position, it nevertheless reflects the social constraints on legal remedies. Secondly, as lawyer Sulin Han argued, because domestic violence is systematically denied and relegated to the realm of 'private matters', and marital rape considered a 'taboo subject concerning sex and sexuality' across Chinese society, it is unlikely that marital rape be criminalised any time soon, and

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<sup>151</sup> Rihong Dang/党日红. "奸淫被拐卖妇女定性问题的理性思考." *山东女子学院学报*, no. 6 (2019), 27-28.

<sup>152</sup> Shuting Wu, 57.

<sup>153</sup> Jing-Bao Nie. "Limits of State Intervention in Sex-selective Abortion: The Case of China." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (2010): 207-209

<sup>154</sup> Quanbao Jiang and Cuiling Zhang. "Recent Sex Ratio at Birth in China." *BMJ Global Health* 6, no. 5 (2021): E005438.

<sup>155</sup> Che, Hao/车浩. "收买被拐妇女罪的刑罚需要提高吗?", *新浪财经*. 2022. url: <https://finance.sina.com.cn/china/gncj/2022-02-07/doc-ikyakumy4628917.shtml>

even if marital rape is criminalised, effective enforcement of the law will remain unlikely.<sup>156</sup> Lastly, as Eklund and Purewal recognised, without addressing the socio-cultural issue of son preference, criminalisation of sex selective abortion will only drive it underground and undermine women's wellbeing.<sup>157</sup> Consequently, if there are to be effective legal remedies at all, they must be accompanied if not preceded by social remedies, which will be discussed in IV.iv.

Whilst the international community could do little to directly address this dilemma, international lawmakers could contribute to the effort against marriage trafficking by ratifying the Palermo Protocol and formally recognising marriage trafficking as a distinct form of exploitation. As mentioned in I.ii, currently, the Palermo Protocol does not explicitly recognise marriage trafficking, and the UNODC explains that it is not always possible for trafficking for forced marriage to be recognised as a crime because in some cultures it seems indistinguishable from arranged marriages.<sup>158</sup> However, such cultural murkiness could easily be rectified by commissioning ethnographical researches of arranged marriage. Hence, this omission of marriage trafficking is hardly excusable, and if anything, as Pamela Bridgewater points out, this reflects a pervasive male bias in the legal world that overlooks how women experience exploitation and enslavement, which needs to be rectified.<sup>159</sup>

#### **iv. Social solutions?**

Whilst prevention, targeted action, and legal ratifications could all remedy the problem, as a fundamentally-social problem, marriage trafficking can only be fully eradicated through social solutions tackling both the supply and demand.

Addressing the supply of marriage trafficking means tackling women's intersectional vulnerability outlined in III.i. In the long term, structural remedies include regional development, improving social care for mentally ill women, bans on discrimination in hiring, and affirmative action in education and employment for disadvantaged women and girls. In the current Action Plan, the Chinese State Department acknowledged the importance of the first two remedies, but

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<sup>156</sup> Hannah Feldshuh, "Marital Rape: A Crime Left Unseen and Unspoken in the Chinese Legal System", *The Diplomat*. 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/marital-rape-a-crime-left-unseen-and-unspoken-in-the-chinese-legal-system/>

<sup>157</sup> Lisa Eklund and Navtej Purewal. "The Bio-politics of Population Control and Sex-selective Abortion in China and India." *Feminism & Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2017): 38-40.

<sup>158</sup> UNODC report 2018

<sup>159</sup> Pamela Bridgewater. "Ain't I a Slave: Slavery Reproductive Abuse, and Reparations." *UCLA Women's Law Journal* 14, no. 1 (2005): *UCLA Women's Law Journal*, 2005, Vol.14 (1): 91-93

fails to mention gender inequality in education and employment.<sup>160</sup> In the shorter term, as the Action Plan recognised, anti-trafficking-awareness-raising campaigns could potentially make women less vulnerable to deception, although it fails to touch upon the structural reasons behind such vulnerability. For instance, as Le et al. records, whilst community-based anti-trafficking campaigns in Vietnam has had some success, it fails to effectively reach the most at-risk populations.<sup>161</sup>

But since the demand is the key driver of marriage trafficking, tackling son preference and the archaic beliefs about marriage and reproduction should be considered more urgent. Tackling son-preference requires not only campaigns and slogans but also comprehensive reforms to inheritance and kinship. Hesketh et al. acknowledged that public awareness campaigns, such as the ‘Care for Girls’ Campaign in 2003, had helped to reduce son preference and SRB distortion in some provinces.<sup>162</sup> However, as Tiefenbrun and Edwards argued, fundamentally, son preference derives from the belief that daughters marry into their husbands’ families and thus cannot carry on the family name.<sup>163</sup> This belief often results in daughters left out from allocation and inheritance of farmland or real estate, and thus becoming a marginalised outsider to her hometown, making the discriminatory belief of daughters being ‘useless to families’ a self-perpetuating myth.<sup>164</sup> Tackling the issue, then, calls for policies encouraging children to be named after their mothers, for sanctions on discriminatory local policies such as Dadun’s scheme of allocating houses according to numbers of sons in the family,<sup>165</sup> and for better implementation of laws regulating that inheritance must be equal.

Changing beliefs about marriage and reproduction is a more direct and immediate solution to marriage trafficking: marriage trafficking arises out of the problem of bachelorhood, hence to tackle marriage trafficking, bachelorhood needs to be transformed so that it ceases to be a problem. This requires a three-pronged approach. Firstly, educational campaigns erasing stigma on

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<sup>160</sup> State Department/ 国务院办公厅. “中国反对拐卖人口行动计划（2021—2030年）”. 2021. url: [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content\\_5603574.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content_5603574.htm)

<sup>161</sup> Le, Tien Hoang, Kerry Carrington, Thanh Hung Tran, Thanh Phuc Nguyen, Trung Kien Le, and Ngoc Ha Bui. "Inter-Agency Cooperation to Raise Awareness on Human Trafficking in Vietnam: Good Practices and Challenges." *Asian Journal of Criminology* 13, no. 3 (2018): 264-265

<sup>162</sup> Hesketh et al, 1376

<sup>163</sup> Tiefenbrun and Edwards, 58.

<sup>164</sup> Tania Branigan, “For richer, for poorer: how China's laws put women second”, the Guardian, url: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/24/chinese-women-equality-laws-land-housing>

<sup>165</sup> Branigan.

unmarried men and dispelling the belief that marriage is absolutely essential are sorely needed. Given that there are currently ~40 million men than women of marriageable age, if unmarried men continue to be stigmatised, and if the widespread belief that marriage is both an entitlement and a duty persists, marriage trafficking and permissibility for which will continue to be rampant.<sup>166</sup> Secondly, improved system of social care for elders must accompany de-stigmatisation campaigns. As Liang points out, the belief that reproduction is essential is partly driven by the practical anxiety that someone without children will not be cared for in old age,<sup>167</sup> which reflects that currently, the onus of caring for the elderly in rural China is relegated to their children as the state is failing to care for its rural elders.<sup>168</sup> This unsustainable system of care must be reformed through better social work, local support networks, or welfare reforms; otherwise it will continue to foster demands for reproductive enslavement. Lastly, reforming oppressive relations in marriage and protecting women's dignity is an essential precondition to mitigating the rural 'bride-drain' and women's general reluctance to marry. As Xuan Li reported, young Chinese women are generally reluctant to marry because they are concerned about being forced to serve future husbands and their families, being pressured to have children and stalling their careers, and being potentially subjected to domestic violence and marital rape without effective recourse.<sup>169</sup> Consequently, either society generously snaps the chains of marriage on women, and men become content with 'rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience',<sup>170</sup> or there shall be countless chains around the necks of innumerable women forced into abject servitude to satisfy millions of men's archaic fantasy and hunger for domestic tyranny.

However, due to the lack of political will and incentives to implement them, most of these solutions remain little more than wishful thinkings. As Beaver et al. pointed out, whilst the Chinese Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s sought to ambitiously reform patriarchal domination through a series of legislations and campaigns, in the face of rural resistance and officials' adherence to patriarchal values, the effort stalled and the Party made concessions to the patriar-

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<sup>166</sup> Xiong, 1458.

<sup>167</sup> Liang, 10

<sup>168</sup> World Bank Report, 中国农村老年人口及其养老保障：挑战与前景, url: <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Rural-elderly-report-summary-chn.pdf>

<sup>169</sup> Li, Xuan. "Fewer people in China are tying the knot." BBC Worklife, 2017. url: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20170804-why-people-arent-getting-married-in-china>

<sup>170</sup> To paraphrase Mary Wollstonecraft

chal society.<sup>171</sup> Moreover, as shall be further explored in V., as economic growth began to stall and social pressures began to mount, the party-state began leveraging the force of patriarchy to consolidate its rule, which doomed most hopes for state-led challenge of patriarchy.

## **v. Mitigating harm**

Whilst harm mitigation does not resolve the problem of marriage trafficking, it is one way of achieving greater justice for trafficked women, and should therefore be considered a remedy. Mitigation of harm mainly entails caring for unwanted children, preventing further harm to victims, and assisting survivors in reintegration.

Unwanted children born in forced marriages are often not properly cared for, especially when the mother is disabled and when the father or his family neglect their duties of care; and when they are cared for, it is usually at the expense of their mothers being trapped in captivity.<sup>172</sup> Hence, ideally, there should be a system of foster care and adoption operated by the state and/or NGOs, to ensure the welfare of both the children and their mothers. However, this has been overlooked in the State Department's 2021 Action Plan.<sup>173</sup>

Prevention of further harm mainly concerns replacing deportation of victims of marriage trafficking as illegal immigrants with a more considerate approach to avoid exacerbating women's exploitation in marriage trafficking. Kook especially stressed the importance of halting repatriation of North Korean victims of marriage trafficking as illegal migrants and implementing alternative asylum policies (such as sending them to South Korea), so that the women's fear for punishment after repatriation can no longer be used by their 'husbands' or traffickers to further exploit them.<sup>174</sup> Though China is not known for humanitarian asylum policies, considering that the government already tolerates Vietnamese female illegal immigrants out of the utilitarian consideration of 'meeting the demand of regional marriage market',<sup>175</sup> it is not unreasonable to expect similar toleration to be granted to women who arguably need it more.

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<sup>171</sup> Beaver, Patricia D., Hou Lihui, and Wang Xue. "Rural Chinese Women: Two Faces of Economic Reform." *Modern China* 21, no. 2 (1995): 206-207.

<sup>172</sup> Liang, 18.

<sup>173</sup> State Department/国务院办公厅. "中国反对拐卖人口行动计划（2021—2030年）". 2021. url: [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content\\_5603574.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content_5603574.htm)

<sup>174</sup> Kook, 131.

<sup>175</sup> Liang and Chen, 114

Assisting survivors' reintegration, as the 2021 Action Plan lays out, entails providing rescued women with vocational training, counselling services, and assisting their return to original family where desired and possible.<sup>176</sup> Whilst having local governments providing these services as the plan suggests is to be welcomed, as Zheng pointed out, empowerment and re-training of survivors is best done through grassroots organisations and women's groups, for local government may be corrupt or co-opted by traffickers and buyers, and survivors may not trust such authority.<sup>177</sup> One successful example of which is Peace House (PH) in Vietnam, an NGO-run shelter providing Vietnamese survivors of marriage trafficking with accommodation, meals, healthcare, weekly counselling, life skills and vocational trainings, and leisure activities as they gradually sought reintegration into society.<sup>178</sup> As Nguyen and Mills argued, PH's victim-centred, empathetic, and rights-based approaches allowed survivors to effectively process their trauma and be empowered to begin a new life with dignity.<sup>179</sup> Such NGO-run shelters have also been relatively successful in other victim origin countries such as Myanmar.<sup>180</sup> However, NGO-run care is increasingly restricted in China as the government tightens control over civil society. New regulations in 2017 banned foreign NGOs from recruiting staff in mainland China and working with Chinese NGOs, which made cross-border coordination amongst NGOs to care for survivors nearly impossible.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> State Department/国务院办公厅. “中国反对拐卖人口行动计划（2021—2030年）”. 2021. url: [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content\\_5603574.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-04/28/content_5603574.htm)

<sup>177</sup> Zheng, 176.

<sup>178</sup> Nguyen and Mills, 486-487.

<sup>179</sup> Nguyen and Mills, 486-487.

<sup>180</sup> UN Women. “Tackling human trafficking in Myanmar”, 2019. url: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/1/feature-tackling-human-trafficking-in-myanmar>

<sup>181</sup> Lhomme et al. 6.

## V. The elephant in the room

At this point, it should have been made abundantly clear that the greatest impediment to eradicating marriage trafficking is not the absence of recourses or resources, but the state's reluctance to confront structural problems and repression of civil society initiatives in remedying social ills. Any solution which does not seek to comprehensively reform and address the aforementioned structural social ills merely scratches the surface of marriage trafficking, and no solution of such scale is possible in China without state involvement. But, as repeatedly established, the state is little interested in anything beyond scratching the surface of marriage trafficking.

This is because, simply put, to the state, the exploitation and enslavement of some thousands<sup>182</sup> of impoverished and marginalised women seems too little a price to pay for the sake of social stability and political longevity. As Leta-Hong Fincher aptly summarised, the subordination of women and state-level backlash against feminism is currently a 'fundamental element' of the CCP's 'stability maintenance (weiwen)' system.<sup>183</sup> She argued that as the Party could no longer rely on rapid economic growth to bolster its performance legitimacy, in recent years the state had resorted to leveraging traditional Confucian patriarchy to pacify increasingly discontent young men.<sup>184</sup> The logic goes that as long as men have wives as outlet for will-to-power and violent urges, inequality and societal oppression becomes more tolerable, and hence the polity becomes more stable.<sup>185</sup> Such logic of patriarchal authoritarianism is hardly unique to China: as Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks pointed out, autocrats around the world fear women's political mobilisation, and often mobilise traditional families and antifeminism to secure male support and entrench political power.<sup>186</sup>

To conclude, this paper has established that marriage trafficking is a distinctly egregious form of human exploitation and modern slavery prevalent in modern China, with an unspecified number of both domestic and foreign women, disproportionately disadvantaged and vulnerable, illicitly sold like chattels each year, and subsequently enduring prolonged abuse, labour exploitation, and reproductive enslavement. At the roots of marriage trafficking lies a cannibalistic patriarchal society which murdered millions of women at birth, which mandates women as exploitable

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<sup>182</sup> Or millions

<sup>183</sup> Leta Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother : The Feminist Awakening in China* 2018, 223.

<sup>184</sup> Fincher, 224-225.

<sup>185</sup> Fincher, 252-253.

<sup>186</sup> Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks, *Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women*, url: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs>

material for production and reproduction in marriage, and which, when waking up to the consequences of its past murder, resorted to devouring countless other vulnerable women in such egregious manner. Whilst it is possible to remedy marriage trafficking by improving preventive measures, targeted actions, and domestic and international legal infrastructure, eradication of such exploitation through identified social solutions is nearly impossible. As the authoritarian state has made a lethal Lateran Pact with the deeply patriarchal society to collude in the cannibalisation of women beneath the veneer of stability, bloody leashes which shackle the soul are bound to multiply on this mystical land.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Jingrong Yang/杨景荣. “沉重时刻”



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