

# Trafficking in Women in China<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Based on existing data and prior research, this paper reviews studies of and investigations into the trafficking of women in China. First, the “industrial chain” of human trafficking is analyzed. Second, the analysis indicates that the “buyers market” exhibits a strong demand for trafficking in women. The scale of trafficking is escalating: originally the crime was mainly committed in a few provinces, but has now spread to nearly every province in China. Furthermore, human trafficking groups are now displaying the characteristics of collectivization and specialization. Although the Chinese government has launched a series of rescue actions, the effort has run into tremendous difficulties due to dilemmas encountered by buyers, local citizens, grass-roots organizations and the trafficked women themselves. To completely eradicate trafficking in women, the Chinese government has to make long-term efforts to crack down on the buyers market and to redress the sex imbalance.

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## Key words

Trafficking in women, human trafficking organizations, bare branches, marriage squeeze, China

## Introduction

Over the last 20 years, the prevalence of trafficking in women and

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children has become a worldwide issue. The international community has worked out some explicit laws and regulations against the crime. For instance, the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, formally enacted in November, 2000, stipulated that trafficking in human beings means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability. And the *Palermo Protocol against Trafficking in Women and Children 2000* defined the crime as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Trafficking in women and children is viewed by the international community as a modern version of slavery and a brutal abuse of basic rights. In Mainland China, it has become a social problem that seriously affects the stability of society (Pochagina, 2007; Zhao & Lv, 2010). And now there is heated debate about whether China should reinstate crime of trafficking in persons in China's Criminal Law Code? as it was deleted in 1997 (Guan, 2010). As an extremely savage and brutal social evil, trafficking in women and children severely trespasses upon the legitimate rights and interests of the victims, ravages their physical and mental health, undermines public security and the drive towards socialist cultural civilization, and endangers social stability (Chen, 2000). In the first years of the People's Republic of China (after 1949), the Chinese government launched a stringent campaign against human trafficking. As a result of more than 10 years of unswerving effort, the phenomenon was almost completely eliminated on the mainland. Nevertheless, after slumbering for a time, human trafficking arose again as a crime in the 1970s. By then, an increasing number of women from mountainous and outlying areas began to contemplate improving their living conditions through marriage, and this simple wish became the most convenient ex-

cuse and the fanciest lie for traders in human beings. At that time, the trafficked women were mostly in their twenties, coming from the southwest (Sichuan, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Yunan etc.), and were sold at rather low prices as wives to farmers in central or northern China (Zhang, 2006). From the 1980s, the crime began to attract the attention of society, and the government carried out three large-scale counter-trafficking actions in 1991, 1993, and 1995 respectively. The 1991 action was the first nationwide action taken against trafficking in women and children, following the joint teleconference of the Ministry of Public Security and the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) aimed at combating human trafficking. Such national actions were carried out in 1993 and 1995 also. However, the crime was not stopped. Since 1998, the government has intensified its efforts, as a result of which the number of registered cases of human trafficking has increased and the form of the crime has changed greatly (Tan, 2007).

The female may be abducted or trafficked when there is a shortage of women (Jiang & Li, 2009). As working and marriage migration increases, females face a greater risk of being abducted and trafficked. In South and Southeast Asian countries, the imbalanced sex ratio increases the demand for trafficked women (U.S. State Department, 2007). Female deficit in some Asian countries increases the demand for female labor force and marriageable women, leading to an increase in migration of females who are seeking working opportunities and marriage. With female migration increasing both domestically and internationally, the risk of being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced labor, or marriage rises (Le Bach, Bélanger, & Khuat, 2007). Unlike in many countries, especially those developed countries where females are being trafficked more for sexual exploitation (Hodge & Lietz, 2007), in China, females trafficked for marriage with those disadvantaged, involuntarily single males represent quite a high proportion, as the imbalanced sex structure and particularly that among the marriageable age population in poverty-stricken areas continuously exacerbates (Jiang & Li, 2009). In China's past, buying females as servants or concubines was legal, so even today this traditional ideology is deeply rooted in some Chinese people with some regarding buying brides as normal behavior. Males, squeezed in the marriage market in China, attempt to buy brides, from home or even abroad (Lee, 2005; Le Bach et al., 2007).

Some Chinese scholars are of the opinion that since the 1990s, trafficking in woman has mainly been caused by socioeconomic factors rather than a higher sex ratio at birth (male to female ratio) (Zhao, 2003). Recently, human trafficking aimed at marriage has declined while trafficking aimed at labor and sex exploitation is increasing. Trafficking cases involving the sex and entertainment industry are showing a rising trend (accounting for 50-60% of the total trafficking cases), which is especially true among trafficked women in the 16 to 20 age group (Cai, 2005). Nevertheless, a growing number of scholars are reaching a consensus on the role of the marriage squeeze among men in the marriage market, which is a result of the sex imbalance due to China's ever rising sex ratio. The local sex ratio can be attributed to both the high sex ratio at birth (SRB) and to marriageable female out-migration. China's SRB began to rise in the early 1980s and fluctuated to around 120 throughout the first decade of the 21st century. This demographic phenomenon reflects extreme inequality between males and females in China, as many female fetuses are terminated and deprived of the right to be born. The additional fact that women are able to marry men of higher socio-economic status results in a situation that men from the lowest socio-economic strata and poverty-stricken areas are becoming underprivileged in the marriage market (Shi, 2006; Jiang, Li, & Feldman, 2011). The sex imbalance has fueled trafficking in women, and the ever-increasing number of "bare branches" has provided it with an enormous buyers market (Wang, 2005). The term "bare branch" refers to males who are over a certain age but, involuntarily, have been unable to get married, and thus have no wife and children, like a bare branch without leaves (Jiang & Li, 2009). As bare branch groups and bare branch villages have arisen, the potential market demand for females has taken shape, drawing the attention of greedy criminals. The government at the grass root level is not functioning very well, and there is only a faint notion of law in the countryside; therefore the law is often subjugated to ritual and the power of local families. All this has provided human trafficking with a vital support and guarantee (Peng, 2004). Consequently, the evil phenomenon of selling abducted women to those who can afford them as their wives has begun to be revived.

Trafficking in women makes evident the inequality between males and females in China and severely hinders social harmony and sustainability.

As China faces a severe marriage squeeze in the future, the trafficking practice may well exacerbate. Thus, it is necessary to review studies of and investigations into the internal trafficking of women for marriage in China. First, the industrial chain of human trafficking, including the characteristics and distribution of the trafficked women, trafficking organizations, and buyers, will be analyzed in detail; second, rescue actions by the Chinese government, especially the Ministry of Public Security, will be reviewed; third, resistance from all the persons involved will be analyzed to explain why it has not been possible to stop trafficking in women. Finally, the paper will elaborate on the trafficking in women caused by the marriage squeeze and will present some policy proposals for the Chinese government to crack down on the buyer's market and to redress the sex imbalance.

### **Industrial Chain of Trafficking in Women**

The process of trafficking in women consists of three principal components namely the trafficked women, the traffickers and the buyers. In this section we analyze these related components.

#### *Trafficked Women*

##### A. The Scale of Trafficking

From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, the crime of human trafficking was rampant. Starting in 1977, the crime experienced a peak period, a rally period and a declining stage, following the shape of a saddle. According to incomplete data from 14 regions, the total number of trafficked women reached 97,000 in 1977. In 1983, 12 times more traders in human beings were arrested compared with the previous year. This, thus, can be taken as the first peak period of human trafficking. From 1988 to 1990, the crime showed a rising trend, and hence may count as a rally period. After entering the 1990s, especially since 1992, human trafficking in China has been declining from year to year (Sun, 2004).

National statistical data indicated that the number of registered trafficking cases was 9,194, 7,465, 5,039, and 4,235 in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 respectively, of which 7,539, 5,599, 3,225, and 2,499 were female

trafficking cases (Zhang, 2006). Between April 2009 and December 2010, 9,165 cases of trafficking in women were uncovered and over 18,000 women were rescued (Information Office of the State Council, 2011).

Regional data showed that within five years time more than 20,000 women had flowed into the counties of Sanhe, Xianghe and Dingzhou in Hebei Province, of whom more than a quarter, or 5,000, were estimated to have been trafficked there (Cui, 2000). In the second half of 1988, 509 women flowed into the 23 townships of Hunyuan County in Shanxi Province and 456 or 86 percent of them were trafficked there. After 1995, Jiangsu Province gradually became an important buyer's market for trafficked women and children, and the number of trafficked victims entering Jiangsu from Yunnan Province rapidly increased, reaching a peak period from 1998-2000. In the city of Yuzhou, for instance, 25,347 women from other places had flowed into its six counties from 1985 to 1988 and 5,991, or 24 percent of them, were trafficked there. During the peak period, 2,000-3,000 women were trafficked to Yuzhou in a single year (Wang, 2005). In the village of Xiaolou in Suining County (in Jiangsu Province), the most outlying village of the county, there were merely 60 households. Except for those rescued in 1996, there remained 40 or so unrescued trafficked women in the village, which meant there was almost one trafficked woman in each family (Cheng & Song, 1996). According to statistics provided by the Public Security Bureau on a county on the Yellow River, 2,803 women from places like Sichuan and Guizhou were trafficked into its 1,021 villages, with each village receiving two or three women (Wang, Han, Ji, & Li, 2004).

#### B. Distribution of Inward and Outward Human Trafficking Areas

Outward human trafficking areas are mostly found in economically backward provinces and regions, mainly including Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi and Shaanxi Provinces; outward trafficking is also spreading into other provinces, such as Henan, Hubei, Hunan and Inner Mongolia (Gao, 1998). Inward human trafficking areas are mostly found in economically developed provinces and regions, including Jiangsu, Henan, Hebei, Guangdong and Fujian etc. (Cui, 2000; Zhong & Chen, 2000). The crime of human trafficking was originally concentrated in several provinces but has by now spread to almost every province, espe-

cially in the southeast coastal regions. Provinces that originally were destinations for inward trafficking, like Henan, Hebei, Shanxi, Anhui and Jiangsu, have become outward trafficking provinces. In contrast, in some outward trafficking provinces like Sichun and Chongqing, large numbers of women are now being trafficked in (Sun, 2004).

An investigation targeting Shandong Province showed that women from other places mainly flowed in during two periods. From 1982 to the mid and late 1990s, the women who flowed in from other provinces were mostly trafficked marriage migrants; after the late 1990s, the women who flowed in could be divided into two categories: marriage migrants and migrating workers. During the second period, the number of trafficked marriage migrants has declined but is still considerable, and trafficking using job opportunities such as working for high wages in toy or clothing factories as bait has emerged (Wang, 2005).

### C. Group Characteristics of the Trafficked Women

One characteristic of trafficked women is the trend toward lower ages. In the 1970s, more and more women from poverty-stricken and outlying regions longed to improve their living conditions through marriage. The resulting outflow of large numbers of countrywomen provided human traffickers with an excellent opportunity. During this period, the trafficked women were mainly in their 20s and from southwestern provinces (Sichuan, Guangxi, Guizhou and Yunan, etc.), and they were sold to farmers in central and northern China as wives (Li, 2000). In the 1980s, the trafficked women were mainly adults, with young girls below 18 accounting for less than 10 percent. Since the 1990s, especially in recent years, more and more girls below 18 are being trafficked. According to the data from Hunan, 46 percent of women trafficked out of the province were young girls. This situation is even worse in Yunnan province, where 60 percent of the trafficked females were non-adults. In addition to being sold to poor regions to be wives of male bare branches, these young girls are also being sold into the porn industry (Ding, 1999).

China Agricultural Policy Center of the Chinese Academy of Sciences found that the ratio of female migrating workers aged from 16 to 20 increased from 13 percent in 1990 to 76 percent in 2000. A worrisome

phenomenon is that, among this age group, the age of those trafficked and sold into the sex and entertainment industry is becoming lower and lower. The low age of these migrating females speaks of their lack of educational preparation. Many young girls have quit school too early and have even gone to work to pay for the tuition of their brothers. A poor education means they are not intellectually or technically prepared for working outside their hometowns. Furthermore, their lack of life and social experience makes them extremely vulnerable to traders in human beings and hence they are easily trafficked and exploited. The distribution of their hometowns and villages also shows a “terrace feature”: the remoter the region and the scarcer the information, the more dangerous it is for girls to try to emigrate (Cai, 2005).

Another characteristic of trafficked women is their disadvantageous economic and educational status. Research carried out by some scholars (Sun, 2004) has shown that among the trafficked women, 70 percent are from densely populated rural and mountainous areas, where arable land is scarce, transport is inconvenient and the economy is relatively backward; 37 percent are illiterate or half illiterate; and 46.5 percent are primary school or secondary school graduates. Originally, these women suffered from poor living conditions: low income, high labor intensity and an isolated, outlying village environment. As a result, they were discontented and resolved to leave home to improve their living conditions. However, owing to their having little life experience and a restricted knowledge of the outside world, their ability to recognize and analyze problems was extremely restricted, and they lacked basic understanding of society. Due to their urgent desire to migrate on the one hand, and their lack of awareness of the necessity for self-protection on the other, such women are easily conned by traders in human beings (Sun, 2004). An investigation into the counties of Chuzhou, Tianchang and Shucheng showed that the 15,000 women who had flowed into the region from Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan shared the following features: they were poorly educated; they had many brothers and sisters; the economic conditions of the original home were poor; their marital status was not legally verified; and most of them had no identification and were not registered as a member of the household (Wang, 2005).

An investigation into trafficked women in the city of Yulin in the Guangxi Autonomous Region (from 1995 to 2000) also found that they

share these characteristics: they are generally poorly educated, with illiterates and primary school graduates accounting for 90 percent of them; they rarely read books, newspapers, watch TV, or care about politics or state affairs, as a result of which they lack proper values and a right outlook on life and the world. Since the trafficked women are mainly from the countryside, especially western provinces like Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou and mountainous regions like Hechi and Baise in Guangxi Province, they usually have a strong sense of inferiority. Furthermore, since they believe that as soon as they leave the mountains happiness will be waiting for them, they are often blind in what they pursue. They have relied too much upon marriage: having tied their own fate to marriage, they are eager to leave the mountains as soon as possible so as to marry a good husband and live a happy life (Yang & Li, 2001).

### *Trafficking Organizations*

#### A. Collectivization of Trafficking Organizations

In terms of organization, traders in human beings fall into three categories. The first category is individual traders, who work by themselves and are mostly first offenders. As a matter of fact, many female traders were themselves trafficked women. They often target their acquaintances and their business is not on a large scale. The second category is guerrilla traders, who work together as a group made up of from three or four to a dozen people. Members of such groups play specific roles and collaborate with each other. There is a third category called a legion, in which dozens or hundreds of people work together. They are highly organized and members from the city and the countryside collude together by dividing their work clearly and committing crimes as they move about, whenever a profitable opportunity presents itself. Members of such groups are in charge, respectively, of stealing, robbing, trafficking, finding targets, transporting and sales (Cui, 2000).

Since the 1990s, the trafficking in women and children committed by these guerrilla traders and legions has increased rapidly, accounting for more than 90 percent of all the cases. Criminals usually bond together based on family and blood relations. In most criminal groups, there are a certain percentage of women members (functioning as so-called inter-

mediates), strict organization, and a tendency to work in a professional way (Ding, 1999). During 1991 and 1998, Anhui Province alone captured 788 such criminal groups and seized 3,317 criminals. These organizations were made up of dozens or even hundreds of members.

### *Case 1*

In 1995, a major woman trafficking case was cracked on May 22 in Woyang County. There were as many as 151 members in this group. The head of the group was from the village of Yu'an in Woyang County (in Anhui Province), where 80% of the 600 villagers were involved in the trafficking of women. In this case and related ones, 334 trafficked women were rescued. On November 28, 1996, the Supreme Court of Anhui Province sentenced 61 members of the village to punishments of varying severity: the death penalty, death penalty with a reprieve, life imprisonment, and set terms of imprisonment (Gao, 1998).

## B. The Professional Tendency of Trafficking Activities

Not only have trafficking organizations developed into criminal groups of considerable numbers of members and varying forms, but some have also transformed into professional criminal groups. Local criminals are gradually colluding with those from other places in trafficking activities, turning them into a criminal network and separating abduction from trafficking. Within a large human trafficking network, there are usually transfer stations, transportation routes, and hiding places. So from abduction to purchase, delivery, transfer, harboring and selling, each step is strictly organized, forming a unified conveyer belt chain of crime and a trade market of independent steps, as a result of which the crime can succeed very easily (Sun, 2004). Most of the trafficking groups are now strictly organized, clearly dividing the jobs of abduction, delivery, transfer, and selling among their members. Currently, there are not only first-hand, second-hand and third-hand traders, but also different sales forms like retail and wholesale. And some trafficking groups have developed into professional modern gangster organizations (Gao, 1998).

With the passage of time, the means by which traders in human beings operate have also changed. Whereas they used to work by clandestine methods such as cheating and stealing, they are now robbing and kidnapping openly. Besides cheating in the labor market and other public places, they are also founding temporary factories as transfer stations so that they may lure women there under the pretext of hiring female workers. As soon as they find buyers, they sell the workers to them (Li, 2000). In addition to their original purpose of making money, their motivation also includes rape and other forms of sexual abuse, as well as blackmail. The criminals are now showing violent tendencies. Most women are raped, raped by turns, and destroyed both physically and psychologically in the process of trafficking. Some traders in human beings even pretend to be police officers so that they may get back by force the women they have sold in order to sell them again at a higher price.

### C. Complicity of the Participants in Trafficking Activities

The members of trafficking organizations were mostly farmers in the past. However, increasingly more workers, cadres, teachers, idlers, and reformed criminals (those who have been reformed by labor and education) are involved in such criminal cases. And a phenomenon worth special attention is that relatives of the victims are increasingly committing the crime (Sun, 2004).

In most trafficking groups, there are a certain number of women members (Ding, 1999), who were themselves once the victims of human trafficking. Some data (Ding, 1999; Sun, 2004) showed that owing to the strong external shocks they were subjected to, the trafficked women would live in an unstable and unbalanced state once victimized. As a result, they might develop a vindictive mentality or accept the crime. Then, they might imitate the criminals and become traders in human beings themselves. In other words, those who were originally abducted and sold would later actively participate in trafficking in other women. For instance, in 1987, Yunnan Province spent thousands of Yuan and rescued 77 abducted women. However, in less than half a year, all 77 of them were gone, together with 200 other women that they had abducted (Sun, 2004).

*Buyers*

With more and more female laborers leaving their original residence in the countryside, the sex ratio imbalance in some rural areas is worsening. The ladder-pattern marriage migration of Chinese women results in different degrees of marriage squeeze in the city and the countryside, and among different regions. Since poverty-stricken and outlying areas suffer gravely from the loss of marriage resources, the males there are subject to a severe marriage squeeze. Many unmarried men find it even harder to find a bride from their own county, and thus, imported brides are badly needed (Zhao, 2003). Males suffering from marriage squeeze are mainly concentrated in poor and remote rural regions. Due to personal disadvantages (disease and poverty, etc.) and poor education, such men have limited abilities and opportunities to secure economic resources (Shi, 2006).

Traditional notions and practices make some people think that human beings can be traded like commodities (Li, 2000). The older male bare branches in the countryside form the potential buyer's market. Making a living by farming, these men possess few skills and are poorly educated. Since their families are mostly poverty-stricken, it is very difficult for them to marry a local girl. Due to poor education and a weak notion of law, some of them think it is a fair deal and a natural act to buy a wife (Li & Wan, 1998). As a result, they are willing to go into debt to commission others to buy them wives from even poorer regions, creating a huge buyer's market (Cui, Cheng, & Zhong, 2000). This active buyer's market is one of the key factors that explain why the business of human trafficking is flourishing so strongly (Mao, 2000). With China's ever increasing sex ratio, the demand for trafficked women as brides is also higher. Without the enormous demand of the buyer's market, the trafficking practice would not be so rampant (Zhao, 2003; Wang, 2010).

*Case 2*

In Tongguan Township, Zhen'an County, Shaanxi Province, the village of Coldwater lies along the Qilin Ridge. In August of 2005, a wife-buying craze swept through the village: eleven villagers, divided into five batches, bought wives from Yunnan province within three months. In mid August of 2005, 31-year-old Xie Junda, a member of the village, bought a wife from Yanshan County in Yunan province for 2,400 Yuan. For quite a while, other male bare branches came to Xie to learn how he did it. They, determined to buy a wife, all raised money by borrowing from relatives, banks, and even loan sharks. Soon, Gao Changsheng, Xie Dahui and Zhang Xinjun went south to Kunming together to buy wives. Xie Guangbao, seeing that his son had brought home a wife, spent 4,000 Yuan on a banquet. According to the investigation, of the eleven villagers, ten had bought wives by taking on high-interest debt ("Peasants of Shaanxi Province," 2006).

### **Rescue Actions by the Chinese Government**

China has been very firm in combating the trafficking in persons. Since its founding in 1949, the People's Republic of China has enacted a series of laws and regulations aimed at preventing and punishing this brutal practice and it has launched many special national and regional rescue campaigns.

#### *Laws and Regulations*

The Chinese Government has enacted a series of laws and regulations against trafficking in women. The 240th article of China's *Criminal Law* stipulates that trafficking in women and children means the abducting, kidnapping, purchasing, trafficking, and transferring of women and children for the purpose of selling them. The *Suggestions Concerning Laws and Regulations Applicable to Trafficking in Women and Children* published by the Public Security Ministry pointed out that trafficking in women and children, as long as it is for the purpose of selling them and belongs to

one of the steps of abducting, kidnapping, purchasing, trafficking, delivering, or transferring, should be investigated as a human trafficking case. The *Notice Concerning a Combined Operation against Trafficking in Women and Children by the Supreme People's Court, the Public Security Ministry, the Civil Administration, the Ministry of Justice and the All-China Women's Federation* mentioned that trafficking in women and children, as long as it is for the purpose of selling them and belongs to one of the steps of abducting, kidnapping, purchasing, trafficking, delivering, and transferring, should be investigated as a human trafficking case regardless of the number of the victims and the profit gained through it.

Since the 1980s, the increasingly rampant trafficking in women and children has attracted a great deal of attention on the part of the Chinese Government. The State Council, Public Security Ministry and other related authorities have issued orders more than once to guide operations against the crime in various regions. In 1987, the General Office of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China and the State Council together issued the *Notice about Combating Trafficking in Women and Children Unswervingly According to the Law*; in 1988, the Public Security Ministry, the Ministry of Justice and the All-China Women's Federation together issued *Suggestions for Rescuing Trafficked Women and Children*; in 1989, the State Council issued a *Notice about Unswervingly Combating Trafficking in Women and Children*; in the same year, the *Symposium on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children and Banning Prostitution* was held in Beijing. In 1991, the Public Security Ministry and the All-China Women's Federation held a telephone conference concerning a nationwide campaign against trafficking in women and children in Beijing, and the first large scale nationwide combat against trafficking followed immediately. In 1993, the Security Commission of the CPC Central Committee held a symposium in Haikou City, starting the second combat against trafficking and prostitution. In 1994, the Public Security Ministry and the All-China Women's Federation together issued a *Notice about Looking for Lost Children and Women and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children*; on April 23, 1999, the *Cooperative Program on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children* was inaugurated in Beijing, which was signed as an agreement between the Public Security Ministry and the United Nation's Children's Fund. According to the agreement, China would cooperate with the UN in combating trafficking in women

and children via the four aspects of personnel training, propaganda and social mobilization, establishing transfer centers, and carrying out a social analysis. Participants in the ceremony included officials from the Public Security Ministry, along with other authorities headed by Minister Jia Chunwang, and a delegation of UNICEF officials headed by director Carol Bellamy (Ding, 1999). On March 20, 2000, six administrations including the Public Security Ministry and the Ministry of Justice jointly issued a *Notice of Combating Trafficking in Women and Children*, initiating another unprecedented nationwide battle against trafficking, which was also the 10th fight against trafficking since 1988.

Since 1990, the Chinese government has been increasing the intensity of its operations against trafficking in women and children by enacting and enhancing related laws and regulations. In 1991, the National Congress discussed and approved *Decisions on Strictly Punishing Criminals Involved in Abducting and Trafficking of Women and Children* and amended the *Criminal Law* by adding articles concerning trafficking in women and children and raised the standard of penalty measurement.

Besides all these kinds of laws and regulations, the Chinese government at various levels has also established Anti-Trafficking Offices, welcoming the active participation of different NGOs. In order to severely punish trafficking in women and children and to rescue abducted and sold women and children, the Ministry of Public Security has established an anti-trafficking hotline for people to report the crime. The ministry announced that the hotline would deal with reports on trafficking from the abducted and sold women and children themselves, their relatives and society as a whole. Local Public Security Bureaus will also gradually establish these kinds of hotlines. According to the unified deployment of the Ministry of Public Security, an office specializing in anti-trafficking has been established in local governments above the county level. At the end of 1999, the Public Security Bureau of Yunnan Province together with the Provincial Women's Federation (representing the social organizations of the public) and the British Save the Children Organization (representing international NGOs) jointly initiated the *Community Anti-Trafficking Program through the Cooperation of Multiple Organizations* in the village of Longmie in Guangan County, Wenshan District. The program was intended as an experiment in preventing trafficking involving the integrated efforts of different governmental organ-

izations and the social efforts of each villager.

The government has recently made further efforts to prevent and crack down on the crimes of abducting and trafficking in women and children. The *Action Plan to Crack Down on Abducting and Trafficking in Women and Children (2008-2012)* was established in 2007 as well as the *National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010)* in 2009. An inter-ministry joint conference system of working units has been established to prevent and crack down on the crimes of abducting and trafficking in women and children, as well as to rescue and resettle those who have been abducted. Relevant departments have established a notification and verification mechanism for unidentified victims and for those who are believed to have been abducted (Information Office of the State Council of China, 2009).

### *Rescue Actions*

Since 1988, when China initiated the first anti-trafficking campaign, the public security authorities have carried out nine nation-wide anti-trafficking operations in ten years. Between 1991 and 1996, Chinese police rescued 88,000 abducted and sold women and children and arrested 143,000 policemen involved in this exploitative business. From 1988 to 1999, the public security authorities investigated an average of 20,000 trafficking cases each year (Elliot, 1998). In 1995 alone, 10,531 trafficking cases were investigated and 13,935 women were rescued from being trafficked or from being detained by their buyers; in 1996, 11,000 women were rescued; in 1997, 6,425 cases were investigated and 7,051 rescued women were sent home. In 1998, 6,247 trafficking cases (3,798 were major cases) were investigated, 1,958 trafficking organizations were broken up, 10,647 human traffickers were seized and 5,242 women were rescued. During 1997 and 1998, the police rescued altogether 23,000 abducted and sold women and broke up 8,000 trafficking organizations. In the first half of 1999, 2,890 trafficking cases were investigated, 710 trafficking organizations broken up, 4,949 human traffickers were arrested and 3,099 women were rescued (Li, 2000). In the year 1999, the country investigated more than 6,800 trafficking cases in total, of which 1,600 were specialized in trafficking in children. For that year, 7,600 women and 1,800 children were rescued. From April

to June 2000, another 43,527 women and 9,959 children were rescued in the special anti-trafficking campaign initiated by the Ministry of Public Security (Tong & Qiu, 2001). In April 2009, China launched another national anti-trafficking campaign. During this campaign, 9,165 cases of trafficking in women were resolved and over 18,000 women were rescued between April 2009 and December 2010 (Information Office of the State Council of China, 2011).

From a regional perspective, in 2003, the Chengdu City Public Security Bureau made outstanding achievements in combating trafficking in women and children, as well as helping those rescued with their household registration, education and employment. The 100 or so policemen of the city carried out more than 2,000 actions, pursuing human traffickers and rescuing trafficked women and children. Over the course of the year, 25 trafficking cases were investigated, five trafficking organizations were broken up, 44 human traffickers were punished, and 140 women and ten children were rescued (Xiao, Chen, & Yu, 2003).

### **Obstacles against Rescue Actions**

Even though the Chinese government has always been quite firm in its fight against trafficking practices as well as being active in rescuing trafficked women, obstacles exist from buyers and their local cadres, with moral tolerance for such practices being deeply rooted in society. Moreover, some related departments do not assume responsibility expected of them; all these factors make the rescue of trafficked women a difficult task.

#### *The Situation of Buyers*

Since the 1980s, the cost for a wedding and the associated bride price has risen many times. Marriageable young men cannot find wives and they continue to age; nevertheless, they believe strongly that they need to be married, so they choose to buy a wife, even though the cost is thousands of Yuan. Without a wife and home, those young men would become troublemakers, because if they failed to find themselves a wife, they would choose to abduct and traffic women themselves. Furthermore, the problems will be much severer in the future if not ad-

dressed promptly.

In a large case of trafficking in women, a syndicate was uncovered that had trafficked and sold more than 60 women to Guoyang County in Anhui Province. Zhaozhuang, a village characterized by poor road connections, a backward culture and an undeveloped economy. In addition, the proportion of men to women is abnormally high in the adjacent villages. Since Zhaozhuang is very backward and poor, few girls are willing to marry men here, so the number of unmarried men in Zhaozhuang has been increasing, and their inability to marry has turned out to be the problem that affects their parents, relatives, and friends the most. In Zhaozhuang, more than 10,000 Yuan has to be spent on the bride price, house, and wedding feast in order for a man to marry a woman, but it usually costs only about 3,000 Yuan for a man to buy a trafficked woman. Taking the reduced cost and the convenience of operation into consideration, many bare branches choose to buy trafficked women to be their wives. Some men are physically or mentally defective or too old, so it is very difficult for them to find a woman who is willing to be their wife. But they also need to get married and carry on the family lineage, so they also choose to buy trafficked women (Sun, 2004). In poverty-stricken areas, buying a wife is regarded as a normal practice for continuing the family lineage. If a woman from another place is abducted and trafficked to a remote and backward village, the villagers will undertake the obligation of preventing the trafficked woman from escaping, and will even work together to impede the work of those who are seeking to rescue the trafficked woman (Peng, 2004).

In cracking down on the crime of abducting and trafficking women and children, strong measures and penalties have been enacted against the trader in human beings, which has alarmed the criminals involving in trafficking women. However, there have been few penalties against the buyers of trafficked women, because people tend to have pity on the buyers and see them as victims too, because they lost their money and bought wives (Yu, 2000). From the buyers' point of view, a purchased wife is a lawful one and they themselves are deceived victims. So the buyers often besige, abuse, and attack the police when they come to rescue the trafficked women (Mao, 2000).

*Case 3*

Han Yonglai is a resident of a village in Inner Mongolia. In 1991 he bought a woman trafficked from Sichuan province for 3,600 yuan. Later the woman escaped. In 1998, Han Yonglai bought another woman who was also trafficked from Sichuan, but they never registered for marriage. On April 10, 2000, Saiyin Buyaer, a policeman and two other officers from the police station at Jujinhao town were investigating the practice of purchasing trafficked women in local villages. When the three police officers were inquiring about the woman from Sichuan and inquiring into her background, Han Yonglai shouted invectives against the town government. Saiyin Buyaer and the other two police officers tried without success to persuade Han to allow them to continue their inquiries, so they had to terminate their investigation into the Hans and left to inquire about another two families. However, Han followed them and continued to chase them and shout at them, interrupting their collecting of evidence. When Saiyin Buyaer opened the door, Han drew a knife and plunged it into the policeman's chest. Saiyin Buyaer fell to the ground, and later died on the way to the hospital (Mao, 2000).

*Protection from Local Villagers for the Buyers*

In some areas, trafficking in women does not result in legal punishment, so more and more people also choose to buy wives in order to get married. The neighbors of the buyers have no objection to this behavior of wife purchasing. They think buying a wife is neither illegal nor shameful, and trafficking in women becomes a custom in that area. Relatives and friends of the buyers often reach a consensus, and the whole family or even the whole village will turn out to be acting as accessories to the crime. They will help to watch over and persuade the trafficked women to stay (Mo, 2005).

This tendency for locals to protect buyers is the essence of a narrow parochial ideology; in addition, the long-standing feudal patriarchal system remains, and other factors include kinship, help from neighbors and

friendship. Every time the interests of one clan/place are in conflict with the collective interest or the interests of another clan/place, this local solidarity will emerge to create trouble, hindering the implementation of the laws or even completely overwhelming the rule of law. Cracking down on trafficking in women affects the interests of different areas, so local solidarity plays the most important role in hindering anti-trafficking operations. In some areas where trafficking in women and children is a serious problem, there are many people protecting the buyers and the trader, giving them information, refusing to provide information to public security agencies, and monitoring the purchased women. They will make joint efforts to pursue women who attempt to escape, and if someone else wishes to rescue the trafficked women, they devise means to hinder the rescue work or even prevent it by joint violence (Cui, 2000). In some areas, the police found that they seemed to be working in enemy territory when they came to rescue the trafficked women and arrest the traders; the local people refused to cooperate, and some even detained the police and judicial officers as hostages. The rural grass-roots organizations and people have a very limited legal consciousness, which leads them to oppose those who work to combat trafficking in women, and even results in the support of this illegal action on the part of the whole village or town (Li, 2000). In many cases attempts to rescue a woman are met with organized and violent resistance from the villagers (Zhao, 2003).

In addition, out of their own self-interest, some villagers choose to cover up for or even aid the traders in women. For example, in the case of trafficking in women in the Zhao village of Maoan town, Guoyang County, Anhui Province, there are more than 600 people in the village where Zhao Ming, the leader of the gang, is from, and about 80 percent of the villagers participated in the trafficking in women (Gao, 1998). Miu Buhuang was arrested in the first female trafficking case uncovered in Fujian province in 2000. In fact, all of Miu's fellow villagers knew he was a trader in human beings from the beginning of his first deal in the mountains, but none of them reported anything to the public security office. Many villagers were envious of Miu's way of making money, and asked to watch over the trafficked women in order to receive a commission from Miu. The villagers thus became accessories of Miu. At first, Miu hired his fellow villagers to watch over the

tents in which the trafficked women were kept, at the price of about 200 Yuan for each tent. Later, Miu organized a transportation team with the profit made from the sales of the trafficked women. He hired quite a few people to join in his illegal trade of women, and formed a well-organized gang in order to kidnap and traffic in women in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan provinces. Thereupon, a large number of tents for locking up trafficked women appeared in the mountains around the Fujiazhuang village. Bare branches and marriage-makers around the village rushed to the mountains to see and buy the women or girls they liked (Chen, 2000).

### *Indifferent Treatment of Local Grass-Roots Organizations*

The management of household registers in some areas where the buyers are from is so lax that even a certificate of household registration can be bought. This causes an increase in the purchasing of women and children in these areas, which in turn stimulates the growth of crimes like trafficking in women and children. Moreover, some marriage registration offices at the grass-root level have simplified the necessary procedures for marriage registration, making it very easy for the buyer and a trafficked woman to get a legal marriage certificate from the local office. This shrouds the illegal acts with an apparent legality, and causes severe problems for the public security forces seeking to rescue the trafficked women (Jiang & Li, 2009).

Many buyers, the general public and even grass-roots cadres are lacking in legal knowledge and elementary ethics, so that they often treat the trader in human beings as a kindhearted matchmaker. They even think that buying women is an easy way of addressing the need among older local men to get married, as well as a good act that helps to fulfill others' wishes and stabilize the local society. Therefore, when the police go to rescue the trafficked women, the village cadres choose to inform the buyers and collude with them to hinder the rescue work (Li & Wan, 1998). In some towns, even though the cadres knew that some women and children had been trafficked there, they still issued marriage certificates to their buyers and registered the women as permanent local residents. In many villages, the village cadres not only took no measures to prohibit villagers from trafficking or buying women, but also pro-

vided information for the villagers or acted as their guarantors, sometimes even taking the lead in trafficking in women and children. When the police come to rescue the trafficked women, those local town or village cadres and local police officers often come up with numerous excuses and measures to delay and hinder the rescue work (Cui, 2000). The public security agencies, party and government organizations of some areas where the buyers are from also obstruct the progress of investigation and rescue work in the name of protecting the interests of the local masses. They even evade, create difficulties for and join in attacking those who come to rescue the trafficked women, causing many more difficulties for the rescue work (Jiang & Li, 2009).

### *The Dilemma of the Trafficked Women*

In the process of being trafficked, women are brought from one place to another, sold at a set price, and are finally forced to marry their buyers. They are often illegally locked up by the buyers. Without personal freedom, these women turn out to be nothing but the buyers' tool for having sex and bearing children. Their resistance obtains no other results than more severe violent acts, abuse or humiliation. If a trafficked woman attempts to resist her buyer or flee from the kind of life she has been forced into, her husband will immediately beat and abuse her until she becomes completely desperate and gives up forever on the idea of going back home (Mo, 2005). Some women who are not rescued and cannot escape on their own, or feel too ashamed to go back to their hometowns, have to endure the humiliation and yield to the buyers, living a life of numb acceptance; some of them choose suicide as the only way to resist when they have lost all hope; finally, some of them, fed up with the abuse they have suffered and filled with hatred, choose to kill their buyers and hence are transformed into criminals themselves.

In fact, in later years, perhaps even decades after being forced to marry their buyers, some trafficked women set escape as their life goal. Some of these women make their escape by chance, but their families are left broken. In such broken families, the children suffer the most. Therefore, those women who were trafficked and finally escape are called "chickens that discard their eggs" (Wang et al., 2004). However,

those women who successfully make their escape still have many worries. In the town of Wangxia in east Fujian Province, more than half of the population is below the poverty line and forty families are still living in caves. In recent years, 35 women were trafficked from that town; among those that were rescued and returned to their birthplace, eleven of them were forced to leave their hometown once again, because their natal families were so poor. Some trafficked women are unwilling to return to their hometown. They say they do not wish to endure poverty any longer (Cui et al., 2000).

#### *Case 4*

Among the 200 women rescued by the Public Security Bureau of Shouning County, fewer than twenty are willing to go back to their original home. According to a police officer from the Public Security Bureau, even though Shouning was a poor and backward county in past years, still it is richer today than most counties in Guizhou and Yunnan Provinces. In Shouning, women need not labor in the fields and can earn an income out of tea and mushroom planting. What is more important, many women have had children after being trafficked to Shouning and forced to get married there. The love between those women and their children makes it very hard for them to leave. Many women choose to stay so that their children will not suffer hardships. They think their life may change after their children grow up, and their children are their hope. A woman trafficked from Guizhou said: "What difference will it make to go back to my hometown? My natal family is very poor and looked down upon in my hometown, so I would rather stay here." She can't help shedding tears while talking of these things. It is tremendously hard for those women to make a decision about leaving or not (Chen, Huang, & Sang, 2000).

### **Conclusions**

In China, the female shortage caused by the abnormally high SRB has deleterious effects on Chinese men's spouse selection and marriage, ef-

fects that are concentrated in poverty-stricken areas. As the under-privileged group in spouse selection, the marriageable men in those areas will become the immediate victims of the effect of the imbalanced sex structure of China's population on people's marriages. The increase in the number of unmarried older men in rural China may make it difficult for some to engage in regular sexual activity, which in turn could result in frustration, in some cases leading to an increase in sex crimes and trafficking in women. Meanwhile, the great interest that exists in trafficking in women can even stimulate the criminals' motivation and fanaticism, leading to an increase in female trafficking cases and the growth of gangs dedicated to trading in human beings. The Chinese government has implemented a series of laws and regulations and has launched numerous special actions to crack down on trafficking in women and to rescue trafficked women. Achievements have been made, and women's legal interests and rights are indeed better protected by these efforts. However, in the practical work of rescuing the trafficked women, obstruction by local people and grass-roots organizations creates great difficulties for the rescue work.

Trafficking in women is a barbaric and inhumane social evil. It occurs against the will of the female victims and is accomplished by means of tricks, traps, and violence in order to abduct, kidnap, buy, transfer, and traffic in women and children. This not only gravely violates the victims' personal rights, but also inflicts endless pain and suffering on their loved ones, since it breaks up the entire family, endangering the preservation of society (Wang, 2007). Therefore, it should be a matter of concern to society as a whole to combat trafficking in human beings. Further legal education for villagers regarding trafficking and wife buying must be undertaken and grass-root level cadres and local public security departments must assume responsibility for cases of wife buying within their community. The Chinese government must give importance to the following areas when making efforts to crack down on trafficking in women in the future.

First, more attention and efforts should be devoted to uncovering and cracking down on crimes related to the trafficking of women and children.

Second, the cooperation between different departments should be strengthened to combat human trafficking crimes, and the entire society

should be mobilized to participate in this action. The cooperation between public security forces and organs such as women's federations, Family Planning organizations and news outlets should be enhanced to advocate the fight against and prevention of human trafficking, and to raise women's consciousness so that they learn how to avoid being trafficked. In this way society at large can be mobilized to make joint efforts to combat and prevent human trafficking crimes and protect the interests and rights of all women, especially those who are trafficked.

Third, buyers should be more severely punished. Buyers are an important link in the criminal industrial chain of trafficking in women. Therefore, the buyers market should be fiercely cracked down on so that the traders cannot receive any expected profit from trafficked women; in this way, these crimes can be effectively prevented and reduced (Mao, 2000). For the sake of complete eradication of trafficking in women and children, not only do relentless actions need to be taken to eliminate the traders who traffic in women and children, but also punishment of the purchasers of trafficked women should be intensified so as to destroy the buyers market (Yu, 2000).

Finally, in order to eradicate women trafficking at its origin, it must be understood and recognized that this phenomenon is closely related to the marriage squeeze caused by the imbalanced sex ratio, as a result of the lack of equality between males and females in China. In order to address the abnormally high SRB and excess female child mortality, the Chinese government is defining some new social policies and interventions, such as the national projects called "A New Culture of Marriage and Childbearing Entering into Families" and "Care for Girls", in order to gradually weaken people's preference for sons. These efforts have significantly improved the survival environment for girls. In the long run, the ideology of equality between men and women must be advocated and popularized in order to promote the harmonious and sustainable development of Chinese society.

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