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“The Trafficking of Women in China”

Is gender a defining vulnerability factor?

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Abstract

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This thesis critically analyzes the aspect of women's vulnerability factors in human trafficking in China. The analysis is based on a previous research overview that brings up the most important aspects and relates to the discussion on women's vulnerability to the two trafficking forms, bride and sex trafficking. The theoretical framework consists of two interconnected feminist theories; feminist political economy and gendered relational approach. Both theories represent women and identify women's subordination and gender as a defining factor. The feminist political economy approach looks at the totality of society, and sheds light on gender discriminating structures in the patriarchal Chinese society, gendered relational approach focuses on the gendered power relations and arises of women's vulnerability from loss of social security, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. Part of the analysis places the vulnerability factors within the bigger picture of the Chinese States prevention and anti trafficking work. The thesis concludes that gender is a vulnerability factor, from patriarchal historical and cultural teaching there is a prevailing unequal gender power relation, where women in many areas of the Chinese society are being discriminated. Although gender is a determining factor, with rising poverty and the impact of policies by the Chinese State along with socioeconomic issues it has also shown to increase female victims in trafficking. These are therefore also important factors to include. There is a great need to further understand women's vulnerability factors and address these to sincerely combat trafficking in China.

Keywords: China, Trafficking, Vulnerability, Women, gender, inequality

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ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

- **GMS:** GREAT MEKONG SUB-REGION (COUNTRIES: CAMBODIA, THE YUNNAN PROVINCE OF CHINA, LAOS, MYANMAR, THAILAND AND VIETNAM)
- **NPA:** “CHINA NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN”
- **SIREN:** STRATEGIC INFORMATION RESPONSE NETWORK, UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY PROJECT ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING (UNIAP)
- **TIP :** TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT
- **UNDOC:** UNITED NATION OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE AREA OF RESEARCH

Human trafficking is a serious violation of human rights. It is the illegal trading of women, children and men for the purpose of sexual and/ or labor exploitation (SIREN; UNIAP). According to the 2012 Trafficking in Person Report given by US Department of state, it resembles the human trafficking to a modern slavery and estimates that there is around 20,9 million victims in the world. To combat and prevent this transnational crime, several international organizations have taken action and initiated anti trafficking programs at a national, regional and sub regional level.

Despite implementation of extensive anti-trafficking programs, reports from the last decade shows that the number of trafficking cases and victims are rising, especially within sex trafficking victims, where the percentage of victims in 2012 is higher than in 2005. Women are disproportionately affected by trafficking as it has been identified that 98 percent of sex trafficking victims are women (ILO, TIP, 2012). Asia and the Pacific, including South Asia, remains the largest in terms of victims (TIP, 2012). As a result, in the two last decades the international agenda of anti trafficking measures has been dominated by the discourses on prostitution of women and children and labor migration.

The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) has considered an emblem of anti-trafficking work. It's latest anti-trafficking measure is the Trafficking Protocol launched by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC), which is set to combat trafficking through the central "3Ps" - *Prevention, Policy and Protection* acting on a sub regional, regional and national level (Kneebone & Debeljak, 2012:103). On a national level, state parties are required to take action and include the 3Ps in their anti-trafficking measures, especially prevention measures to curb the demand for trafficking and decrease vulnerabilities that cause people to get trafficked. The vulnerability factors that are often raised and debated as vulnerable to trafficking are gender and poverty (Ibid, 2012:112). Nevertheless, although many states have signed and ratified the Trafficking Protocol, putting it in practice and addressing vulnerability factors has remained problematic.

Focusing on China, which is a part of GMS cooperation, there are many forms and purpose of trafficking in China today, these being: exploitation of forced labor, sex trafficking, purchase of women for brides, the purchase of a male son, or sale of unwanted female children (Edwards & Tiefenbrun, 2008:4). Of all these forms and purposes of trafficking, according to US department of State TIP report, the trafficking of women and children is "the most significant

problem in China” (US. Department of state 2008, TIP report 91). It is estimated that 90 percent of human trafficking victims are women and children, mostly from poor rural provinces, who are trafficked to wealthier urban and costal provinces primarily for sexual exploitation; women are also trafficked into rural areas to be sold as brides to unwed men (Tiefenburn, 2008:254). This indicates that trafficking in China is mainly male driven and gender is therefore a highly relevant vulnerability factor of trafficking in China.

Nevertheless, poverty is also considered a vulnerability factor in the trafficking of women in China. The country has over the last two decades experienced high economic growth that has been powerful in reducing poverty (HDI, 2006), but the Human Development Index measurement also shows that development in China is uneven, that has lead to poverty and underdevelopment and high proportions of migration from rural areas, both internal and across borders. Studies show that many migrate out of poverty, and in this process vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking (US department of State, 2012). Overall, the Trafficking Protocol assumes that trafficking occurs when parties are in unequal relations, which relates both to the vulnerability factors, poverty and gender.

Moreover, China is considered a source, transit and destination country of forced labor and sex trafficking, China’s internal trafficking is the most pronounced, this is a result from the large migration population moving mainly from underdeveloped rural areas to fast developing industrialized zones (ibid, 2012). Besides gender and poverty there is a history of strong prevailing patriarchal culture in China, resulting in a structure of gender inequality that has also indirectly affected the nature of trafficking.

The human trafficking of women in China has over the last decade become a lucrative business that is expanding due to several factors: the aggressive implementation of the One-Child policy, a faulty legal system, and the blind adherence to long-standing cultural traditions that devalue women (Edwards & Tiefenbrun, 2008:5). This shows that the Chinese government through its policies and long standing culture are enhancing the aspect of gender as a vulnerability factor for women. Today, the Chinese government is making efforts to comply with the minimum standards in elimination of trafficking, but fails to adequately protect Chinese and foreign victims of trafficking (Ibid, 2008:7). China is today on Tier 2 watch list, which means countries where governments do not fully comply with the Trafficking Victim Protection Acts (TVPAs) minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards (TIP, US Department of state, 2012).

It is acknowledged that there is a growing global awareness of human trafficking, but the level of knowledge remains very low which increases the vulnerability of potential victims, and

what is alarming is the number of victims that are rising, particularly female victims. The discussion of women's vulnerability factors, particularly gender in sex and bride trafficking, is therefore highly important. This is not only in terms of discussing how the gender power relation structures in society is a fueling factor in trafficking of women, but more importantly if gender inequality is causing trafficking of women in China. This question is especially important as it belongs to the broader discussion on how to combat trafficking, which is a crime that is continuously growing in China.

1.2 AIM OF THE THESIS

The aim of the thesis is to critically analyze and problematize Chinese women's vulnerability factors i.e. the "abuse of power and or a position of vulnerability" as a potential underlying and root cause to trafficking in China. This will be carried out through a research overview and a theoretical framework. In order to carry out the critical analysis, the empirical understanding of the vulnerability factors in China must be examined. The study of empirical findings will therefore be drawn from a review of previous research that brings up the most important factors of vulnerability in human trafficking in China.

The theoretical framework in this analysis is a feminist approach, which aims to show the gender power relations in a society. The theoretical framework is applicable on this discussion because it sheds lights on unjust structures, which is highly relevant to vulnerability factors such as gender and inequality in human trafficking within China.

Based on the research overview, which presents the hard facts of different aspects of vulnerability in the human trafficking in China, and the theoretical framework, which presents women's situation and highlights the inequalities in the Chinese context that makes women vulnerable to trafficking, this thesis will culminate in a critical discussion about the vulnerability in human trafficking and the aspects around it. A part of the discussion will place vulnerability factors of trafficking in a larger discussion about today's human trafficking work in China.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

- What are women vulnerability factors in China, which have affected the forms of trafficking in China today?

- How has the lack of vulnerability factors in the Chinese State anti-trafficking work affected the trafficking?

The first question focuses on understanding women's vulnerability factors but also to shed light on its connection to the trafficking forms that predominantly affects women in China. The second question aims to show how the lack of vulnerability factor in the Chinese State's anti trafficking work has affected the development of trafficking in China today.

1.4 LIMITATIONS

Human trafficking is a transnational crime with a broad term that relates to many different subjects and areas, however my focus in this thesis is on women's vulnerability factors into sex and bride trafficking in China. Even though there are many forms of trafficking, I have chosen to limit the research to the two forms presented above. There are therefore many aspects that are not brought up in this thesis, aspects that are highly important to trafficking and anti-trafficking work, but that will not be given any focus here.

Nevertheless, even when discussing the vulnerability factors, other areas will inevitably be brought up. Such areas are impossible not to bring up in certain part of the thesis, however they will not be given any larger space.

As an approach I will be using a feminist political economic framework and gendered relational approach, which can give an impression of a one-sided gendered view. However in the context of trafficking in China, where my main focus will be on women, the patriarchal structure and gender are important factors to include in this study, I therefore believe this approach is applicable.

1.5 METHODS

This research will be carried out by a research overview based on secondary data. The research materials are gathered from academic books, journals, articles, as well as TIP and reports from the US department of state and UN.

The research overview has a special focus on the research done in China, apart of the

Greater Mekong Sub-region that estimates to have the highest number of sex trafficking victims in the world. This is because the research material on human trafficking and its push factors around the world is extensive. In order to maintain focus in the research it is necessary to limit the material used in this thesis. It does not however mean that research in other countries and regions than China and Greater Mekong Sub-region are ignored, but rather that it is impossible to include and present all research done on anti trafficking efforts. China is chosen because it is a country that is increasingly getting more powerful and influential, but along with this development the human trafficking activity and number of victims has increased. There is a discrepancy between China's anti trafficking measures and human rights and it has shown that China is not living up to its promises in important areas of human rights (China Annual Report, 2007). Human rights are fundamental to empowerment, and it is women that are lacking human rights whom are the most vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation (Brysk & Choi-Fitzpatrick 2012:6).

Greater Mekong sub-region is chosen in this thesis because China is a part of the regional cooperation and it has been reported to have the largest number of victims (TIP, 2012). It is known that the human trafficking in GMS is widespread but also that it is a well researched region with well documented anti –trafficking programs and initiatives (Kneebone & Debeljak, 2012) and can therefore provide comprehensive material but on the other hand it has not given such widespread view of the gender aspect.

1.6 DEFINITION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Today one can find many various and even competing definition of the term human trafficking, launched by different organizations and actors which is used in the combat of this transnational crime. I will use the definition provided by UNDOC, which is one of the main global actors against human trafficking but also because this particular definition is largely used in the GMS. The term of human trafficking is taken from the article 3, paragraph (a) of the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish which defines Trafficking in Persons as:

“ The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of 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 labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs ”

(UNDOC, 2013).

In the *Trafficking Protocol* definition it could be seen that consent to the intended exploitation is irrelevant where the elements of trafficking (Coercion, fraud, deception, abuse of power) have been used (Kneebone & Debeljak, 2012:111). This indicates that the definition includes a consent-nullifying behavior, which indicates to protect the victim but where the main focus is on the perpetrator.

1.7 DEFINITION OF VULNERABILITY FACTORS

Currently there is no agreed definition of “vulnerability”, but despite this, the term vulnerability is employed in a wide range of different disciplines such as criminal justice, human security and health (UNDOC 2013). Looking at the context of human trafficking, “abuse of power or a position of vulnerability” is included in the definition presented by UNDOC, but it is however not defined further. Yet, despite this, vulnerability is usually agreed and referred to those inherent, environmental or contextual factors that increase the susceptibility of an individual or group to being trafficked. These factors are generally agreed to include human rights violations such as poverty, inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence (UNDOC, 2013:13). What is also agreed upon is that these factors shaping vulnerability tend to focus extremely on groups that already lack power and status in society, such as women, children and minorities. Furthermore, the term vulnerability is not fixed; there are a multitude of factors that shape the context within trafficking takes place and the capacity of individuals to respond. It is therefore almost always required an understanding of vulnerability in a specific situation (Ibid: 2013: 13).

1.8 DISPOSITION

This thesis is divided in five chapters. The first part of this thesis is an introduction to the area of research, research question, aim and methods. The continuing chapter will present the theoretical framework, which consists of two theories; feminist political economy and the gendered relational approach. These theories are interconnected to show how gender inequality as vulnerability factor affects the trafficking of women, by looking at different aspects within the Chinese society. The third part is the literature overview. The literature is divided in different themes, which present the different aspects in the discussion about women’s vulnerability to

trafficking. The themes are chosen because they represent the most important and relevant aspects of root causes to the trafficking of women. The issue of women's vulnerability to trafficking is related to many topics, it will hence provide the most relevant themes in the research overview. The third part is the analysis based on the research overview and the theoretical framework. The factor of gender inequality as a vulnerability factor will be placed within a broader discussion about the preventions and anti-trafficking work, which is a crime that is currently rising. The analysis will also highlight some of the gaps, which I believe exists, in the research about gender inequality as a vulnerability factor to women being trafficked. The thesis finally provides a conclusion based on both the research overview as well as the analysis.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework consists of two interconnected theories: which will explain how women are affected differently from men by Chinese government policies and how it has increased women vulnerability of becoming victims of trafficking. This is necessary in order to cover a broad range of ideas and thoughts around the discussion of different vulnerability factors, such as poverty and gender relating to a patriarchal structure.

The feminist political economy framework is meant to be interdisciplinary, encompassing the study of society as a totality, which includes the political, economic, social, and cultural as well as sexual and gender, all of which are mutually interdependent (Luxton, 2006:12-13). This approach has two important elements. Firstly employing gender as a defining category and secondly studies the society as an integrated whole where it takes in both political and economic aspects (Riley, 2008). Researches in general have adopted the feminist political economy approach because unlike the several dominating heterodox systems of economics that solely focus on economic, the feminist political approach also focuses on provisioning of human needs and human wellbeing and it also employs gender as a defining factor (InterPares, 2004:4).

To understand the totality of a society and analyze social relations, the feminist political economy approach recognizes the overwhelming power government possesses and its impacts, which have through its gender insensitive policies, established a gender discriminating structure in society. The feminist political economy therefore begins from the base of understanding of women's subordination, especially in relations to social organizations within whose historical and

cultural processes women's experiences with discrimination and subordination have become widespread. In addition, it shows how the government through its policies, has systematically treated social reproduction through childbirth, child rearing and the general care-giving as the responsibility of women (Ibid: 2008:3).

Historically, the feminist political economy was developed in the early 1980s and was shaped between its engagement between its liberal and Marxist theoretical roots, but also the ways in which its destiny and capabilities are tied to the larger feminist theoretical and political movement of which it is a part (Luxton 2006: 13). However, even though the approach has a particular focus on women, it does not exclude concerns about the whole of society or the environment. "Understanding gender divisions implies looking at both men and women from a feminist perspective and with a special emphasis on women's subordination and the pursuit of gender equality" (Beneria, 2003).

To further understand the rise of women's vulnerability in the process of trafficking the gendered relational approach puts women's subordination in focus. It singles out the existing gender relationships between men and women and the different needs and interests which women have largely due to their different position in society (Chen, 2008:6). This will enable an understanding of vulnerabilities rising in China from the process of transitions in relation to different provisions of rights for men and women. The rise of vulnerability can come through loss of *assets*, such as income, property and family resource: through loss of *entitlement*, such as pensions, social security and health insurance; and through social exclusion from structures and institutions that provide opportunity and voice in society (14, Ibid, 2008: 6). The gendered relational approach, with its indicators, will identify the gendered power relation existing in China. The gendered power relation is a key element in understanding the gender inequalities in society and the rise of women's vulnerability, despite this it has been neglected. The gendered relational approach is therefore important in this research.

Moreover, the gendered relational approach with its focus on gender power relations has emerged as a complement to the feminist political economy approach. The theories presented together will show how women are discriminated through the state and its policies in different areas of society. I am not unaware that these theories represent a strong feministic view that can give the impression of a one-sided gender view, but I want to use these two theories as my theoretical framework since I believe that they, because of their broad perspectives, are applicable to the situation in China.

3. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

3.1 STATE'S RESPONSIBILITY OF VULNERABILITY FACTORS

Vulnerability to trafficking is defined in terms of poverty, underdevelopment and lack of equal opportunity (Kneebone & Debeljak, 2012:214). Lack of equal opportunity relates to gender inequality, a structural problem, which the state has to address through its responsibility from the Trafficking Protocol. In the Trafficking Protocol one of the three core concepts, '3Ps' to combat trafficking, is prevention, which is related to taking measures to alleviate vulnerability factors (Ibid, 2012). China is one of 117 countries that has implemented the Trafficking Protocol and CTOC and has a prevention obligation to undertake these vulnerability factors such as lack of unequal opportunity. The general prevention initiatives in anti- trafficking have mainly been focused upon reducing poverty and empowering women (Ibid, 2012). However, many critics have questioned the effectiveness of States addressing vulnerability factors.

In previous research of the States responsibility in accordance with the Trafficking Protocol to address the vulnerability factors, it has been shown that States have had problems implementing this in practice, in particular in terms of the human rights aspect. Researchers as Anne Gallagher (2012) and Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (TIP, UNDOC, 13 April 2011) note that although many countries have implemented the protocol, State's responsibility to provide remedy to potential victims and address vulnerability factors has become largely optional. This is due to a vague definition in the Trafficking Protocol of recognizing rights, but also because State's often ignore to recognize the term 'abuse of power or a position of vulnerability', which are terms related to human rights (Kneebone & Debeljak, 2012). It often argued that people lacking of human rights are the most vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation (Brysk & Choi-Fitzpartrick, 2012). Brysk (2012) argues that the problem is powerlessness of victims. In the Trafficking Protocol it even assumes that trafficking occurs when parties are in unequal relations, related to the vulnerability factors, poverty and gender.

Nevertheless, because States do not recognize these rights or terms this shows that there is a discrepancy of the Trafficking Protocol in theory and practice of State's responsibility, becoming a problem to address vulnerability factors such as lack of opportunity and gender inequality that can cause trafficking.

3.2 GENDER IMBALANCE – CULTURAL PREFERENCE OF BOYS AND ONE CHILD POLICY

Gender imbalance has often become an issue related to trafficking. The gender imbalance in China is among the highest in the world. The sex ratio is estimated to be 100 women to 120 men (Ljunggren, 2008). In certain rural areas in China, the sex ratio is even higher and estimated sometimes as high as 100 women for every 143 men (guardian, 2009). With the gender imbalance and shortage of females, it has created a male-driven demand for trafficking, particular of female victims for sex and bride trafficking.

In previous research of trafficking in China, several researchers among Yik-YI Chu 2011; Mara Hvistendahl 2011; Susan Tiefenbrun 2008 and Jh Lee: 2005, all argue that gender imbalance is one of the causes of trafficking in China. This can be seen through the pattern of forms and purpose of trafficking in China today, where there is a high demand for women in sex exploitation and bride trafficking for unmarried men (Lee, 2005). Researchers also often argue that gender imbalance in China stems from strongly rooted Confucian values and a patriarchal family system (Chen, 2008) resulting in a strong cultural preference for sons, but also by the one-child policy launched in 1979, the birth planning policy which is one of its kind in the world, that has exceedingly accelerated the gender disproportion in China. These two factors together have led to the wide practice of sex selective abortions of female fetuses, gendercide, which consequently has led to high excess of men and gender imbalance in China (Tiefenbrun, 2008).

In studies, it has been discovered similarities between China and India, both countries having high levels of gender imbalances. These imbalances take form in strong cultural preference for sons, high-level practice of sex selective abortions and similar forms of trafficking in demand for women, namely bride and sex trafficking. Researcher Therese Hesketh (2011) argues that in both countries, the gender imbalance is higher and more severe in the rural areas. Nevertheless, in general the gender imbalance in China is higher; this is due to the one-child policy, implemented by the Chinese government. Nonetheless, the wide gender imbalance has shown to bring with it a wide width of social problems, including the trafficking of women.

3.3 INSECURITIES IN THE JOBSECTOR

A series of economic reform policies have produced double digit-economic growth rates, helping to lift millions of people out of poverty (Ravallion & Chen, 2004). Yet, the economic boom in China has also led to underdevelopment in some areas, such as increases unemployment and loss of benefits and safety nets attached to work. In addition, the Hukou household registration system has also contributed to the vulnerability of migrants. The Hukou registration system was implemented with the ambition to prevent mass-migration into cities, but has instead acted to

increase the insecurity because it restricts migrants from accessing social benefits and help from the locale (US Department of state, 2012). The Hukou register system together with unemployment and lack of safety nets has consequently created insecurity and vulnerability for workers in the job market (Chen, 2008). Female workers are particularly affected, as women are often discriminated on the job market in terms of wages and access to labor markets, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation by traffickers (UNDOC).

Researcher Lanyan Chen (2008) and Xia Ren (1999), both agree that one of the reasons why women are vulnerable is because they are disadvantaged by the discrimination in the job market. These disadvantages that have been created by gender insensitive policies launched by the Chinese state. Chen argues that there are several aspects within the job market where women have disadvantages, these including loss of employment at an earlier age compared to men, lower reemployment rates and at the same time bear the social reproduction responsibility. These have resulted in higher levels of unemployment among women, in women losing entitlements and benefits that hinder them in creating a social security, which consequently makes them vulnerable (ibid, 2008:42). Many women also experience vulnerability, due to part-time work and temporary work in the informal sector, where there is a lack of a stable and regular income, safety nets and formal contracts (Chen, 2008:42). Moreover, the gender discrimination in the Chinese labor market has increased women's employment in informal sector in China, but ultimately also women's vulnerability in exploitation for trafficking.

In other previous research on insecurities on the job market, it has also shown that women tend to be the ones who have a disadvantage and are often discriminated and therefore more vulnerable compared to men. Researcher Jaine Chuang (2006) acknowledges that labor migration is connected with trafficking, and within this migration process, women are particular vulnerable due to well-entrenched discriminatory practices that regulate women to employment in the informal sector (Chuang, 2006:138).

3.4 PROSTITUTION AND SEX TRAFFICKING

Since the economic transformation in 1980s in China and as a result of mass internal migration, the sex industry has grown rapidly; media has described it as the fastest growing industry in the country and as being the major receptor of female migrants (Davidson, 2001).

In previous research, there have been very limited studies on the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking in China, although there is often a general notion of the connection. Some researcher as Gil, Wang, Anderson & Lin (2001) argue that the mass movement in China has created opportunities for traffickers to lure and deceive desperate

women. Women are therefore more exposed into becoming prey for sex traders (Ibid, 2001). Some researchers look from a wider perspective from the society and argue there are causal effects of structural factors as relative poverty, unemployment and gender inequality that cause women to engage in prostitution. Pi & Ma (2001) closely agree and argues that there exists a system of “forcing women of virtue into prostitution” in contemporary China (ibid, 2001). However, there are several researchers that oppose this notion, (Si, 1997: Xiao, 1999: Zhang, 2000: Zhu, 1994) instead arguing this is a moral question. They argue that women in China that choose to engage in prostitution, do so voluntarily in order to pursue money and materialism (Xiao, 1999).

Nevertheless, despite the opposing view on women’s entry into prostitution there is still a lack of knowledge about the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking in China. This research has been largely ignored, not only by the Chinese government but also by academics and the public at large (Liu, 2012). However, looking back at history, the practice of selling and buying women was widely accepted in some regions in China. Wang (2007) argues that human trafficking still exists today, but in new forms such as forced labor and sexual exploitation (ibid, 2007).

Looking at the empirical studies on human trafficking reveals that women in the commercial sex industry rarely migrate against their will or are being deceived in doing so. But also, that some women sometimes are desperate to relocate, and hoping for better opportunities (Davidson, 2001). Despite this, it has been shown that the number of sex trafficking victims are rising in China, with the majority of victims being women (TIP, 2012, US department).

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 BACKGROUND OF ROOT CAUSES TO TRAFFICKING

It is argued that gender imbalance is one of the causes of trafficking in China, particularly of women for marriage and sex trafficking, (Yik-YI Chu, 2011:48 & Lee, 2005: 177). There is today a shortage of women and the sex ratio is estimated sometimes as high as 100 women for every 143 men. The gender imbalance has developed from a gender sex selection, which is strongly influenced by two factors: a strong cultural preference for sons and the Chinese states birth planning policy, named the one-child policy.

The strong cultural preference for sons stems from the historical dominating patrilineal cultures in East and South Asia, where sons have been important for carrying on the family name (Chen, 2008:77). Besides the emotional value of carrying the family name, the preference for sons also has an economic and practical value, as sons were seen as a provider of the household livelihood when parents' retire (Ibid 2008:77). In other words, sons are seen as an economic security and insurance for parent's retirement. While daughters wereq seen as a burden and an economic liability because of the large demand for dowries by the husbands family bringing huge costs to the women's families (Croll, 2002 in Chen, 2008). The cultural preference for sons in China can be traced back to the historical roots of the teaching of Confucius, where women are considered to be inferior to men (Tiefenbrun, 2008:29). In addition, many studies have also shown that not having a son in the family is considered to be one of the greatest taboos in Chinese culture (Chen: 2008:77). There is therefore high societal pressure on Chinese families to have a son.

The other factor, which has contributed to the skewed sex ratio in China, is the one-child policy, which is a birth limitation policy that was implemented in 1979 by the Chinese state to control the enormous population expansion. Susan Greenhalgh (2003) argues that the Chinese State's implementation of this population policy lies in two strong notions, which were: that China faced a population crisis that was sabotaging the nation's modernization, and that the one-policy was the only solution to it (ibid, 2003:166). To comply with this birth limitation, millions of people committed sex selective abortions. This phenomenon of infanticide of female fetuses in China resulted in "gendercide", a systematic killing of a group (women) based on their gender (Tiefenbrun, 2008). The situation of infanticide became so severe in China in the beginning of 1980s that *People's Daily* seeking to coop with the violence warned in early 1983, "the phenomena of butchering, drowning and leaving female infants...have been very serious" (Liand Zhang 1983 in Greenhalgh, 2005). Croll (1978) notes that China is likely facing a demographic crisis, which is due to the high level of gendercide.

It has been shown that discrimination of women is deeply rooted in the Chinese culture, which has been strengthened by economic incentives and societal pressure. The preference for sons in the patriarchal and Confucian culture has not only acted to devalue women, but also with the combination of the one-child policy, it has created a systematic killing of women, gendercide, which women also contribute to, through the practice of sex selective abortions that has resulted in a severe shortage of women in today's China. Chinese women are in societal structure where they are forced to comply, this thus upholds this gender discriminating structure, creating a

vicious circle where women continues to be powerless, discriminated, and consequently vulnerable.

4.2 ROOT CAUSES OF BRIDE TRAFFICKING

The combination of the cultural preference for a male child and the one-child policy has undeniably affected the gender imbalance in China. With a skewed sex ratio, it has consequently affected the nature of trafficking today. Both Lee and Yik Yi Chu argue that the shortage in women has increased the numbers of women being trafficked for forced marriage (2005:177 & 2011:48). Lee (2005) describes the situation of bride trafficking as being affected by several factors, besides the shortage of females, the universal high pressure of men getting a bride has also become a matter of cost. In order to marry, men in China usually have to afford to pay a high traditional bride price for local women, which is similar to a dowry. However, when men cannot afford this, they turn to traffickers to purchase kidnapped brides from other areas. Marshal (1999) distinguishes between the prices of traditional bride price and kidnapped women. For a traditional bride the price is estimated to be between US\$ 1,250 and US\$ 2,500, while for kidnapped women the cost may be anywhere between US\$ 250 and US\$ 800 (Lee, 2005:177). In other words, purchasing a trafficked woman is a more cost-effective solution for men in the “marriage squeeze” (Ibid).

The issue of bride trafficking is more widespread and severe in poor rural areas where the issues of cost of purchasing a bride become more evident but also where the gender imbalance is greater. In some rural areas in China, the gender imbalance is estimated to be as high as 100 women for every 143 men, and therefore it is also a higher pressure and demand for women within these areas (Chen, 2008). It demonstrates that women in rural areas are more vulnerable to exploitation of traffickers because the factors of poverty and gender imbalance are more widespread and therefore aggravate the situation for women, making them more vulnerable.

What is interesting and contradicting is that although there is a high demand for women in rural areas, there is a common practice of rural families giving away their baby girls, creating a vicious circle, as this is one of the practices that initially created the problem of gender imbalance in many parts of China. However, trafficking is a lucrative business and those rural families that engage in this practice often do so, driven by economic incentives, but also because the preference for sons is more strongly rooted in rural areas (Yi Chu, 2011).

The situation of bride trafficking demonstrates that the patriarchal Confucian structures are prevalent and still a strong influence on people’s behavior in the Chinese society. The strong

cultural preference for sons and with the one child policy, it has seriously exacerbated the gender imbalance that has consequently increased the trafficking of women.

4.3 ARISE OF VULNERABILITY AT JOB MARKET

The most pronounced trafficking in China today is within China's internal migration, which is estimated to exceed 221 million people (US Department of state, 2012). It has also been recognized that trafficking takes place mainly within labor migration processes in which recruitment is largely informal. This indicating that many migrants, are in a situation where they are more vulnerable to trafficking. Since 1980 China has undergone a structural change, with implementation of a series of economic reforms, which has resulted in rapid economic development along China's east coast, but similarly along with the presence of unemployed laborers in undeveloped parts of China, this has resulted in massive internal migration (Liu, 2012). Showing that the economic development in China has been very uneven. Chen (2008) notes that the majority of the migrants in this transition are retrenched, laid off workers but also a large amount of rural migrants who have been travelling to urban areas seeking employment (Ibid 2008:48). These migrants in this transition are commonly in a vulnerable situation due to lack of stable jobs and social safety nets. It has also been noted that many of these migrants are poorly educated and lack skills to find stable jobs and therefore usually end up working temporary or domestic labor in informal sectors.

During the early 1990s there was an expansion of an informal job sector, which absorbed most of China's internal labor migrants (ibid, 2008:49). However, Chen finds this being a paradox. While the informal sector grew rapidly, most workers have slipped through the social safety nets and still lack security of income and livelihood (ibid, 2008:48). Meaning that many migrants that enter the informal sector in hope of finding security, instead found themselves in a new vulnerable situation, where they again lack or have very little access to social security but now in an even worse situation of forced labor, where the perpetrators withholds the workers passport, preventing them from leaving. For most workers within in informal sectors, they are often employed on very unstable conditions with irregular income, employment without any formal contracts and are outside the parameters of formal (ibid, 2008:47).

The economic structural change and transition have overall had a negative impact both on female and male workers and migrants as it has increased their vulnerability, through the loss of work and safety nets. However, although Chen agrees on this, she also argues that this industrial restructuring has a far greater negative impact on women than on men (Chen, 2008:41). In her

studies it has been shown that labor market restructuring in China has had different impacts on women and men at different age and income levels, where women usually tend to be those who are disadvantaged. This can be seen through the fact that there are higher levels of unemployment and informal employment among women, which Chen argues is largely due to a discrimination in the labor market and that women are having the lion share of responsibility for social reproduction (Ibid, 2008:41). Rachel Tolhurst (2004), who studies health, gender and maternal health care, argues that the existing gender discrimination on the labor market affects women on their capacity to build up social security entitlements such as maternity benefits, which creates both social and economic vulnerability if women become sick or require maternity or preventive care (Rachel Tolhurst et al. 2004, in Chen, 2008). Women also tend to lose these benefits just because they are the ones likely to bear the social reproduction responsibility and are more vulnerable (Chen, 2008:42). Because of this, employers commonly see women as a liability rather than an investment and therefore rarely employ women. This interestingly reflects the old patrilineal view of women that indicate that old patriarchal Confucian structure is still very much present.

It has shown that poverty is also a vulnerability factor, but in combination with gender, women are far more discriminated on the formal and informal labor market than men. With gendered discriminatory structures in the labor market, women are hindered from building up social security. This shows upon unequal gendered power relations between men and women, which has ultimately led women to a position of vulnerability.

4. 4 PROSTITUTION – SEX TRAFFICKING

The sex industry in China has grown rapidly; media has described it as the fastest growing industry in the country (French, 2006 in Liu, 2012). With the sex industry being the main receptor of women. Although the prostitution is thriving in China, an important aspect of the issue has been largely ignored: the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking. The reason for this connection has been overlooked in China can be understood from two distinct discourses on women's entry into prostitution.

The first discourse regards prostitution as a moral issue, which stems from a communistic ideology that argues that prostitution is a product of the capitalist system of exploitation. It is argued that in socialism, which has supposedly eliminated such exploitation as prostitution. The occurrence of prostitution should therefore not exist in a socialist society. Several Chinese scholars, these include Si, 1997; Xiao, 1990; Zhang, 2000; Zhu, 1994 argues that the women voluntarily engage in prostitution or sex work in order to pursue money and materialism;

prostitution is therefore a matter of moral issue (Liu, 2012). This discourse rejects the very idea of prostitution as existing, and if it does exist, the ones responsible for it are women, as it is believed that they engage in prostitution voluntarily. The focus in this discourse does not only discriminate by putting the sole blame on women, but it also disregards from important structural factors, such as poverty, unemployment and gender inequality.

In the second discourse, which moves away from the moral issue, scholars argue that women become prostitutes because of causal structural factors such as relative poverty, unemployment and gender inequality (Liu, 2012:331). Ren (1993, 2000) argues that there are many factors that contribute to the thriving sex industry in China, but it is important to acknowledge the discrimination of women's economic and political rights and the weakening of legal and political protection under the economic transformation, which has had a significant role in the sex trade boom (Liu, 2012:331).

The general previous research made on women's entry to prostitution shows that the majority of women entering the sex industry do it voluntarily (Skeldon, 2000). Vocks and Nijboer (2000) discovered in their studies on trafficking that the least frequent cases of women entering the sex industry are where women are being abducted and transported, this followed by the cases where women are being deceived by recruiters and traffickers (Liu, 2012). Nevertheless poverty is also commonly cited as a cause of women's entry into prostitution. Money has also been shown to be another common motivator for women to engage in prostitution. Many women claim that they are often "forced" into prostitution because of unemployment and because they are under desperate economic situations (Brunoviskis & Tyldum, 2004; Sharp, 1998). However, looking at China, where there are strong discriminatory practices in the job market against women that hinder them from accessing and building social security, the situation of unemployment and desperate economic circumstances are driving factors into the sex industry, which has provided a convenient option (Ren, 2000).

However, if women's engagement in the sex industry ultimately makes them vulnerable to sex trafficking in China is unknown. This is because the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking has been largely been ignored. Government and law enforcement authorities have not only overlooked it but also by academics and the public at large (ibid, 2012:331). The reason why it has been neglected might be because the moral discourse on prostitution in China is more dominant and closer in line with the patriarchal societal view, as the moral discourse focus is that prostitution is seen as something voluntary and therefore something self caused by women.

This does not only disregard social structures and factors such as poverty and gender inequality, but more interestingly it does not address socioeconomic factors and social structures,

that are driving prostitution and even likely the sex trafficking in China. With the lack of research between prostitution and sex trafficking in China, one cannot for sure establish if there is a strong connection between the two. Yet, with the prevailing patriarchal structure, it has been shown that the number of sex trafficking victims has increased.

4.5 FAILURES OF THE STATE'S RESPONSIBILITY

China is one of the 117 states that have implemented the Trafficking Protocol but it has neither employed the term “abuse of power” or “ the position of vulnerability” nor recognized and implemented important rights. These terms, which can be mechanisms that can help address the prevailing gender inequality in China that has discriminated women in many areas in society that has consequently made them vulnerable to trafficking. According to Human rights Watch (2012), the Chinese government does acknowledge the acute and widespread problems of employment discrimination and discriminatory social attitudes, but despite this it continues to restrict development of independent women rights groups and discourage public interest (Human Rights Watch, January 2012). This shows that it is not a matter of unawareness or lack of knowledge but rather unwillingness from the Chinese state to implement rights for women. Based on the feminist political economy approach, the Chinese government, by denying women’s rights and not addressing these discriminatory structures in society, upholds the discrimination of women. These, have kept women in subordination and made them vulnerable to exploitation, such as male-driven trafficking. Moreover, according to the US Department of State, China has not addressed the one child policy, which is strongly argued to be a root cause but also a fueling factor to the trafficking of women (US. Department of State, 2013). The Human rights Watch also acknowledges this, but sees the action of the state as another denial of human rights. Because the one child policy hinders women from the right over their own body. As this birth limitation policy comes with strong enforcement such as fines and forced abortions that can have severe impact on women’s health (Human Rights Watch, January 2012). The impact of the Chinese government to maintain the one child policy shows yet another area where the Chinese state does not take responsibility to address this vulnerability factor that makes women vulnerable or to curb the demand for trafficking of women. Because of this ignorance the Chinese government instead adds to women’s subordination and fuels trafficking.

Nevertheless, in some aspects, the Chinese state has taken measures and responsibility to strengthen women’s rights, these including implementing the “*China National Plan of Action on Combating Human Trafficking in Women and Children*” (NPA, 2008-2012). This plan was launched along with a series of conventions such as “The Elimination of all forms of

discrimination against women” in 2008. Yet, what has been shown is that, despite these efforts to combat and strengthen women’s rights, there has not been any significant impact as both the sex and bride trafficking are still rising (humantrafficking.org/China). The number of sex workers, which are estimated to be four to ten million in China, remain a particularly vulnerable segment of the population, this due to government’s harsh policies to crack down on prostitution (Human Rights Watch, January 2012). It is interesting that the Chinese governments put much effort to crackdown the prostitution, rather than providing rights and abolish gender discriminatory policies, these that has contributed to the worsened socioeconomic conditions for women and prevented women to build social security. For women being marginalized by socioeconomic factors, the sex industry provided an option. Whether or not women engage voluntary into the sex industry, the government’s lack of addressing gender discriminatory practices in society, has undoubtedly had an impact on women’s situation.

China is today on the Tier 2 Watch list for the seventh consecutive as it does not fully comply Trafficking Victim Protection Acts minimum standards (TIP, US Department of state, 2012). This indicates that China has not taken enough measures to address what has been causing and fueling the trafficking in China.

5. CONCLUSION

Feminist political economy and the gendered relational approach are two theories that in many respects represent women’s vulnerability to sex and bride trafficking in China. These approaches have mirrored many different aspects of women’s situation in China. Based on the research in this thesis, one may conclude that gender, in particular gender inequality is a strong vulnerability factor for women into sex and bride trafficking. Yet, there are also several other important contributing factors to women’s vulnerability into trafficking. It has also been shown that because the Chinese state lack of addressing vulnerability factors such as gender and poverty, in its anti-trafficking work, trafficking will consequently continue and rise, despite other preventive measures.

Starting by looking at the discussion of the root causes of the trafficking of women and girls, there has been a long history of a dominant patriarchal structure. This has stemmed from the old teachings of Confucius that see women as inferior to men and has from its teachings placed women in a subordinate position. The patrilineal; together with the economic and practical

value of sons has added to the development on the strong cultural preference for sons, but similarly devalued women. These values were shown in practice when the Chinese state launched the one-child policy in 1979. With the combination of the cultural preference for sons and the one-child policy it led to gendercide of female fetuses, leading to a shortage of females and the highest gender imbalance in the world. This testifies that there is a deep in rooted gender discrimination in the Chinese society, this is shown through women committing sex selective abortions of female fetuses. This discrimination against women has shown to influence many areas of the Chinese society.

Continuing to look at the discussion of bride trafficking, gender is also a determining factor of women being trafficked, namely the gender imbalance. Because there is a severe shortage of females, it has created a strong demand for trafficked women as brides for unwed men. This form of trafficking of women has also been driven and intensified by economic reasons. Normally for men to get married, they must be able to afford a high price of dowry. And when men can't afford this they instead purchase trafficked women for marriage, which has shown to be a more cost effective choice. The practice of bride trafficking has therefore been shown to be more widespread in poor rural areas, indicating that poverty is also a fueling factor, but also because gender imbalance are higher in rural areas, hence more demand for women. In this discussion it also showed that gender imbalance has created a vicious circles of trafficking driven by economic incentives.

If we turn to the discussion on vulnerability arising in the job market, it shows that most labor migrants are vulnerable in the process of migration and hence vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. This is due to the *Hokou* register system that restricts migrants from accessing benefits, safety nets or help from the locale. It has been shown that the Chinese economic transformation overall has had negative impacts on majority of migrants as it has led to unemployment and loss of security. However, it has been shown that women tend to be the hardest struck because of gender discriminatory practices in the labor market, which restrict women from accessing and building social security. This indicates that there is an unequal gendered power relation between men and women that keeps women subordinated, which reflect the old patriarchal Confucian culture.

Continuing on to the discussion on the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking, there is often a general idea of it. However this is not established as it lacks knowledge in this area as it has largely been ignored. But from the discourses on women's entry into prostitution it indicates the connection. One of the discourses argues women's entry into prostitution is due to causal effects of structural factors as poverty, unemployment and gender

inequality. This discourse acknowledges that there are underlying structural factors in society that makes women vulnerable. While the other discourse argues that women's entry into prostitution is a matter of moral. This discourse, which is the more dominant one, is also more in line with prevailing patriarchal structure. This moral discourse not only ignores the causal structural factors but also blames women for the existence of prostitution as it is argued that women engage voluntarily in this practice. This discourse is also reflected in the view on women in sex trafficking. Nevertheless, there is a gap of knowledge between the connection of prostitution and sex trafficking in China and one cannot therefore for sure establish if there is a connection. Overall in both prostitution and sex trafficking, it seems the Chinese state does not acknowledge gender or poverty as a vulnerability factor.

Finally in the discussion of the state's responsibility, China has implemented the Trafficking Protocol, but despite this, the Chinese state has not taken its responsibility to address vulnerability factors such as gender and poverty or implemented important rights. It is known that the Chinese State is aware of the gender discriminatory practices against women but has not taken significant measures to address them. The Chinese state has even restricted other independent women rights groups and indicated an unwillingness to provide women rights. Nevertheless, despite the unwillingness to adopt and address vulnerability factors, the Chinese state has taken some measures to combat the rising trafficking, but these efforts have unfortunately not had any significant impact as the trafficking victims in China are rising. China is today on Tier 2 Watch list and has been on the list for seven years, as its anti-trafficking measures, which mainly have been focusing on the demand side, prosecuting traffickers, are not enough to stop the trafficking of women.

It is clear that more research is needed in terms of understanding women's vulnerability to trafficking, on for example, family conditions and education. Although in this research, gender has been shown to be a dominant factor, it is not the only factor that makes women vulnerable to trafficking. There is also a great need of conducting more research on the connection between prostitution and sex trafficking as it currently is lacking, and is an important area to further understand and address factors that make women vulnerable to trafficking.

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