

Analysis and Solutions of the Problem of Women Trafficking -- Taking "Chained Woman" as a case study

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Abstract. This paper addresses the definition of women trafficking, the background of human trafficking, the merits of social media in framing and promoting the collaborative governance. In conclusion it highlights the dignity of human as end of life itself instead of as biological tool of reproduction in the capacity of a woman, it evaluates social media as effective tool to facilitate the political objective of collaborative governance.

Keywords: Chained woman scandal, Collaborative governance, Tacitus Trap, Trafficking of women.

1. Background and History of Trafficking of Women in China

1.1 The Chained Woman Scandal

In late January 2022, a video of a woman with eight children in an isolated village in China's Jiangsu Province was uploaded to Chinese social media. In the video, the woman was chained by her neck, dressing shabbily and appearing to have mental illness. What is most appalling is that the woman's family turned a blind eye to her poor physical and mental conditions and her terrible living circumstances. The woman's husband even appeared on local social media for raising eight children as a beneficiary of China's successful anti-poverty policy. With the deep dive of investigation, the public finds that the woman is a victim of human trafficking in China. With further investigation, the evil of trafficking of women in China is being steadily uncovered, calling for collaborative governance to search for effective resolutions and pertinent policies on the protection of women's rights in China.

1.2 Human Trafficking

Theoretically, human trafficking is defined as the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service, which is mainly divided into four types: sexual exploitation, forced labor, child trafficking, and human organ trafficking, typically in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation (Oxford languages and google, 2022). According to The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), if a person is involved in sexual exploitation, whether intentionally or not, is considered "an act of trafficking". Human trafficking is the third largest illegal trade in the world after drug smuggling and arms trafficking, according to International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conservatively estimates that 2.5 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking. These are the stark figures we encounter in a civilized world today.

1.3 Trafficking of Women in China

According to The SAGE Handbook of Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery, China is a major source country for human trafficking, as well as a transit and a destination. Trafficking of women in China includes both transnational and domestic trafficking. Transnational trafficking of women in China varies in different purposes, from sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and illegal adoption to being family slaves. In terms of cross-border trafficking, many victims are traded from Southwestern China to other parts of the world (such as Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, etc.). At the same time, according to The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the women abducted to China are mainly from Vietnam, Russia, North Korea and Myanmar.

According to an analysis of cases of women trafficking in China from 2007 to 2008 on Chinese media, Yunnan and Guizhou are the main source provinces of trafficking of women. In 2022, with the exposure of the chained woman, Fengxian County, Jiangsu Province in central China has become a high-profile destination for trafficking of women.

2. Reports on Trafficking of Women in China

Problems that have long plagued Chinese society, such as the imbalanced sex ratio, the marriage pressure for males, especially in poor rural areas, the preference of sons rather than daughters, and lack of labors in economically boosting coastal areas. And these social and economic factors have caused rampant human trafficking in China. And the historical, cultural, and ethical conflicts behind these social problems have never been taken seriously or attempted to solve by government because of its keeping-stability politics.

Before the chained woman scandal was made public by social media users, calls for protection of women's rights are limited to just a few news reports and documentary literature. For example, the documentary *The Dark Swirl* (1988) published by Xuzhou Daily reporter Tang Dongmei recorded a particularly influential case of trafficking of women in Jiangsu Province in the 1990s, where over hundred women were trafficked as tools of reproduction and sexual slaves. Previously, China's social network was undeveloped, the scope of coverage was relatively limited, and the news or message was often shielded off, thus the trafficking of women has rarely been able to attract the public attention. No obvious social protests were staged against the authoritarian keeping-stability politics. As a result, the agreement-seeking and collective action processes could not be formed to generate proposal and policies on the protection of women's rights.

3. Key Variables of Trafficking of Women in China

3.1 Sex Ratio Imbalance

Chinese farming has been based mainly on manual labor, family could get better economic returns by raising boys as reliable economical resources, a historical, cultural, and economic sense of "preference of boys rather than girls" was developed and gradually became popular mentality in Chinese society. The one-child policy in the 1980s further deteriorated the imbalanced sex ratio. As time passes on, the marriage squeeze caused by the overpopulation of marriageable-age men has become one of the most serious troubles in China. Take Jiangsu Province for example, the five National Population Censuses of China since 1953 has disclosed a true story that the sex ratio of the 0-year-old population in Jiangsu Province was higher than that of the whole country four times. In 2000, the sex ratio of the birth population in Jiangsu Province was 116.51, and the sex ratio of City Xuzhou, where the chained woman scandal was reported, was 126.79. By the end of August 2005, the sex ratio of the 0-year-old population in Xuzhou was as high as 172.44.

Within the authoritarian discourse, keeping-stability is adopted as the most prioritized politics by Chinese government after Deng Xiaoping's reform and open-door policy. Since the family is described as the cornerstone of social stability, Chinese traditional family values are admired in the conviction that "women exist to make families stable and strong". Single-man living in rural areas and in poor financial conditions caused by marriage squeeze is considered to be an unstable factor and an obstacle to China's social development. In the 2010s, helping them marry and start families became an urgent policy issue for various Chinese local governments. After the anti-poverty policy launched in 2013, some local governments in China even implemented the "anti-marriage squeeze" policy to encourage rural young women to stay in their hometowns and strive to reduce the imbalanced sex ratio of rural young men to rural young women. In 2016, the Women's Federation of Hainan Province collaborated with the local government to organize blind dates for five impoverished counties in the area, and no obvious alleviation to marriage squeeze is thus achieved. All the deliberation and consensus-based decision-making, and implementation and adaptation processes of

these collaborative governance groups including various-level local governments and NGOs, are regarded by the public as a negative collaboration that infringed women's rights, merely reducing women to sexual slaves.

Furthermore, the dire situation of women was even worsened by poverty. The ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor in the economy-centered China is another incentive for the serious trafficking of women in China. In 2020, China's Gini coefficient is 0.468, which is at a relatively high level. In the 1980s, with the relaxation of restrictions on population migration to agree with the reform and open-door policy, farmers began to have tradable currencies, thus human trafficking gradually flourished in China, especially in her rural areas where single men community constitutes a human market to trade on trafficked women. In the due case, City Xuzhou is located at the intersection of central provinces and is an important railway hub in China, such geography and transportation convenience facilitated the so-called "brides trafficking". According to Tang Dongmei's documentary *Dark Swirl*, about 2,500 women living in Yunnan Province were trafficked to City Xuzhou from 1988 to 1990, and such trend for women trafficking has been increasing with the improved economic conditions enabling local farmers to buy and jail trafficked women from remote undeveloped areas in the southwestern provinces and even from neighboring Southeastern countries.

3.2 Weak Laws, Unjust Policies and Immoral Sex Culture

How to help the victims of trafficking? What organizations and institutions should provide the sufficient rescue resources? What kind of resources should be provided? How long does it take victims to recover after being rescued? These questions have been haunting around in Chinese civil society. Due to the lack of general principle guidelines in the deliberation and consensus decision-making process, no stakeholders could accomplish their moral and social responsibilities in conducting formal collaborative governance together with administrative executives at various levels.

Another obvious factor is that laws and policies for the protection of women's rights are very weak in essence in China. For example, in Article 241 of China's Criminal Law, there is only a basic penalty of up to three years for buying trafficked women. In paragraph 6 of Article 241, there's even a statement "If a trafficked woman is bought, and there is no abuse to the bought woman, there is no obstacle to her rescue, or one who buys the trafficked women does not hinder her from returning to the place where she's from, the punishment may be reduced." Criminals involving in trafficking of women are even less punished than those who endanger precious and extinct wild animals in China. There is a serious punishment imbalance in China between the crime of trafficking of women and the crime of trading precious and endangered wild animals.

In addition, the Chinese judicial system does not support divorce, and the freedom to divorce is terminated by a "cooling-off period". The County Fengxian People's Court, where the scandal was reported, refused the trafficked women's requests for divorce on many occasions. An article by BBC in July 2021 argued that based on the current political climate in China, Chinese women protested against the lack of effective laws and policies for the protection of their rights with the fallen birth rate and the older age of first marriage in recent years.

4. Proposed Solutions

4.1 Call for Effective Collaborative Governance

As the chained woman scandal provoked broad social protests and outcry on social media, the Jiangsu provincial government was forced to set up a province-level investigation, collaborating with the local governments to find out a proper solution to the problem. However, it could not convince the public due to the lack of transparency and open supervision relating to the chained woman scandal. Chinese netizens have criticized and protested through various forms such as on-the-spot investigations, satirical cartoons and articles, and protest videos. They employ the social media as collaborative system platform to further social protests to garner information and resources, forming a nation-wide call on Beijing to set up a national investigation team to cooperate with diverse interest

groups, seeking for a resolution to eradicate the evils of trafficking women that have long plagued Chinese society, and to promote effective policies and laws to protect women's rights.

4.2 Deliberation and Decision-Making Processes to Protect Women's Rights

The chained woman scandal involves trafficking of women, illegal detention, sexual assaults, abuse of mentally ill patients, gender inequality and incest in sharing the insane woman by the family's father and two sons and many other social issues of crime in nature. The human rights and ethical issues involved have long plagued Chinese society and hindered her social civilization. With easy access to internet by modern technology, the Chinese social movements have been rapidly promoted on social media at home and abroad, paving a new and effective way for the public to speak out and protest on a large scale, thus promoting policy reforms and helping solve many tough social problems. In the chained woman scandal in early 2022, various social media platforms, such as WeChat, Sina Weibo, YouTube and a variety of search engines have demonstrated their merits in framing, monitoring, reaching consensus and consolidating collaborative governance. Numerous organizations and individuals have joined the public stream to speak out for the chained woman, as well as to protest against the sexual discrimination and women suffering without legal and policy protection. It can be said that the voices from social media and NGOs for the chain women, the collective actions of diverse NGOs to solve the dilemmas faced by Chinese women, and the deliberation between NGOs and the local governments, etc., all reflect an effective abnormal collaborative governance model in an authoritarian regime, especially on the deliberation and consensus-based decision making, as well as the implementation and adaptation processes under an authoritarian regime.

4.3 Public Involvement, Joint Problem-Solution, and Consensus-Based Decision Making

In a free democracy, public involvement and decision-making are often important elements of the final phases of collaborative governance in deliberation and consensus-based decision making. Public involvement, in particular, is a complementary role that cannot be ignored in the final phase of collaborative governance in consensus-based decision making. Because collaborative governance concerns itself with public policy and the public good, its impact extends beyond the interest parties in the collaborative process at the collaborative governance table, and decisions made in a collaborative governance process will affect the general public in both agreement-seeking and collective governance action processes. Public involvement itself reflects a democratic feasible form. However, with rapid development of the technology and the popularization of internet, Chinese people could deftly use the ubiquitous social media with easy access to conduct social protest movements by online posts, comments, reposts, curating and sharing. This protest form does not only adequately reveal an inevitable trend of democracy, but also reflects the public involvement in the deliberation and consensus-based decision making process in the collaborative governance. Chinese people share information and resources from different interest groups through the Internet, and they participate in discussions sincerely and freely, framing common concerns, expressing different interests and needs, reaching a consensus on combating the trafficking of women in China with collective actions. At the same time, in terms of joint learning and joint problem-solving, Chinese netizens have also gathered effective information by sharing data-banks and historical reports on trafficking of women in China, availing themselves the advantage of various digital platforms to expand the influence of social protests. As a result, more and more people have realized the earnestness and urgency of human rights protection in terms of saving the chained woman by calling on Chinese government to introduce more effective public policies to protect human rights, especially women's rights.

5. Conclusion

Taking the collaborative governance process model as the theoretical basis and the problem of trafficking women in China as the background, this paper discusses an abnormal collaborative governance model under an authoritarian regime, specifically focusing on the application of the deliberation and consensus-based decision making, and implementation and adaptation processes of collaborative governance toward the chained women scandal and the protection of women's rights in China. The conclusions of this paper are as follows:

First, it is well perceived that the chained woman scandal is a moral evil haunting the Chinese society. It violates the Kantian formula that any person should be treated as end itself, not to be treated as means to an end and the end symbolizes the dignified imageship of person with independent mind instead of as a biological tool for animal life.

Second, it is acknowledged as public involvement under an authoritarian regime. In authoritarian regime, social protests on social media may mobilize broad and sufficient public involvement, serving both as starting point and effective dynamic of collaborative governance process. Social media has shown the potential political values in openness, democracy, and human rights besides its being communication tools. It can break through the restrictions imposed by the authoritarian regime on citizens' freedom of speech and protest rights. At the same time, social movements on social media may also function as effective means of monitoring government operations, promoting collaborative governance, and advancing democracy. With the chained woman scandal, we could understand this unique process of promoting collaborative governance as an abnormal form under an authoritarian regime to justify the normal code of collaborative governance in a free democracy.

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