THE TRAFFIC IN WOMEN FOR MARRIAGE IN CHINA: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ping Zhuang is the deputy director of the Women’s Studies Centre and an associate professor in the Department of Sociology, Shandong University, China. She was a visiting scholar at the University of Regina, Canada from February 1997 to May 1998 and prepared this paper at that time.

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Introduction

The past two decades in China have been a time of great social transformation, a blending of the new and the old and an ongoing challenge and defense of modern and traditional ways. Like dying embers, some old issues are glowing again, rekindled under a climate that is both confrontational and harmonious. For example, the phenomenon of trafficking in women for marriage—a problem long kept silent—had slowed to a stop for about 30 years. But in the 1980s, the phenomenon revived and rapidly spread to almost all provinces in mainland China, especially the provinces of Sichuan, Hunan, Guizhou, Shandong, Hebei, Henan, Anhui and Neimengu.

The traffic in women for marriage has grievously harmed the rights and interests of Chinese women. It has damaged the physical and mental health of its victims and their kinfolk and become an issue of public health, particularly in regions of heavy trafficking. However, almost no policy attention has been given to addressing this problem as a public health issue, and only a few researchers have been willing to look deeply at it. Most researchers, including those in the academic field, are concerned with what they believe to be other, more important social issues. Because of this focus on other issues and, more to the point perhaps, because women in China have not gained the social status they deserve, it is difficult to obtain accurate representative figures on the true extent of the trafficking problem.

In this paper, I will first provide a context to the phenomenon of trafficking in women in China by outlining the impact of the country’s social and economic transformations on the status of Chinese women over the last 50 years. I will then analyze the problems and the causes of trafficking in women for marriage with the hope of drawing attention within certain circles in China to this important women’s health issue. In order to eradicate trafficking, it is important that we establish a sound, common strategy. In the final section of the paper, I will propose some countermeasures to the trade of women in China.

Research for this paper draws upon documents made public by various levels and departments of the Chinese government, the Statistics Bureau of China, public information sources as well as information obtained in interviews I have conducted.

Social and Economic Change 1949 – 1996

China is a developing country in the midst of rapid economic and technological growth. At the same time, it is an ancient culture steeped in tradition. In its modern history, China has suffered several “invasions” from the West. Economically, China has lagged behind nations of the “developed” world for reasons both external and internal. Moreover, the level of education throughout China remains low. In fact, it has only been 80 years since China cast off its burden of feudal monarchy, and it is not yet 50 years since the creation of the People’s Republic of China following civil war and the War of Resistance against Japan (1938-1945).

In the 30-year period following 1949, China continued the momentum of class struggle and maintained efforts to propagate “left-trend” thought in socio-political matters. In the economic sphere, the “planned economy” was instituted as was the practice of “average distribution”—the planned economy’s policies of guaranteed employment and food. It was during this period that the emancipation of Chinese women was begun.
1949 to 1977

In the early 1950s, the Chinese government put into practice a series of political principles resulting in an equalization of the sexes in a number of areas. The Chinese Constitution (1950) defined the equal legal status of women and men, thus serving to push women forward both economically and politically and quickly improving their social standing.

At this time men and women enjoyed equal pay (equal salaries in the cities and equal work points in rural areas) for equal work, albeit that the government’s policies of the day encouraged high employment and low income throughout the country. Since 1950, the employment rate for women has reached 75 to 80 percent, which is one of the highest rates of employment for women in the world. In comparison, the 1991 labour participation rate for Canadian women stood at 58 percent (Statistics Canada, 1992).

Along with changes in the workplace, great changes were also taking place in the traditional Chinese family. Women were encouraged, as an official policy of the government, to “leave the home,” find work and become an equal part of “employment units” established by the government.

Women’s position in society continued to grow and strengthen from 1949 onward. The Chinese government established organizations for the protection of women’s rights and benefits such as the All-China Women’s Federation. Beyond matters of employment and career, women gained equal rights in many areas, including education, marriage and inheritance. Perhaps the greatest gain took place in the realm of consciousness. Possibly for the first time, Chinese women developed an awareness of their inherent value and rights, their true capabilities and the greater possibilities opening up for them.

In the practical political arena, the early stages of women’s emancipation in China proceeded from the requirements of nationalistic government policies, not from the economic requirements of the marketplace and not from the efforts of a feminist movement. In ideological terms, women’s emancipation reflected the ideals of Chinese communist justice based on the principle of “equality for all.” Some popular slogans reflecting those ideals were “Both men and women are the same because the times have changed,” “Women can do anything that men have done” and “Women hold up half the sky.” On the social plane, emancipation served the interests of the state administrative goal of greater centralization.

1978 to 1996

Over the past 20 years, tremendous changes have taken place in China. A market-driven economy (comparatively speaking) has replaced the planned economy. In the ideological sphere, Chinese society has abandoned the principles of class struggle and moved toward relatively greater freedom of speech. There are now many contending schools of social and economic thought evolving in China. In the area of employment, the reliance upon the “iron rice bowl” and average distribution is gradually giving way. And in the cultural arena, China has opened its doors to the
world and western culture has been quick to enter. What is most apparent is that Chinese society has changed dramatically and continues to undergo great social and political transformation.

In recent times and certainly since the move to a market economy, women have begun to encounter a new set of problems. The planned economy is gone and so are the advantages that came with it. The state no longer guarantees work or provides job security; instead, market forces dictate employment patterns. Chinese workers now must compete for jobs in the cities, and as factories and businesses lay off their employees, women are the first to go.

In the countryside, there are problems for women as well. The rural economic reform of the “contracted responsibility system” linking remuneration to output, as well as the aspiration for greater wealth, have lured the rural labour force away from farmlands and into city, town and township enterprises in non-agricultural sectors. Rural women have been left to bear the major burden in agricultural production, and this has led to a significant demographic shift. In some rural areas, women comprise up to 70 percent of the labour force (Zhuang, 1994).

Changes in the education patterns have also affected women as a group. In a society becoming increasingly materialistic, the need to make money takes on greater importance and, predictably, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased. For the last ten years at least, many children have been required to discontinue their education because their families want them to work and bring more money into the home. Here too, girls are the first to make the sacrifice. For those women who are able to continue their studies, problems arise after graduation. In the past, China’s planned economy ensured that every college or university student had a job upon graduation, but with employment no longer guaranteed, graduates must now compete for good jobs. Not surprisingly, those last to be considered are the female graduates.

Prostitution, a re-emergent problem that has taken on new meaning in China’s market driven economy, has also affected women’s status. In 1952, the Chinese government declared to the world that prostitution had been eradicated and, indeed, from 1952 to 1977 prostitution virtually disappeared from Chinese society as a result of wide-sweeping reforms. Before the victories of the communist forces (between the 1920s and the 1940s), the women and girls turning to prostitution often did so as a matter of basic economic survival and necessity. However, the prostitution emerging now is a different form. Many women are turning to this profession with the idea that it will bring them a “better life” and greater social advantages.

In the early 1970s, China began an official policy of birth control in order to reduce population pressures. The policy itself has created some unexpected problems that also have had major consequences for women. For instance, the attempt to control the population is now seen as the main reason for a large and increasing gender ratio imbalance that favours males. With families restricted in the number of children they can have, and with male children regarded as more desirable than female children, China now has a huge surplus of males. In 1990 with a total population of nearly 1.3 billion, China had approximately 36.2 million more men than women (Statistics China, 1993)—a number greater than the entire population of Canada. With so many men in need of wives and so few women available to satisfy the need, a whole new illegal trade in women has arisen. The country’s new market economy has played a major role in creating the
conditions that have made possible this growing trade. Although prohibited by the state, trafficking in women for marriage has so far proved impossible to stop.

Problems†

It is important to recognize that trafficking in women in China is only part of a larger, global problem. In fact, trafficking is a world-wide social phenomenon in which women are seen as a commodity to be bought and sold, while the trafficker (the seller) reaps the benefits. The following features are peculiar to the problem in China but they may also apply to the problem as a whole.

The main purpose of trafficking women is marriage.

Since the 1980s, the fate of most women lured into the trafficking trade in China has been to become the “wife” of a total stranger. Only a small proportion of the women is sold into prostitution or rural sweatshops. Most buyers are unmarried peasant men who usually live in poor or remote districts of China (Jaschok & Miers, 1994: 264).

Women sold “voluntarily” into marriage coexist with women forced into the trade.

On the one hand, women volunteer to be sold as wives through, for instance, “matchmakers” who profit from the sale. On the other, women are forcefully abducted or coerced into the trafficking trade. If a buyer isn’t satisfied with the “wife” he bought, he can resell her.

Statistics obtained from government departments in the province of Shandong indicate that of about 80,000 women sold for marriage in that province from the mid- to late 1980s, approximately 30,000 had been abducted from more than 10 provinces, cities and autonomous regions. During the same period (1985-1989), about 25,000 women entered Xuzhou city and its six counties in the province of Jiangsu. An estimated 6,000 of these women (24 percent) had been abducted. In the Hunyuan county of Shanxi province, 23 of 28 townships saw the arrival of 590 women who had been sold into marriage; 454 had been abducted. According to a report in the Chinese Legal Daily an estimated 40,000 women had been kidnapped and sold or lost within China (cited in the South China Morning Post, July 1, 1991).

For the most part, the women sold voluntarily into marriage suffered little harm. Those forced into marriage, however, were often treated with extreme mental and physical cruelty. In order to profit from the trade, it was not uncommon for traffickers to swindle the women, lure them with promises of gain and resort to physical violence as a means of control.

Trafficking moved women far from their hometowns and across provinces.

† Except where noted, the data in this section were gathered in the early 1990s during my research on the issue of trafficking in women in China.
Trafficking on a large-scale in China is possible because of the country’s geographic, historical and socioeconomic conditions as well as the particular needs of the traffickers and the buyers. Most of the women sold through trafficking came from the poor distant areas of Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and Hunan in southwest China. Statistics from Wan county in Sichuan indicate that 14,000 women were lost in the district between 1982 and 1989. During the same period, 1,000 women exited Yanbian county (among them were women of minority nationalities such as Li, Lili, Miao and Meng). Another 800 women and children were abducted from Funing county in the province of Yunnan. Many of these women were moved into the provinces of Hebei, Shandong, Henan and the northern part of Jiangsu. Some 5,000 women were sold into Quyang county in the province of Hebei throughout the 1980s and, in the late 1980s, 680 women entered Gaoqing county in the province of Shandong. These numbers indicate that the trade in women in China flowed primarily from the provinces and autonomous regions of the southwest into the northeast, and from mountain and border areas into the interior and the prairies.

Many women lost contact with their families, often because of poor education, language barriers and/or restraints the buyers imposed on the women’s freedom. Some victims did not even know the names of their home provinces or counties. It was only by tracing their accents and references to particular geographical landmarks that the police were able to help the rescued victims return home. Many women suffered severe, long-term distress from losing contact with their families and from living in strange and difficult environments.

The traffickers were well-organized and devised many clever tactics to help them carry out their operations smoothly and over great distances. Since it was important to prevent their victims from escaping and to avoid being trailed by police, the traffickers formed underground gangs. These gangs operated like assembly lines efficiently moving women across provinces, with the victims changing hands quickly from one trafficker to the next before reaching their “dens.” Small gangs had three to four members; larger ones, up to 100 members. Each gang was strictly organized and its activities carefully plotted and concealed. Each had its own special codes and jargon, with gang members giving false names and addresses whenever they checked into hotels or reported their status to authorities. The extent of this highly organized activity is evident from a nation-wide hunt from May to October 1990 when police arrested 2,630 gangs and 10,309 gang members involved in the traffic of women (Li Ming, 1992). By 1996, 1720 of the 254,155 persons charged by the prosecuting arm of government were major criminals accused of trafficking in women and children (People’s Daily, March 21, 1997).

The women “up for sale” were often seriously hurt.

In the eyes of traffickers and buyers women were not human beings, but things--a piece of private property arbitrarily selected and sold--often hijacked from trains, buses, hotels, workplaces or dance halls (Jaschok & Miers, 1994). The traffickers would haggle over the price of each victim on the basis of her physical features, age and health. (This was known as the negotiated price by quality). Whenever a woman passed from one trafficker to the next, her cost would increase. Each woman could fetch a price anywhere between 2500 to 5000 yuan, equivalent to $400 to $900 U.S. (1990 rate of exchange). With huge profits at stake, it was not uncommon for traffickers to intimidate, bribe, anesthetize or use even harsher methods of enslavement if they thought it was necessary. The South China Morning Post (August 31, 1991) reported the severity of the situation:
One… slave trader is Ho Laiwen, a farmer in Hunan province and the boss of the notorious ‘One Hundred People’s Gang’… [He] employed a team of surveyors to select young female victims, kidnappers to abduct them, a network of transport crews to ferry them across the nation, receivers to hide them and, finally, a unit of superb salesmen to market his stock. Gang members invariably brutalized the young women, and customers were allowed to inspect and handle the merchandise, police said. The salesmen promised prices would be adjusted to the quality of the goods … .

Captured women were not only of Han and minority nationalities but included non-resident ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese residents. Ranging in age from 14 to over 50, these women represented all walks of life: peasants, city workers, state personnel and university and graduate students (Zhuang, 1991).

The mass media found that all women sold through trafficking had completely lost their rights and dignity and were forced to suffer many hardships. Traffickers raped, bound and battered their victims. Once bought, many women were forcefully retained, sometimes kept in cellars or in long-term bondage. Some victims of on-going rape suffered severe psychological damage and were sold several times—often for a higher price—because their buyers found them unsatisfactory. Some were granted freedom by their buyers only after they had been forced to bear children and were then deemed unable to escape. Most significant is a 1994 World Bank paper estimating that 30 percent of the deaths among otherwise healthy rural Chinese women were due to suicide. The paper goes onto note that “[t]his finding is consistent with reports of mass suicide in rural China among women forced or sold into unwanted (and often violent) marriage” (World Bank, 1994:19).

Victims of trafficking suffered long-term mental torment of various kinds.

After being sold and repeatedly raped, most women became pregnant. They suffered the double humiliation of being raped while imprisoned and being forced to bear the rapist’s children. For many victims, the psychological effects of their experiences were more debilitating than the physical effects, even if they were rescued. This was especially true for those victims with an advanced education. Fear, anxiety, traumatic stress disorders, and sleeping and eating disturbances were common long-term reactions to frightful experiences. I personally know a female university student who had escaped to her hometown after being abducted and taken to a remote village in Neimenggu, Autonomous Region where she had spent more than two years and borne two children. She had planned to finish her studies but eventually gave up those plans because of the psychological and physical effects of her suffering. Her future may well be ruined.

In many instances, victims of trafficking did not have their “marriages” formally registered in law and, instead, were forced to cohabit with the buyer. Victims who had families and children before they were abducted and sold experienced not only the bitterness of losing their own families, but also the despair of raising the children of the men who had bought them. Even after being rescued by police or through self-escape, these women continued to care about the children they had left behind. The legal, financial and emotional problems these women endured will affect them for the rest of their lives and will significantly impact their children’s development and education.
It can be argued the post-traumatic reactions of the women who experienced the processes of abduction and selling are more severe than those that result from other forms of violence against women. Moreover, trafficking in women for marriage represents a hidden obstacle to economic and social development. By sapping women’s energy, undermining their confidence and compromising their health, trafficking practices deprive society of women’s full participation (Carrillo, 1992). Victims may have difficulty making decisions, they may lose their life goals, and they may be unable to work or creatively express themselves when they are burdened with the physical and psychological scars of abuse. In rural China, where tradition and convention exert particularly powerful influences, rescued women may receive sympathy on the one hand and disrespect on the other. In the eyes of many local people, these women have lost their purity and thus their status is diminished. Public opinion in small rural communities is indeed strong and controlling and not at all conducive to the recovery of the victims’ physical and mental health.

 Trafficking threatens the health and safety of women and of society as a whole and impedes social and economic development.

The traffic in women has caused tremendous suffering for victims’ families and resulted in enormous property losses. In seeking lost wives or daughters, some families have spared neither expense nor time. They have advertised in newspapers and magazines and traveled afar to places where women were frequently purchased. Some family members were psychologically unable to perform their jobs. Others abandoned their work to seek lost kin. The consequences have been shattered families, wasted money and human resources and, in areas of intense trafficking, impaired social and economic development.

What is also important to acknowledge is the fear and insecurity arising from trafficking. During the most active period of trafficking, husbands were afraid of losing their wives, parents feared their daughters would be kidnapped, female workers were anxious about going to and from work and female students worried about going to and from school. It was not unusual for women and children to be escorted to work, school and home. Women were afraid to be out alone at night and career women especially were afraid to travel unaccompanied on business. In areas of heavy trafficking, women were particularly apprehensive about taking a taxi alone late at night. On a few occasions, I have experienced this fear and insecurity. For instance, before returning home by taxi after an evening meeting or party, women would ask each other to “please remember the licence plate number” –a potential clue if they were kidnapped. In short, stalking women for trafficking purposes limits their participation in social and political life.

The worst consequence of trafficking has been the damage done to women’s rights and social status. Historically, Chinese women have endured a low social status due to multiple forces of oppression, mainly, husband’s rights, clan power and the power of the emperor. For the last few decades, however, women have striven ceaselessly to increase their standing and have improved it considerably since the Second World War. Progress has not been easy. As the 1980s dawned, trafficking practices began to spread, becoming a means for some peasants to get rich. From the south to the north of China certain “special” villages and households quickly gained wealth through the traffic in women and children, with some village leaders organizing their relatives or friends of the same clan to engage in trafficking activities. But as the phenomenon received more
and more media attention, it became clear to all: Woman as a group had little social value—they could be bought and sold. Consequently and since 1989, the Chinese government has found it necessary to launch a nation-wide “Anti-Six Evils Campaign” against the traffic in women, prostitution, gambling, drugs, feudal superstition and pornography.

Causes

 Trafficking in women for marriage is an extremely complex phenomenon deeply rooted in gender-based power relations, sexual relations, values and social structures. In order to more fully understand trafficking and its causes, it is important that we recognize the social and cultural contexts in which trafficking flourishes.

*China’s unbalanced sex ratio caused a huge and potential market demand for wives.*

Overall, unbalanced sex ratios, with a high ratio of males to females, is not uncommon in many developing countries. It is often strongly desirable in these countries to add male labourers to the family because of the labour-intensive nature of work and because of powerful cultural ideas about the value of male children. Prevalent in China, for instance, is a consciousness that attaches importance to men and devalues women. This kind of thinking is associated with a higher mortality rate among female infants than among male infants which, in turn, produces a higher sex ratio in China than in developed countries. By adulthood, in developed countries, the ratio of males to females is about equal, or the number of women may be slightly greater than the number of men. According to 1980 population statistics covering 106 countries, the sex ratio averaged 100.5, or 100.5 males to every 100 females (United Nations, 1983). By contrast, China’s fourth nation-wide census (1990) shows 36.2 million more men than women. This creates a sex ratio of 106.3, which is an increase of 1 percent in this ratio since the third national census held in 1982 (Statistics China, 1993). China’s sex ratio at birth is also higher than the world average and is increasing. In 1981, the country’s sex ratio at birth stood at 108.5 and increased to 111.4 during 1989-1990. Of the total 2.4 million births in China in 1990, there were 1.3 million more males than females.

With the limited data on hand, it is only possible to report the sex ratios among the Chinese unmarried and divorced population for selected years during the 1980s. (The traffic in women was particularly intense during the latter half of the 1980s.) This data show a much higher sex ratio among the divorced and unmarried population than among the Chinese population as a whole (see Table 1). Men represent ¾ of this divorced and unmarried population; women, only ¼. The sex ratio among the unmarried population was also high for all calendar years reported.
Table 1.
Sex Ratio of Total, Unmarried and Divorced Population Groups in China, 1982 and 1984-1987 *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Sex Ratio of Unmarried Population</th>
<th>Divorced Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982 Census</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 Sample</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985 Sample</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 Sample</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample of 1987 Disabled Population</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 Sample</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census Department, National Statistical Bureau, China (1989)
* Excludes military personnel

A one percent sample of the 1987 Chinese census indicates the marriage rate among females is over 99.0 percent at age 30 (less than one percent unmarried). At age 40, the marriage rate among females stands at 99.7 percent (0.3 percent unmarried). On the other hand, the percentage of unmarried males in the 30-year age group is 9.5 percent or 10 times the number of unmarried women in the same age group. At age 40, the unmarried male population represents 5.7 percent of the total male population and 20 times the total number of unmarried females aged 40. The sex ratio among the unmarried population aged 40 to 44 reaches a maximum of 3,337 (33 unmarried men for every unmarried woman) (National Statistics Bureau, 1989). The number of men is about 5 percent greater than the number of women 15 years of age in the unmarried population, and there are about 45 percent more men than women in the unmarried population overall.

In 1990, nearly 24 percent of the unmarried Chinese population aged 28 to 49 lived in cities and 76 percent lived in rural areas; 97 percent of all were male (Tang Shen, 1996). These data lend support to other findings identifying the final buyers of women as mainly unmarried, divorced or disabled adult men, aged 28 to 49, living in rural areas. These men risked the possibility that the “wives” they purchased would either escape or be rescued by police, but they took that chance just because they could not find a partner in their own home location. Their need for marriage and a disproportionate sex ratio has, in fact, created a “social breeding ground” for trafficking in women. Despite repeated crackdowns, the crime cannot be stopped.

The imbalance in China’s sex ratio has a long history. Conventional Chinese wisdom considers boys to be of overwhelming importance to the family. In this view, when a son reaches adulthood, he is expected to support his parents and grandparents, and he is regarded as a form of
insurance for old age. As well, sons are thought to be the only means of ensuring continuous ancestor worship. Conversely, traditional views hold that female descendants can do very little for their ancestors (Guiso & Johannesen, 1981:176). A female child is considered to be a drain on family resources, one who provides no prospects of future gain and no return for the effort and money spent on rearing her. Consequently, females are not usually treated well during childhood.

In researching sex ratios in China, J. L. Buck (1937) studied 16,786 farms in 168 localities and 38,256 farm families in 22 provinces between 1929 and 1933. He found a large proportion of males among the resident rural population in both north and south China (a sex ratio of 108). There were even fewer females than males under the age of 20 and, at birth, the sex ratio stood at 112 (Buck, 1937: 375). Ironically, while many sons of poor peasant families were unable to find wives, parents considered their daughters to be of little use.

In earlier times, the Tongyangxi, Dianqi or Zuqi forms of marriage helped to solve the problems created by a large male population. Tongyangxi, which refers to the adoption of a daughter-in-law, was a relatively common marriage custom in China’s history. It allowed for the sale of a five- or six-year old girl to a family with a son. The family would raise her in exchange for her work and service and, when grown, she would marry the son. In this way, the custom of adopting a daughter-in-law secured the future marriage of male children.

When Dr. Fei Xiaotong, a prominent Chinese sociologist, was conducting his research on the village of Kai Xinangong in Jiangsu province, he discovered that the 1935 village census reported an unusually low ratio of females to males in the 0-5 age group (87:118 or 135.6). Only 131 families (37 percent of all families) had any girls under 16 years of age, and only 14 families had more than one girl. The census also indicated that 17 percent of married women and 39 percent of unmarried women were “adopted daughters-in-law.” There was, on average, one adopted daughter-in-law for every 2.7 households (Fei Xiaotong, 1945:32-34).

In those times, some men in poor rural areas could not even afford an adopted daughter-in-law as a wife, so they turned to the marriage customs of Gongqi and Dianqi. The Gongqi allowed financially strapped men to jointly purchase one woman, thereby obtaining a conjugal partner. The Dianqi allowed a man to rent another man’s wife for a contracted period of time. In both “marriages,” the woman was treated as an accessory to man. She was a sex object, a source of labour, a “machine” to produce sons and not regarded as having any social value.

In 1950, the Communist party enacted the first “marriage law” establishing the system of monogamy and forbidding the old undesirable marriage customs. The law could not, however, abolish the social and systemic problem of sex ratio imbalances.

*Geographical variations and regional gaps in economic development influenced the traffic flow.*

I have noted that the women sold through trafficking moved into provinces such as Shandong, Henan, Hebei and northern Jiangsu and that the phenomenon of women who ran away or were abducted occurred most often in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Hunan. As also noted these patterns show the direction of trade in women flowed roughly from the southwest into the
northeast, from the mountain and border areas into the inland and plains areas and from the poorer areas into the richer areas

The provinces where women were abducted are mountainous and hilly. In fact, mountains and hills comprise at least 80% of the terrain: Sichuan (93%), Yunnan (94%), Guizhou (100%) and Hunan (81%) (Chinese Map Press, 1981). Arable lands are few, decentralized and spread out in bits and pieces. Living conditions are poor and the intensity of women’s labour is high. In contrast, farmlands of the plains form a relatively high percent of the total terrain in the provinces of Shandong (65%), Henan (56%), Hebei (41%) and Jiangsu (95%) (Buck, 1937). These are winter-wheat areas where women’s labour is less intense than it is in the mountains and in the rice-growing areas of the south (Davin, 1976; 118-119).

From an economic perspective, the women obtained for sale came from regions experiencing relatively poor agricultural productivity and low income levels. Between 1988 and 1993, for instance, the average yearly net income per person in peasant families in the provinces of Guizhou, Sichuan and Yunnan ranked twenty-second or less amongst all thirty provinces, cities, and regions in China (see Table 2). In contrast, the provinces of Hebei, Shandong and Jiangsu into which women flowed had relatively high incomes. Clearly, geography and regional economic development gaps played important roles in determining the direction of the traffic in women for marriage and, indeed, this economic development gap helped to make trafficking possible. Interestingly, many of the women sold from poor regions into wealthier locations developed deep feelings of filial duty and an understanding of the reality of poverty. They came to accept their fate and did not attempt to escape.
Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Per Capita Income Yuan ($)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Per Capita Income Yuan ($)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Per Capita Income Yuan ($)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guizhou</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>435(54)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>579   (72)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>558(70)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>698   (87)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunnan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>541(68)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>675   (84)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>622(78)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>804   (101)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>680(85)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>953   (119)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>959(120)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1267   (141)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* U.S. dollar equivalent to eight Chinese yuan (1990 rate of exchange).


In addition to the influx of women into wealthier locations, large numbers of women were imported into economically underdeveloped counties and cities having below average standards of living. Poor standards of living were particularly characteristic of the southwestern and southeastern parts of Shandong, northern Jiangsu, five regions and cities in southern Hebei and other regions where the buying of woman was common. Many peasants in these areas had only recently—in the early 1980s—been lifted out of poverty. Although economic conditions had improved, the areas remained relatively underdeveloped. Most unmarried male peasants, aged 28 to 49, living in these areas were now in easier circumstances, but their marriage possibilities were limited for they had missed the best age for marriage when they had lived in poverty. Few women were willing to marry them so their usual alternative was to buy a wife.

Peasant customs surrounding traditional marriage in China reflect differing regional influences, but all marriage customs have one common feature: the tremendous expense. A young man could not easily find a wife without spending a few thousand yuan. Consequently, many poorly educated men with low incomes favoured buying a wife as a more realistic option and thus became participants in the crime of trafficking in women. The Anchen village of Xinle county
reported a total expenditure of 240,000 yuan ($30,000 U.S.) for the purchase of wives (Chinese Women’s Daily, 1989). This is a considerable financial outlay for a village of little wealth.

Rapid urbanization and huge population migrations are historical backgrounds to the crime of trafficking in women.

China is a large agricultural country with 70 percent of its population living in rural areas. Along with large-scale economic reforms, the developmental gap between city and country, industry and agriculture, and inland areas and coastal regions is gradually widening. For example, the 1994 average yearly net income per person in peasant families was nearly five times greater in Shanghai city than in Guizhou province (Statistics China, 1996). The comparative advantages offered by the richer regions and the productive sectors have enticed much of the rural population, especially the young, to leave the farm lands.

In the last two decades, market forces have gradually influenced and altered various factors of production. With industrialization and urbanization, the population has migrated from rural to urban areas and from primary sectors to secondary and tertiary sectors. Between 1990 and 1994, about 160 to 170 million rural labourers permanently or temporarily transferred from the agricultural sector to the non-agricultural sectors of China (Chinese Social Science Press, 1996:154). This large contingent of labour surging like tide water into cities (referred to as the labour tide) has been largely male due, in part, to educational factors and employers’ needs for male workers. In 1986, the ratio of men to women rural labourers transferring out of agriculture stood at 4:1 and increased slightly by 1994 (Chinese Social Science Press, 1996: 340).

Changing conditions nation-wide proved favourable for trafficking. In particular, the quickening pace of social mobility and the large number of rural labourers migrating to the cities provided opportunity to traffickers. Most labourers were not formally registered with the authorities in their new communities and could move about quickly. With changeable whereabouts, they were not easily managed or controlled by either city police or administrative departments. Traffickers exploited this situation, carrying out their crimes of abducting, trading and harboring women with the knowledge that their steps would be difficult for police to trace.

In addition, many poorly educated women with only rural living experience and who eagerly wished to leave their home villages became victims of trafficking. The younger rural women, especially, wanted to change the status quo, to leave rural life and earn a good living in the cities. They could achieve this goal in one of two ways. One way was to go to the city and find part-time work in a factory or as a housekeeper, but this meant difficulty and hardship and required courage and time. The alternative was marriage. For a poor rural woman, marriage could be a shortcut to better circumstances.

A local investigation from 1987 to 1989 by government departments in Liaocheng city in Shandong found that in 31 percent of the cases of women sold, the traffickers had promised either to help them find a boyfriend with a good job or to love and marry them. Nearly 48 percent of the women believed the traffickers would introduce them to a job in a large city or hire them as a business partner. Fifteen percent were enticed by offers of travel, and 6 percent were encouraged to move away in order to learn occupational skills. A similar investigation in Yunyang county of
Sichuan in 1988 found that 55 percent of the women sold through trafficking were lured by the promise of finding either a prosperous boyfriend or love and marriage.

*Impenetrable morality and the gender-sex system gave the practice of trafficking women a semblance of legality.*

Marriage, which involves gender relations and social structures, is a social system based on biological sex. One view holds that this system represents a relationship of dominance and subordination played out through the different social roles, norms and practices of men and women. It permeates society’s macro and micro spheres, pervading all institutions, influencing interpersonal relations and inflecting self-concepts. Institutionally structured access to and control over the resources and benefits of the family and of society as a whole have created a situation in which men are privileged and women are subordinated (de los Rios, 1993:13). The relationship between men and women in China is an expression of the deeper essence of Chinese culture. In fact, trafficking in women for marriage was a particular result of the interaction between Chinese socioeconomic conditions and the institution of patriarchy.

In a little over a decade, violence against women has been recognized throughout the world, particularly in the developed countries, as a serious problem. The victims of violence have won sympathy and help and offenses are condemned and dealt with according to law. Overall, most people do not accept violence against women and, in China, the government has been making great efforts to fulfill the legal provisions of equality between women and men. However, it must be kept in mind that certain sectors—especially rural areas—of the Chinese population have been apathetic to the problem of trafficking women.

In many of these areas, traditional moral structures and value concepts are deeply rooted and difficult to change. Whereas modern attitudes condemn acts of violence against women, including transactions of women for monetary profit, traditional attitudes consider it to be the “natural” right of men to dominate and have superiority over women. In other words, the right to dispose of wives and daughters, as dictated by a family’s needs and interests, is perpetuated by an acceptance of discrimination as the norm in all social relations. This has been the case in certain areas of China where trafficking women as well as other violent acts against women are considered a “legitimate” and “natural” means of maintaining the status quo within marriage and ensuring the continuity of the patriarchal family, culture and society.

Such attitudes are pervasive and long-standing. The penal code of the Qing Dynasty (the last dynasty in China) permitted husbands to sell adulterous wives or concubines (Meijer, 1989). In 1950, the Chinese government created a marriage law, which, for the first time in Chinese history, allowed women the right to divorce. Nonetheless, for two or three years after enactment of the law, many women were killed by their husbands or their mothers-in-law because they had raised the idea of divorce. It is estimated that during the first year of the law’s enactment, more than 10,000 women were killed in south-central China, and from 1950 to 1952, 11,500 women in eastern China were killed over marriage-related issues (Kazuko, 1989).

Until very recently, it was not considered a disgrace for a man to buy a wife. In the less developed areas of China, most villagers sympathized with unmarried local men who could not
find wives and, in fact, applauded a buyer for his purchase. Nor did the villagers condemn the trafficker. Some villagers went as far as protecting traffickers from the police, for they regarded trafficking as an aid to unmarried men and altogether different from crimes of murder, arson, and robbery. Similarly, certain village leaders considered the practice of importing wives beneficial for it solved the problem of unmarried village men and helped to normalize the public order. What was not considered were the interests and the sufferings of the women who were bought and sold.

Anecdotal evidence about a Hebei provincial township illustrates the unquestioned acceptance of trafficking and the traffickers. The township had been a base or “Red area” for the Communist party during the War of Resistance against Japan. During the late 1980s, the villagers hid the women bought through trafficking behind false walls and in cellars for protection from the police in the same way their predecessors had hidden from the invading Japanese. Village leaders would give secret information to relevant persons and collaborate with each other when the police rescued the sold women. Many villagers did not understand why the police would wish to rescue the women, and they collectively obstructed police activity, holding hostage the police or the judicial persons involved in rescue attempts. On occasion, undercover police had to disguise themselves as peasants in order to penetrate “enemy-control areas” – the villages where women bought as wives awaited rescue (Zhuang, 1991). According to Li Zhong Xiu (1990) of the All-China Women’s Federation, “People still believe that as long as they have money, buying a wife or child is their own business.”

Confucian principles and ethnic ideas of tolerance and conciliation, long revered in Chinese culture, were often pushed to the extreme thereby reinforcing the seeming normality of the trade in women. Many victims did not attempt to escape captivity even though they suffered greatly. Some poorly educated women were entirely unaware their plight was illegal, while some, living without money or resources in a strange place, did not know how to obtain legal protection. Chinese law has often seemed weak and inept when it confronted an ignorant and illiterate population with no knowledge of legal principles. The common Chinese expression “laws can’t function when the multitudes violate them” finds its full meaning in the issue of trafficking in women.

The vast illiterate and semi-literate population was fertile ground for the traffic in women.

After the 18th Century, the status of western middle class women gained ground. Women’s consciousness began to shift and feminism emerged. Such developments opened up the possibility for better education and further advancements in consciousness—both important components of social transformation. Education, for instance, is a process created to turn social and cultural knowledge into individual knowledge. It can deepen humanity’s capacity to understand itself and the surrounding world and it can optimize social practices by enhancing the individual’s ability to acquire knowledge and skills. Not only can education increase productivity and provide opportunities for personal development, it can also foster the development of progressive social structures. In contrast, the understandings and practices of an uneducated population tend to be constrictive and conventional. New ideas are accepted slowly and people have difficulty relating to the larger world. Data from China’s fourth (1990) census indicate that the population six years and over received, on average, only 6.3 years of education; that nearly 85
percent of the 180 million illiterate and semi-literate persons in China lived in the countryside; and that women comprised 75 percent of the illiterate population.

In China, the criterion for choosing a spouse is “a perfect match between a gifted man and a beautiful woman.” Generally, a young Chinese woman will choose a husband having a better financial, occupational and educational standing than she does, whereas men’s standard for a spouse is quite the contrary. Given that urban areas are more prosperous, a massive unmarried male population—much greater than the female population—is mainly distributed throughout rural or remote poor areas. Most of this population is illiterate, semi-literate or primary schooled. That the crime of traffic in women is hard to eradicate is related, in part, to the reality of this enormous illiterate and semi-literate rural population and partly to the fact that this reality forms part of the culture’s psychology. Investigative reports from the Procuratorial Bureau in Shandong suggest that most traffickers and buyers of women were themselves poorly educated or illiterate.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Cent with Highest Functional Level</th>
<th>Illiterate or Semi-literate</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Junior Middle School</th>
<th>Senior Middle School</th>
<th>University or College</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aged 15 years +</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 30 years +</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 50 years +</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 3, from a sample of one percent of the Chinese population, offer a general view of the education level of the advanced age and unmarried population. As age increases, the proportion of the population with a middle school education declines, whereas the proportion that is illiterate, semi-literate or primary schooled rises sharply. We can also note that 45 percent of the unmarried population over 30 years of age are illiterate and semi-literate and that 71 percent of the unmarried population 50 years and over are illiterate or semi-literate. It is apparent, then, that not only men and rural peasants, but also the illiterate and poorly educated constitute the majority of the older, unmarried population. These results are similar to the distribution of those who buy “wives,” where the percentage of illiterate or semi-literate is large. Many of these buyers regarded women as machines for bearing children and providing sex. They wantonly insulted and abused their “wives” and limited their freedom. Inconceivably, some northern peasants who bought southern women lived with them for years without understanding their language! It must also be noted that the majority of abducted women was also illiterate or minimally educated, easily taken in, unaware of legal rights and unable to adapt positively to new surroundings (Zhuang, 1991).

The law was powerless to stop the traffic in women.

On July 1, 1979, at the beginning of the Chinese reformation and the “opening” of the country, the Communist party enacted the first Code of Criminal Law. It had only 192 provisions. Clause 141, part 2, chapter 4 of the code read: “The crimes of trafficking women will be punished by a sentence of a set term of imprisonment under five years; crimes with more serious aspects will be punished with sentences of a set term of imprisonment over five years.” Moreover, clause 184 of chapter 7 provided that “the crimes of trafficking in males and females under 14 years of age and separated from family or guardians will be punished by a sentence of a set term of imprisonment under five years.”

The law of 1979 was simple. It did not anticipate the appearance of special criminal activity (e.g., trafficking in women and children, drug abuse, trafficking narcotics, intellectual piracy) after the reformation and the opening. No matter how severe the crime of trafficking women was in China during the 1980s, offenders did not receive a just punishment: only five years’ imprisonment or less. (The abduction of women was sometimes compared to the theft of an ox). As well, there was no relevant provision within the law to deal with those who purchased women and children or those who abused their purchases.

The problem was compounded by the short supply of police resources to handle cases and insufficient funds to support crackdowns. Trafficking was a cross-regional criminal activity. Each case had to be investigated separately so as to obtain evidence and provide rescue and repatriation—often over long distances. Language barriers increased the complexity of each case. Not only did the poorly educated victims have difficulty making their home addresses known, but many investigators in northern China did not usually understand the victims’ dialects. On top of that, the highly organized southern traffickers left no trail, moved quickly, lied and traded their abductees regularly. Efforts to keep trafficking in check proved quite inadequate.
Propositions and Countermeasures

Following almost two decades of organizing and education by women’s groups, violence against women has been recognized as requiring international attention and action (Heise, 1994). In the fall of 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations offered, for the first time, an official definition of violence against women. In addition, the United Nations and some individual governments recognized the practice of trafficking in women, which is defined and included as part of violence against women, as a legitimate human rights issue. Nonetheless, the policies of many international organizations and governments, including China, have virtually ignored it as a public health problem.

From the foregoing analysis, we can see that the traffic in women for marriage in China is a complex social phenomenon. All strategies implemented to eliminate it must confront the social structure of gender relations perpetuated in the country’s culture, traditions and beliefs, and they must be all-encompassing and long-term. Given these critical requirements, the following strategies are proposed.

*Improve the law to protect women’s rights.*

Women’s groups in various nations throughout the world often use legal provisions as effective weapons to improve the status of women and to seek equality (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Historically, however, China is a society without a legal system and one in which human relations are considered above judicial laws. Yet, since the reformation and opening of China, its legal systems and practices have been developing by degrees—developing and conforming to new standards of economic activity and through linkages with international society. From 1980 to 1997, the National People’s Congress and the Standing Committee of the Congress legislated a total of 324 laws. At the same time, the State Council created 780 administrative laws and regulations (People’s Daily, March 3, 1998).

With the rapid transformation of China, the binding, all-encompassing force of the traditionally established system of ethical norms has weakened. The old norms, moral codes and limited legal provisions no longer cover and control many aspects of contemporary social life. For this reason alone, it is important to create and perfect a national legal system to fill the “norm vacuum” and inform personal actions. As a tool embodying the essence and traditions of a nation and its forms of government as well as its mainstream motives, contemporary law must reflect the spirit of civilization, accord with social development and protect human rights. It must also aim to gradually change undesirable customs, crackdown on crime and protect civil rights, including the right of gender equality, in the process of delivering justice.

Quickly and directly perfecting the legal system to protect women is an obvious and desirable measure. As noted, the 1979 *Code of Criminal Law* did not provide the judicial department with a legal basis to punish those who either bought women or obstructed police rescuing women. Up until the end of the 1980s, this issue did not arouse much attention. But in 1991, the legal committee of the National People’s Congress passed a provisional law “to punish severely the crime of deceiving and kidnapping women and children.” From then on, numerous offenders were punished. At the same time, the number of criminal cases began to decrease. From 1991 to 1992, the total number of cases declined by 35 percent; from 1992 to 1993, 9 percent; and from

*Give play to the reaction of the Chinese government.*

Given the social conditions prevailing in China, the role of government as controlled by the Chinese Communist Party cannot be replaced by other political powers, parties or organizations. The government has the capacity to quickly and effectively bring all social resources into play and promote socioeconomic development and secure public order. The government can attempt to make the following improvements:

a) Implement appropriate laws and provisions, apply greater efforts to better protect the rights of women and investigate and penalize acts of trafficking through legal and civil measures;
b) Use governmental authority to promote resources and better integrate controls in order to govern, prevent and help resolve the issue of trafficking in women;
c) Adopt appropriate measures, especially within the field of education, to alter social and cultural patterns and practices which discriminate against women and replicate dominance and subordination;
d) Increase media awareness about sexist advertising, promote non-stereotypical representations of men and women and eliminate images portraying violence; and
e) Allocate adequate government finances and mobilize community resources for activities aimed at eliminating the traffic in women and providing support services to victims and employment assistance to help them overcome poverty.

*Work towards improving the social status of Chinese women.*

Trafficking in women for marriage reflects particular social and historical conditions which privilege men and subjugate women. As with other forms of gender violence, trafficking mirrors a culturally encoded pattern of asymmetrical power relationships between men and women. By internalizing socially prescribed expectations of maleness and femaleness, men and women are conditioned in different ways and influenced differently in the choices they make. Institutions ensure that those expectations are fulfilled by rewarding adherence to male and female stereotypes and penalizing deviations from them (Gomez, 1993:5). An essential goal, therefore, is to change the existing, conventional perception that females are of lesser value than males so as to genuinely improve the status of Chinese women, rebalance the sex ratio and help end the traffic in women.

The theme “equality, development and peace” emerged from the United Nations’ Decade for Women (1975-1985). Equality was sought for women in the First World; development, for those in the Third World; and peace, for women in occupied territories and war zones (World Bank, 1994). China is a Third World country seeking development and change, and it is this goal that provides Chinese women with both challenge and opportunity.
The process of China’s industrialization and urbanization has seen the agricultural portion of the gross national product (GNP) fall each successive year and, drop, altogether, about 25 percent (Chinese Social Science Press, 1996a). The “dual structural barriers” between city and country are breaking down and urban and rural labour markets are developing as an organic whole. Inevitably, these processes have empowered Chinese women to actively participate in social transformation. For instance, a growing non-agricultural sector, drawing upon the better-educated, has propelled Chinese women’s groups to promote education and garner the resources women need to compete and participate in the labour market.

Transformation of the Chinese market will certainly reduce the labour participation rate in traditional agriculture, increase child-rearing costs, increase the intensive use of arable land and weaken the base of small-scale peasant economies which favour sons. Along with structural change, new ideas about gender relations will be constructed and old ideas replaced. The reform of the whole of society has historically been connected to each step of Chinese women’s emancipation, and at this historical juncture, the goal for Chinese women is to become active participants, to speak out and decide what kind of development they want and how they may achieve it.

Expand the function and role of Chinese women’s organizations. The Communist party was built, in part, on its early advocacy of women’s rights. After wielding state power and making sexual equality a national policy, the party supported the establishment of the All-China Women’s Federation—a nation-wide network of women’s organizations working centrally and throughout provinces, counties, cities, towns, and villages. The various organizations comprising the federation have done much to defend the lawful rights and interests of women and children. They have helped women living in poverty, supported indigent girls in their return to school and trained unemployed female workers for the job market. But the federation has its own problems, such as a monolithic organizational structure. Moreover, its goal of improving women’s condition is often a mere formality—a little like talking a lot but doing little. Given the impact of trafficking on the status of Chinese women, the organization must strengthen its social work function in order to a) help alleviate the trafficking problem, especially in areas of heavy trafficking; b) help victims deal with their unfortunate marriages; c) engage the volunteer services of lawyers, psychotherapists and other professionals in providing consultation to victims; d) offer training, education and employment skills so that victims may carry on with confidence and with the knowledge of the laws that protect); and e) develop and evaluate plans for improving the health and well-being of both women and men.

_Promote relevant scientific research._

Over the past decade, there has been a tendency to emphasize China’s economic development and disregard its social development. This tendency is reflected in the minimal support of and budgeting for social and humanistic studies at the national and provincial levels of government. Although government has established and issued guidelines for applying for research programs, only one or two of the few hundred programs listed yearly in the guidelines throughout the 1990s has involved women’s studies. As a result, Chinese researchers interested in women’s issues have had to seek funds overseas. At the Forum of Women’s Studies Centres in Chinese Universities, held in the city of Zheng Zhou in July 1995, only about 8 of the over 40 delegates attending the
A related problem is that it was not until the early 1980s that the Chinese government established a policy for the use of statistical indexes. Only a small portion of the statistics amassed by the State Statistics Bureau during the 1980s included gender indices. And, as far as I know, relevant departments of the Chinese government as well as the All-China Women’s Federation have made no systematic investigation of violence against women in China—although this particular failing is not surprising given the cultural tradition of “report the good news, not the bad.” In short, many Chinese scholars concerned with efforts to have violence against women recognized as an international human rights issue are hampered by a lack of population based data, except for a small investigation of trafficking women and its health consequences. In reality, it is not only a shortage of state funds which contributes to the dearth of sex-specific data, but also a sexual bias in both information-gathering and compiling statistics.

Although women’s studies in China have been underway for some time despite obstructions, the government must make concerted efforts to increase its budget so that gender indices can be included in the data the Statistics Bureau collect. Government must also increase the number of national-level research projects that deal with women’s issues. As well, academic groups have a greater role to play in promoting research, collecting data and compiling statistics, especially concerning women’s health, the traffic in women and the prevalence of different forms of violence against women. Academics must encourage research into the causes and the consequences of these kinds of issues and evaluate the effectiveness of measures implemented to prevent and redress them. And, academics must disseminate their research findings to a broad audience.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of trafficking women for marriage is a social problem that re-appeared in China after its reformation and opening. It is a complex result of the cultural preference for sons and the needs of a small-scale peasant economy—both of which have contributed to an unbalanced sex ratio. Compounding the problem is the growing developmental gap between cities and country; between agriculture, industry and the service sector; among the different regions of China; and between an enormous illiterate population and the new, improving legal system.

The traffic in women for marriage is a most serious problem, injurious to women’s rights and health and causing inestimable suffering for both victims and their families. Although efforts are being made to keep the problem under control, the very conditions that created it still exist. Therefore, the prevention and redress of the traffic in women for marriage in China will be long-term and complex.
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