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**Author:                        James O. Finckenauer, Ph.D., Ko-lin Chin, Ph.D.**

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**Researching and Rethinking Sex Trafficking:  
The Movement of Chinese Women to Asia and the United States  
for Commercial Sex**

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Final Report

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To

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Principal Investigator: James O. Finckenauer, Ph.D.  
School of Criminal Justice  
Rutgers University  
Newark, NJ 07650  
Tel: (973) 353-3301; Fax: (973) 353-5896 (Fax)  
Email: [finckena@andromeda.rutgers.edu](mailto:finckena@andromeda.rutgers.edu)

Co-principal Investigator: Ko-lin Chin, Ph.D.  
School of Criminal Justice  
Rutgers University  
Newark, NJ 07650  
Tel: (973) 353-1488; Fax: (973) 353-5896 (Fax)  
Email: [kochin@andromeda.rutgers.edu](mailto:kochin@andromeda.rutgers.edu)

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## **Executive Summary**

Despite the concern and attention devoted to human trafficking in general and sex trafficking in particular over the past decade, there is still much about it that is unknown or subject to disagreement. And in general there has been little empirical research on the issue. Where there have been studies, the researchers have often drawn conclusions or generalized findings based on biased samples. Given this state of affairs, we have chosen in the study reported here to assume that prostitution is a multifaceted business with a proliferation of diverse women, and that therefore it is essential to study women in different sex venues and different destination countries in order to have a more nuanced and better balanced understanding of the transnational commercial sex business and its relation to sex trafficking.

In contrast to the prevailing research approach in this area, of relying upon subjects defined by others, we instead decided to cast the broadest net possible, and to interview subjects under the broadest range of possible statuses. We also decided to conduct our subject interviews under circumstances that would maximize the probability that the subjects would be forthcoming and not constrained by other motives or agendas.

In brief, we set out to conduct a study with the following specific aims:

1. To examine the underlying reasons for the illicit movement of women from China to destinations throughout Asia and to the U.S. for the purpose of prostitution.
2. To explore the structure or social organization of the movement of women from China to Asia and the U.S.
3. To understand the methods of recruiting, transporting, and managing Chinese women by various participants in the smuggling, trafficking, and sex businesses.

4. To investigate the economic aspects of smuggling, trafficking, and prostitution.
5. To examine the social adjustment and settlement patterns among Chinese women and the victimization and exploitation of these women by smugglers and traffickers and sex industry operators.
6. To analyze the individual and group characteristics of smugglers and traffickers and their relationships with gangs and organized crime.
7. To evaluate the problems and prospects of combating the movement of women from China to the rest of the world.

Our goal was to shed light on one group of women who go overseas to engage in commercial sex – in this case women from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) – and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the movement of these women and its possible relation to sex trafficking. Our underlying assumption is that commercial sex, the transnational movement of women to overseas sex venues, and sex trafficking are linked. In this study, we sought to explore that linkage, and to consider whether that linkage is as characterized by the U.S. government and the United Nations in their respective codifications of human trafficking . A secondary goal was to inform the development of better strategies and responses to cope with these phenomena.

### **Research Approach**

We included ten research sites in our project; eight in Asia and two in the United States. The eight Asian sites are Hong Kong, Macau, Taipei (Taiwan), Bangkok (Thailand), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Singapore, Jakarta (Indonesia), and Shenzhen (China), and the two U.S. sites are Los Angeles and the New York City metropolitan area. We selected

these sites because of reporting in the media, government reports, and other sources that indicated there were large numbers of Chinese women in the sex industries of these locations, and because we had firsthand knowledge from prior research that this was so.

One of the major premises underlying our research approach is the idea that the best sources of information about possible sex trafficking are the very people who might be most directly involved in it. These include most obviously women who are providing commercial sex services. We did not assume that these women are necessarily trafficking victims, but we did and do believe that the pool of commercial sex providers is a potential source for finding possible victims. Then there are the owners, operators or managers of the venues where those sex services are being provided, the law enforcement and other government officials who are charged with combating sex trafficking, the victim services providers who are charged with working with sex trafficking victims, and finally local individuals who can be key informants because they have good “street” knowledge and connections. Between December 2006 and August 2008, we conducted 350 face-to-face interviews with these groups of subjects – women who engage in commercial sex, sex ring operators, government officials/law enforcers, and NGOs/other key informants.

As we explain in the discussion that follows, we recognize that there are at least two other possible routes to finding sex trafficking victims which could be sources of information. One is law enforcement officials who have dealings with specific victims, and victims’ services providers and various NGOs who similarly have such contacts. Indeed, in other studies researchers have relied upon interviewing victims who were in the hands of law enforcement or who were in shelters. Much of what has been reported

about sex trafficking in the media and official reports has been drawn from this method.

We deliberately rejected this approach for reasons that are discussed in the report.

A second possible route to victims is through some of the operators who are directly involved in the sex trafficking business – pimps, fake husbands, document procurers, etc. --- who are also in the position of possibly putting researchers in touch with specific victims. In fact, we did interview a number of people who were engaged in the facilitation of commercial sex, and they referred some of “their women” to us to be interviewed. Whether or not they were sex traffickers however, and whether or not what they were doing could be considered sex trafficking, and whether the women in their charge could be considered trafficked victims, is hard to conclude, dependent as it is ultimately on how one defines sex trafficking. It is just that issue which is the point of our study.

Given that the ultimate goal of all sex trafficking is financial, we proceeded on the premise that sex trafficking victims must somehow be engaged in providing sexual services for money. This means they must be in settings or venues that are discernible to and accessible to potential paying clients. They cannot, in other words, be so hidden as to be inaccessible. We realize that our approach may be criticized because we did not find many *transnational* trafficking victims, but we did find that 10 percent of our female subjects had been *domestic* trafficking victims, i.e., had been victims in China before going overseas. To this criticism we would only say that we pursued every avenue in the 10 cities to find sex for sale, wherever and by whomever it was being sold. We interviewed between 15 and 18 women in each site for a total of 164 *xiaojies* (literally “miss”) -- Chinese females who were involved in commercial sex.

We initially proposed to rely upon respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to select our *xiaojie* subjects. RDS has very strict requirements, i.e., initial respondents must have knowledge of the size of their relevant personal networks, each respondent must be given a serial number for tracking purposes, and each respondent must be assigned serial numbers for the recruitment and tracking of other respondents who they refer. We determined early on that we would be unable to follow this procedure. First, it became obvious that our respondents had only the vaguest sense of the size of the *xiaojie* network of which they were a part. Second, we became concerned that respondents would be afraid and thus reluctant to be numerically identified, and further that they would be reluctant to identify other *xiaojies* by what they would see as a traceable serial number. In addition, we had only a relatively limited time in each site, and a potentially time consuming effort to actually use this technique was thus not feasible. Consequently, we had to rely upon a more traditional snowball sampling technique. As Table 2 in the full report indicates, such referrals of individuals and venues account for the vast majority of our interview subjects. As with any snowball sampling however, there are consequent limitations on validity and generalizability.

### **Findings and Conclusions**

Contrary to the popular image of the majority of women involved in commercial sex as sex trafficking victims, our data show that a variety of women from diverse backgrounds in fact go overseas to engage in prostitution – older as well as younger women; well-educated as well as poorly educated; married or formerly married as well as single, etc. Actually, we found that there is more diversity among the parties involved in prostitution

than is commonly supposed, and that to portray them all in the same way as victims is an oversimplification. Some four in 10 of the women we interviewed had engaged in prostitution when they were in China – before they went overseas. In fact, prostitution was the largest category of prior employment that was reported.

It is clear from our interviews that economic factors were the driving force behind whatever choices the women made. Many, as indicated, had already been the victims of circumstances. Whether they would have behaved differently or made different choices if they had had other options is, of course, unknown. Nevertheless, it would seem that greater economic opportunity for women in China would certainly reduce the pressure of economics as a major push factor in prostitution and sex trafficking. That said, once these women had already entered into prostitution, many of them were then receptive to or actively sought out the possibility of moving abroad in order to increase their earnings.

One way to view the process through which these women moved is in terms of what some criminologists call “bounded rationality.” The women’s decision making was bounded – constrained or restricted – by their social, physical and situational contexts, and their perceptions of those contexts. The individual assessments of the costs, risks and benefits involved are subjective, which is why different women in the same circumstances would make different choices; and why the same women may make different choices at different times.

Ultimately, we think that any failure to recognize the distinctions and nuances that actually characterize the commercial sex business, whether because of politicized moral positions or other reasons, helps neither the women themselves, nor leads to the development of coherent and effective practices and policies to combat sex trafficking.



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**Researching and Rethinking Sex Trafficking:  
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for Commercial Sex**

**Main Body**

**I. Introduction**

**Background**

A little known topic just a decade or so ago, the illicit movement of people both within and across national borders has began to draw worldwide attention since then (Scarpa 2008). A variety of developments account for the growth in both the size of the problem and in the attention paid to it: the collapse of the Soviet Union, the breaking up of Yugoslavia, vast socioeconomic disparities between, e.g., Mexico and the United States, burgeoning economic development in China, rapid advances in global communication and travel, increasing demands for cheap labor, a growing sex industry. The list could go on and on.

These developments taken together comprise what have come to be called the “push and pull” factors driving human migration (Massey et al. 1993). Push factors include both societal conditions – lack of opportunity, discrimination, persecution, civil war, etc. – and personal issues such as domestic violence and divorce that push the individuals suffering them to want to migrate. The pull factors are the opportunities – real or perceived – in developed and developing countries for jobs, for freedom, for safety, and so on. In most instances, the most dramatic difference between source countries and destination countries is economic opportunity. The demand for cheap labor in industrialized countries creates opportunity. With specific reference to the sex industry, countries that have lucrative commercial sex venues – brothels, massage parlors, karaoke

lounges, topless bars, escort services, and so on – and/or that are tolerant toward or have legalized prostitution create a simultaneous demand and pull for prostitution (Zhang 2007).

Would-be migrants with connections, professional skills, or education can and do pursue legitimate channels to pursue their dreams. For thousands of others, however, the legitimate channels are closed off. For them, the choice is to give up their ambitions, or to seek alternative means. This is where smuggling and trafficking come in. Here certain facilitating factors usually work in concert with the push/pull scenario. Those facilitators include liberal or porous border policies and corruption. Greasing the palms of officials is almost always necessary to secure documents and to avoid detection, especially when smuggling is involved.

Unable to follow the legal route of migration and for a price that can vary from a few hundred dollars in the case of Mexican coyotes (as those particular smugglers are called) to well up into the tens of thousands, all travel and necessary documentation will be arranged. Human smugglers are in the business of illegally moving people across national borders. Their clients are willing customers. Once the fee has been paid in full and the transaction has been completed, the customer, the person smuggled, is generally free and clear of the smuggling operation, although they are illegal aliens in their destination country (Kyle and Koslowski 2001).

Human trafficking is defined by the exploitation of victims. These victims are forced to work with little or no pay; they are beaten or raped; they and their families are threatened; they are deceived by being promised one job and then forced to work at another; they are controlled in their movements; and their documents are held (Brown

2000; Hughes 2000; Farr 2005; Kara 2009). Our focus here will be on this more insidious form of the transnational movement of human beings.

A good deal of attention has been devoted to this subject during the past decade or so. Literally hundreds of articles, books and reports have been published, especially in the past several years (Gozdziak and Bump 2008; Zhang 2009). So why do we need yet another examination of the issue? The answer is simple. Despite the concern and attention heaped on this problem, there is still much about it that is unknown or subject to disagreement. In general there is little empirical research on the issue, as was indicated by Sheldon Zhang in his review of the literature on human trafficking (2007: 122):

Much of the current discourse on human trafficking has not been guided by empirical research. The increased urgency in U.S. government policy and funding priority to combat trafficking in women and children has been influenced more by a moral panic that continues to gain momentum rather than by solid and systematic assessment of the problem. Research on human trafficking remains challenging due to its secrecy and political sensitivity.

Where there have been empirical research studies on sex trafficking, these have mostly been narrowly focused, for example relying on a single type of women engaged in commercial sex. Again, according to Zhang (2007: 122): “[t]he existing body of literature is plagued with methodological and analytical flaws. Researchers often drew conclusions or generalized findings based on biased samples (e.g., street prostitutes only, but no call girls or other indoor workers).” As suggested by Anthony DeStefano (2007) in his book *The War on Human Trafficking*, prostitution is a multifaceted industry with a proliferation of high-priced women, and it is essential to study women in different sex markets to have a nuanced and balanced understanding of the sex trade.

One of the biggest shortcomings in the extant body of research on human trafficking is the fact that it has included almost exclusively rescued subjects who were in the hands of law enforcement officials, advocates, or service providers (Cwikel and Hoban 2005; Gozdziaik and Bump 2008). Not included, for example, are any persons who may have initially been trafficking victims, but who have subsequently removed any indebtedness and have chosen to remain and to work wherever they are. Also excluded are any victims who escape on their own without contact or assistance by law enforcement or others, and any victims who just fall through the cracks because agency contacts fail to recognize them as being victims. Individually complex real life circumstances can get reduced to simple labels or categories by agency workers. In contrast to this approach of relying upon subjects defined by others, we think it is critical to find subjects by casting the broadest net possible, and to interview subjects under the broadest range of possible statuses. We also believe interviews should be conducted under circumstances that will maximize the probability that subjects will be forthcoming and not constrained by other motives or agendas. By this we mean it is preferable to interview them in their own natural settings, without the presence of a third party. This helps assure subjects that the interview is confidential, and that regardless of what is said there will be no repercussions and nothing to be gained by being untruthful.

We also think it is important not only to compare women from different sex venues, but also in different destinations. Again, the available empirical research on sex trafficking has mostly focused on only one group of women from one source country and in one destination country (Gozdziaik and Bump 2008). This approach overlooks the possibility that women from the same source country might have significantly different

traveling and working experiences, handlers, clients, payment arrangements and so on in different destination countries.

Given the limiting effects of these various negative aspects, which in turn have constricted the available explanations and understandings of the sex trafficking phenomenon, we set out here to conduct a study with the following specific aims:

1. To examine the underlying reasons for the illicit movement of women from China to destinations throughout Asia and to the U.S. for the purpose of prostitution.
2. To explore the structure or social organization of the movement of women from China to Asia and the U.S.
3. To understand the methods of recruiting, transporting, and managing Chinese women by various participants in the smuggling, trafficking, and sex businesses.
4. To investigate the economic aspects of smuggling, trafficking, and prostitution.
5. To examine the social adjustment and settlement patterns among Chinese women and the victimization and exploitation of these women by smugglers, traffickers, and sex industry operators.
6. To analyze the individual and group characteristics of smugglers and traffickers and their relationships with gangs and organized crime.
7. To evaluate the problems and prospects of combating the movement of women from China to the rest of the world.

We do not promise nor assume that we will lay to rest all the controversies or definitively answer all the questions about sex trafficking. Instead, our goals are to shed light on one group of women who go overseas to engage in prostitution – in this case women from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) – and to provide a more nuanced

understanding of the possible relationships among commercial sex, human smuggling and sex trafficking, so that we may develop better strategies and responses to cope with this phenomenon.

### **Clarification of Terms**

Throughout this report, we have chosen to use the terms “prostitutes,” “women who engage in commercial sex,” and the Chinese slang term for prostitute “*xiaojie*,” to refer to our female subjects. We do this to avoid such terms as “sex workers” as well as “prostituted persons,” since we fully understand the ideological construction and controversy surrounding the use of those terms (Barry 1981; Jeffreys 1997; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Outshoorn 2004; Stetson 2004; Miriam 2005). Whether commercial sex is sex work or violence against women is an empirical question to be settled by facts, data, and evidence, and not by ideological posturing on either side of the issue. Our study is actually about the social organization of the transnational movement of Chinese women for commercial sex, and thus may have relevance for sex trafficking as well as prostitution. At the very outset, we want to clarify what we mean by the following terms.

#### **Prostitute or *Xiaojie***

A prostitute is a woman who willingly engages in sexual intercourse for money. Of course, agreeing on what is “willingly” can be a problem, but we will return to this question later in the report. For our purposes here, we will use the Chinese word *xiaojie* interchangeably with the word “prostitute,” because *xiaojie* is the term used by the vast majority of our female subjects in the sex business to refer to themselves. The term *xiaojie* is composed of two characters: *xiao* which means “little,” “small,” or “young,”



and *jie* which means “older sister.” *Xiaojie* is usually translated as meaning “miss,” and people in Taiwan and Hong Kong often use the word *xiaojie* to refer to any young woman, regardless of who she is. Even in China, most, although not all prostitutes are called *xiaojie*, but not all *xiaojie* are prostitutes.

Beginning in the 1980s in China, waitresses at service facilities such as restaurants, hotels, bars and other entertainment venues were addressed as “miss,” which was considered a form of courtesy. But it was also in these establishments and at this time that prostitution, although illegal, reemerged. Because some of the waitresses provided sex services, the term “miss” thus became a euphemism for the term “prostitute.” In general, most prostitutes in China are called *xiaojie*, but some are called *jishi* (technician), or *falangmei* (hair salon lady). Strictly speaking, a *xiaojie* is someone who works in a nightclub, a KTV (karaoke/TV lounge), or in a dance hall as a hostess. She can insist that she is not a prostitute because she entertains customers only by sitting at their tables (*zuotai* or on stage), and does not go out with them (*chutai* or off stage). In reality, however, it is rare that a *xiaojie* can resist going out with a customer, or at least not for long.

A streetwalker is also normally referred to as a *xiaojie*. The term *jishi*, or technician, refers to someone who works in a spa or a sauna as a masseuse, but most *jishi* also provide sexual services. A *falangmei* is someone who works in a “hair salon,” but again as a prostitute. The use of these terms will become clearer when we discuss the operations of the various sex venues later in the report. To keep things simple, we will use the word *xiaojie* to denote all the Chinese women who are hostesses (*zuotai xiaojie* or *sanpei xiaojie*) in nightclubs, KTVs, and dancing halls, as well as those who are

technicians (*jishi*) in spas and saunas, hair salon ladies (*fangmei*) in hair salon-style brothels or streetwalkers.

We also want to clarify that, although we use the terms prostitute or *xiaojie* to refer to our female subjects, some of these subjects did not regularly (i.e. on a daily basis) engage in sexual intercourse with their clients. Some engaged in sexual intercourse only with certain customers, or with just one particular customer to whom they referred as their “husband.” And, some of them regularly provided other sex services such as oral sex, rather than sexual intercourse. All our subjects, however, provided sex services up to and including sexual intercourse, for money. Thus the terms defined above are applicable and appropriate.

### **Sex Trafficking Victim**

A sex trafficking victim is a person who unwillingly engages in commercial sex as a result of the use of force, fraud, or coercion. If the force, fraud, or coercion occurs only in the victim’s own country, we will refer to that victim as a *domestic* trafficking victim. If any of these criminal acts take place overseas, we refer to them as a *transnational* trafficking victim. All minors are by legal definition victims. The U.S. TVPA (Trafficking Victims Protection Act) has created a two-tiered definition: “severe forms of trafficking in persons” in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion; and “sex trafficking,” that is defined simply as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. In this report, when we use the term “sex trafficking,” we will be referring, unless otherwise specified, to the “severe forms of sex trafficking” that involve force, fraud, or coercion.

Among our female subjects in the sex business, there were domestic trafficking victims (those who were deceived into prostitution in China). These subjects will not be considered to be *transnational* trafficking victims if no force, fraud, or coercion was involved in their *transnational* movement and activities. To reiterate, while we regard certain of our subjects as having been domestic trafficking victims, we do not view them as continuing to be victims when we consider their prostitution overseas, if they were not deceived or forced to go overseas.

We will take up this classification issue when we interpret and discuss our findings. In assessing the full picture of whether a subject is a transnational sex trafficking victim, we will also consider various other criteria in addition to whether force, fraud or coercion were present. These include whether there was a recruiter or a facilitator involved in the women going overseas; whether there was payment involved in the transnational movement; whether there was debt bondage; and whether a subject's travel documents were withheld. While our focus is mainly on the overseas experiences of Chinese women, we also consider their circumstances and experiences back home in China. The latter are especially relevant to the "bounded rationality" theory and the choices exercised by the women.

Because we interviewed women who had not already been identified as victims, and because the interviews were conducted either in these women's natural settings or in public places, some might argue that we are only studying prostitution, and not sex trafficking. But as we argue later in this report, we deliberately chose not to seek already identified trafficking victims as our subjects. Doing so would have simply repeated what the majority of other studies have done over the past ten years (Gozdziak and Bump

2008; Zhang 2009). Instead, we chose to examine the broader issue of the transnational movement of Chinese women for commercial sex, and in the process sought to define and differentiate what constitutes prostitution and sex trafficking respectively, and how the two phenomena are related. Our questionnaires and interview guides (see appendices) clearly show that most of our questions are related to two issues: the nature of commercial sex overseas, and the social organization of the transnational movement of women. Our goal was to examine the many nuances of prostitution and sex trafficking, and to reflect on those nuances in the context of the current human trafficking discourse. Do the current definitions of sex trafficking, and the policy derivatives, reflect the realities in the field, or do they perhaps need to be re-evaluated?

### **Trafficker or Controller**

A trafficker or controller here is anyone who plays a role in the transnational movement of a woman for the purpose of commercial sex. Many different roles have been identified in the literature on trafficking, including recruiter, transporter, trafficker, brothel owner, and pimp. As will become clear in this report, in the Chinese context at least, many more roles are involved in the transnational movement of Chinese women in particular. We will use the terms used by our female subjects, and by the sex ring operator subjects we interviewed, when we refer to these various functionaries (i.e., chickenhead, agent, mommy, escort agency owner, fake husband, jockey, etc.). We will use the term “sex ring operator” as a generic term to refer to all the people who facilitate the transnational movement of Chinese women.

## **Organized Crime**

In this report, only certain groups will be referred to as organized crime groups. This means that we are going to use a more restrictive definition than the one put forth by the United Nations in the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, that defines an organized criminal group as “a structured group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offenses . . . in order to obtain, directly, or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit” (UNODC 2006: 6). Using this U.N. definition would result in classifying many of the groups that are engaged in the transnational movement of Chinese women as organized crime groups. But drawing on our many years of extensive research on organized crime in Asia and the United States, we have come to the conclusion that, at least within the Chinese or Asian context, only the following groups should be considered as being true organized crime: (1) U.S.-based tongs (i.e. On Leong, Hip Sing, Tung On, etc.) and street gangs (i.e. Ghost Shadows, Flying Dragons, Fuk Ching, etc.); (2) Hong Kong-based triads (i.e. Sun Yee On, 14K, Wo Shing Wo, etc.); (3) Macau-based triads (i.e. the 14K, the Water Room, etc.); (3) Taiwan-based organized gangs (i.e. United Bamboo, Four Seas, Celestial Alliance, etc.) and *jiaotou* groups (i.e. Fang Ming Kuan, Nyo Pu, etc.); (4) China-based mafia-style gangs (i.e. the Liu Yong group in Shenyang, the Li Qiang group in Chongqing, etc.); (5) Thailand-based *jaopho*; (6) Singapore-based *tangpai*; (7) Malaysia-based Chinese gangs (i.e. 390, 18K, Dragonhead, etc.); and, finally, (8) Japan-based yakuza groups (i.e., the Yamaguchi-kumi, the Inagawa-kai, the Sumiyoshi-kai) (see Chin 1990, 1996, 2003; Hill 2003; Chin and

Godson 2006; and Finckenauer and Chin 2006, for a discussion of all the groups listed above and other similar organized crime groups). It is our experience that the majority of government officials and law enforcers in Asia and the United States agree with us on this point.

### **Sex Trafficking and Organized Crime**

Although not at the same level of intensity as some other sex trafficking controversies, such as whether or not all prostitution should be considered a form of sex trafficking, or about just how big a problem human trafficking is, there has as well been a fair amount of discussion and debate about whether this is a criminal business of organized crime (Williams 1999; Shelley 2007). The nature of this discussion revolves around a contention by some skeptics that certain special interests advocate for a big organized crime role to hype interest and gain attention (Kyle and Dale 2001). If it seems, a particular crime can be associated with the “mafia,” people and politicians will take it more seriously (Chin 1999; Finckenauer 2001). On the other side, those who argue that organized crime is very much into human trafficking cite the scale and sophistication of some of the cases (Farr 2005; Shelley 2007). The ways the trafficking is carried out suggest the hand of professional criminals and not “mom and pop” amateurs, they say. The latter especially focus on the violence and corruption that is often involved – factors which are indeed hallmarks of organized crime.

What would be signs of organized crime involvement? On one level, the criminal organizations involved in organized crime generally make use of corruption and violence, and they often attempt to gain monopoly control over whatever criminal enterprises they

are engaged in (Jacobs 1999). Their corruption is not low-level, “nickel and dime stuff,” but instead bribes and payoffs that extend into the upper reaches of law enforcement and politics. Likewise, violence is used purposely to establish credibility and reliability, in order that the actual use of violence becomes only a limited necessity – reputation alone is enough to intimidate and strike fear into its targets (Finckenauer 2007).

Organized crime is the province of criminal organizations that have a degree of criminal sophistication – their crimes are planned rather than impulsive; they make use of technology; they have accounting and legal expertise available, etc. These organizations usually have a structure that has a stable division of labor – different members have specific roles and jobs. There is self-identification with the organizations through such means as wearing colors, swearing oaths, etc. And, as indicated, the organization has the authority of reputation. The more of these sorts of characteristics a criminal organization has, the greater capacity it has for wreaking harm of all kinds, including economic, physical and societal. Such groups are made up of professional criminals who operate continuously over time and over crimes.

We are not suggesting that it is only these particular criminal groups or others nearly identical to them that we would have to find to conclude that human trafficking is really an organized crime problem. But we are suggesting that whoever the traffickers are, they have to have more (rather than less) of the kinds of characteristics outlined above for us to reach that conclusion.

Some previous investigations hint at what is likely to be the conclusion. For example, relying upon a variety of information sources, Jahic (2009) said that while it is frequently assumed that organized crime figures run the trafficking business, there is little

evidence that trafficking is actually centrally and tightly organized. The plausible counter argument is that trafficking organizations are instead loose and rather fluid networks.

This will be one of the issues we will be addressing here.

## **II. Research Methods**

### **Research Approach and Rationale**

#### **Research Sites**

We included ten research sites in our project; eight in Asia and two in the United States. The eight Asian sites are Hong Kong, Macau, Taipei (Taiwan), Bangkok (Thailand), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Singapore, Jakarta (Indonesia), and Shenzhen (China), and the two U.S. sites are Los Angeles and the New York City metropolitan area (See the attached Map of Southeast Asia). We selected these sites first because of reporting in the media, government reports, and popular books that there are large numbers of Chinese *xiaojies* in these locations (Lim 1998; Lintner 2002; Brazil 2004; Yang 2006); next, because we had visited some of these cities in 2003 and 2004 for a research project on transnational organized crime, and saw that many Chinese *xiaojies* were present there (Finckenauer and Chin 2006); and thirdly because we happened to have good connections in these cities and were thus confident that we would be able to recruit and interview *xiaojies*, sex ring operators, and other key informants at each location.

We were well aware that Chinese women were also reportedly going to Australia, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and some countries in Western Europe and the Middle East to engage in prostitution. We excluded those sites because we did not have the same access there, and because we were limited by time and



resources. We do not claim that the research sites selected for this study are a representative sample of all the sites where there may be Chinese *xiaojies*. We do, however, believe that there is sufficient variability among the sites to give a relatively good representation.

### **Data Sources**

Among the major premises upon which our research approach is based is our belief that the best sources of information about commercial sex and sex trafficking are the very people who are most directly involved in it. These include most importantly, the women who are providing commercial sex services. They are followed in importance by the owners, operators or managers of the venues where those services are being provided, law enforcement and other government officials who are charged with combating sex trafficking, victim services providers who work with sex trafficking victims, and certain local individuals who can be key informants because they have good “street” knowledge and connections. The latter are the kind of people found in nearly every city, such as cab drivers, bartenders, and hairdressers who “know where the action is.”

Between December 2006 and August 2008, we conducted 350 face-to-face interviews with these groups of subjects – *xiaojies*, sex ring operators, government officials/law enforcers, and NGOs/other key informants (see Table 1). To conduct these interviews, we took three trips to Asia (lasting for a total of seven months), numerous trips to NYC sites, and one trip to Los Angeles.

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Table 1 about here

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### *Xiaojies*

Women who engaged in prostitution are obviously vulnerable research subjects, and commercial sex is a clandestine business. Thus, our approach to identifying and approaching possible interview subjects, and then actually interviewing them, had to be done within these parameters. In the identification process, we excluded any women who were under arrest or were otherwise under the control of law enforcement. As we indicated, we do not believe that such women are representative of the subject population we were seeking, and because of their risk of jail and/or deportation, we would have reason to doubt the truthfulness of any responses they might give. Similarly, we also excluded any women who were being housed or otherwise assisted by various victims' assistance entities.

Instead, given that the ultimate goal of all sex trafficking is making money, we proceeded on the premise that any sex trafficking victims must somehow be engaged in providing sexual services for money. They must be involved in commercial sex. This means they must be in settings or venues that are discernible to and accessible to potential paying clients. They cannot, in other words, be so hidden as to be inaccessible. We do not deny that accessibility may in some instances be so limited, such as for example in the case of child victims, that we would not learn about them. But child victims were not included in our projected population, and the extent to which adult females may have been so secreted as to make their presence unknown to our various informants is itself unknown.

Keeping with our overall premise, we sought venues where our informants indicated that the word was that sex services were being bought and sold. Depending

upon the legal status of prostitution in a particular jurisdiction, those venues are more or less clandestine. The venues include the most visible prostitutes, namely the street prostitutes such as those in Singapore, to those who work in front businesses such as massage parlors, bars, etc., to the KTV lounges, to private apartments, to establishments that are purely brothels.

We interviewed between 15 and 18 *xiaojies* in each site for a total of 164 subjects. All but 15 of these subjects were in overseas locations as shown in Table 1. The 15 interviews in Shenzhen, China were done more informally, meaning they were not asked every question in our standardized questionnaire (see Appendix I). Those particular interviews were conducted mostly for additional understanding of the context of commercial sex, and on the possibility that some of the women might be returned *xiaojies* from overseas.

The referrals for interviews were made by *xiaojies*, by various operatives in the commercial sex business, and by other knowledgeable informants. We opted not to use the respondent-driven sampling (RDS) method originally proposed because the requirements for such sampling could not be met. Our *xiaojie* subjects indicated that they were only vaguely aware of the size of the *xiaojie* network with which they were familiar, and they claimed to know no sex trafficking victims. Most were also reluctant to refer their friends or colleagues to us because they thought that doing so would be a breach of trust. They would, in other words, be telling us that certain women they knew were prostitutes, and their friends would not like that. We were concerned as well that the serial number tracking system used in RDS would discourage both initial respondents and

referrals. Finally, the time and resources available for interviewing in each site did not permit a long term commitment to attempting to make RDS work.

#### Sex Ring Operators/Facilitators

We conducted face-to-face interviews with 76 sex ring operators and others who facilitate commercial sex operations. This group of subjects includes recruiters, sex establishment owners or managers, pimps or intermediaries, drivers, and telephone operators. As with the women, we also interviewed the vast majority of this group in their own settings (see Appendix II for the interview guide).

#### Government Officials and Law Enforcers

We interviewed 76 criminal justice and other related officials. The majority of the subjects in this group were either police or immigration officers. A small number of judges, prosecutors, customs or coast guard officials, and American officials working for the U.S. embassies in Asia were also interviewed (see Appendix III for the interview guide).

#### NGOs and Other Key Informants

Finally, we interviewed some social service providers, NGOs, and other advocacy group members who were responsible for serving and protecting trafficking victims. The number of NGOs and service providers who had actually had experience in dealing with women from China was very small. We thus additionally recruited and interviewed in an informal way many key informants who, as previously mentioned, due to their work, leisure activities, or simply residency, have special knowledge and understanding of the

social organization of commercial sex involving Chinese women in their locales. Taxi drivers who also work as middlemen, businessmen who frequented sex venues, and longtime residents of certain places were included in this group (see Appendix IV for the interview guide).

### Fieldwork

To better understand the social organization of sex work, we also conducted fieldwork whenever there was an opportunity for us to do so. For example, we spent time eating with various subjects, normally before or after the interviews. We also spent many hours simply visiting and observing various red-light districts in Asia. Very often, we would ask a pimp who was soliciting business in the streets to take us to where the girls were, simply to have an opportunity to observe these places. After we became acquainted with the owner of a sex venue, and we let the owner know that we were conducting a research project, we also asked the owner to allow us to hang out, just watching the people who come and go and talking to the women who were working there.

In Taiwan, we were able to observe up close how an escort agency works by following the owner of an escort agency for three evenings. This owner also allowed us to ride along with a so-called jockey (a driver) and a *xiaojie* for two nights. All parties were informed about the nature and purpose of the participant observation and consented to involvement. The rides started around two in the afternoon and lasted until dawn. In the process, we were able to observe the interactions and power dynamics between the *xiaojie* and her driver, and between the *xiaojie* and her employer (the escort agency owner). We also spent a number of evenings in Taipei eating dinner and/or drinking

coffee with a key figure in the sex trade (a woman) and several women who were working for her.

In all these instances, we remained fully aware of the many ethical issues that might arise while doing this kind of ethnographic fieldwork (Ferrell and Hamm 1998; Miller and Tewksbury 2001; WHO 2003; UNIAP 2008). We believe the unique opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge about the inner-working of the sex trade more than outweighed any potential ethical concerns that might have arisen. We are confident that our fieldwork neither facilitated the business of the sex ring operators we were studying nor put our female subjects in harm's way.

### Secondary Data

We collected a large amount of secondary data from government officials and law enforcement authorities at the research sites, including statistics, reports, indictments, and sentencing statements. We also visited the libraries of various universities in the research sites and downloaded thousands of pages of newspaper, magazine, and scholarly articles that were in English or Chinese. When we visited the NGOs and social service providers in these sites, we also collected information about the history, structure, and functions of these organizations.

### **Data Collection**

At the very beginning of the data collection stage, we placed an ad in a Chinese newspaper in New York City, indicating that two college professors were hiring research assistants/interviewers who were familiar with the sex industry. We were hoping that some current or former prostitutes or sex ring operators might call us for the job. Quite a

few people, mostly women, did call; but once they learned how little we would pay our interviewers and interviewees, they simply chuckled and hung up the phone. A Chinese man who was an immigration consultant in New York had this to say about the challenge in finding prostitutes to us to interview:

I don't think you will find any Chinese woman who is willing to participate in your study, even if you are willing to pay \$500 for the interview. You have to understand that these women are making \$300 to \$500 a day. Your best chance of getting close to them is to open a massage parlor yourself. You open a store, hire them, and see how they work. There is no other way for you to approach them.

Of course, we were not ready to run a commercial sex venue in order to carry out a research project, so we took the advice of another caller, a Chinese woman who identified herself as a former massage parlor owner: "You really do not need anyone to help you to conduct the interviews or to refer sex workers to you. Because you are a male, all you need to do is call the phone numbers listed in the local newspapers, ask them where they are located, walk in as a customer, and once inside a room with a woman, tell her you just want to interview her. You must tell her she needs not do anything else, and you will pay her the normal charge. I assure you every woman you approach this way is going to talk to you!"

Eventually, we relied on three methods to locate and interview our female subjects. First, in a few cases we found them on the streets. For example, in Singapore, we found most of our subjects in the streets of a red-light district where they were soliciting business and interviewed them in a nearby hotel. We also located and interviewed quite a few streetwalkers in Kuala Lumpur the same way.

Second, we located them through referrals to the indoor sex venues where they worked. After we arrived at a research site, we would first find out where the various sex venues were located by asking any professional colleagues, and in some cases friends and relatives, who happened to live and work there. Sometimes these contacts would refer us to individuals who became key informants. In a few cases, we found locations by reading advertisements in the local newspapers, or by asking taxi drivers to refer us to sex venues. For example, when we were in Hong Kong, we visited several so-called one woman brothels and conducted the interviews inside these brothels. We found their advertisements on the internet, called them, and asked for their addresses. After our interviewer entered the premises, he told the woman there he was a researcher and would simply like to interview her. We also used the same approach to find subjects who were working out of small hotels or old residential buildings in Macau and those who ply their trade out of small apartments in New York City. Because women working in the one-woman brothels in Hong Kong, small hotels or old residential buildings in Macau, and small apartments in New York City were most likely to be working on their own, the process of finding them, entering their premises, and asking them to participate in our study was not that difficult because there was no third party involved.

The challenge was when we approached subjects who were working in premises that were owned and operated by someone else. For example, when we tried to interview women in the massage parlors of New Jersey, we had to deal with the fact that these women were working for someone else, and we needed to get the consent of the owners of these massage parlors as well. The same is true with the houses (brothels) in Los Angeles: not only did we need the consent of the women to talk to us, but also the



consent of the man or woman who owned and managed the house. Certain sex venues in Asia were well-established and had more than a hundred women working there under the supervision of a dozen or so so-called “mammies” or “mommies” (older females who were in charge of the girls). In these large sex venues, it was not possible for us to ask for the opportunity to talk to the owner and obtain his or her consent. As a result, for those particular sex venues, like the spas in Macau and Jakarta and the KTVs (karaoke TV lounges) in Bangkok, we tried to obtain the consent of a mommy or a manager first and then the girl later. Once we began talking to the girl, we told her who we were and what the project was about, obtained her consent, and the interview was conducted in the lounge. At no time did we deceive any of the interview subjects as to who we were and what we were doing.

The third way we found our subjects was through direct referrals. For example, we asked a relative living in Hong Kong to ask her hairdresser to introduce us to a “dancing hall” mommy and we later asked the mommy to introduce some of her girls to us. In Hong Kong, we also were acquainted with a mommy who was soliciting business on the streets for her girls and then asked her to bring her girls to us to be interviewed. In Shenzhen, we also relied on a street mommy to refer several girls to us. The same is true with all the escorts we interviewed in Taiwan and Malaysia. In both sites, we were able to meet a number of escort agency owners through referrals. Once these owners told their staff to support our project, we not only interview their girls, but also to interview the owners and even observe up-close how they conducted their businesses. In no instances, however, did any owners, managers or mommies demand or otherwise require the female

subjects to speak with us or coach the female subjects what to tell us, at least not to our knowledge.

We also used a snowball sampling method by asking those subjects we found on our own to refer their friends or colleagues to us. We used this method in locating most of our subjects in Bangkok and several in Jakarta. As previously indicated, because of time constraints, and concerns about subject reluctance, we did not employ the respondent-driven sampling approach originally proposed.

Table 2 shows the number of subjects we located using the three approaches by research site. We recruited 17 street prostitutes (11% of the overseas sample of 149), mostly in Singapore and Malaysia. Most Chinese *xiaojies* in Asia and the United States do not walk the streets; they are most likely to be engaged indoors.

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Table 2 about here

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We located 62 subjects (42%) by visiting their venues. We relied on this method heavily in Macau and New York, but less so in Jakarta, Los Angeles, and Hong Kong. The majority of the subjects we found this way were working in brothels, hotels, or massage parlors. We did not use this method to locate women working in nightclubs and KTVs because, first, it is quite costly considering cover charges and other charges; and second, it would have been seen as unusual to be visiting these sorts of places alone and also quite difficult to arrange a one-on-one meeting with a hostess.

Seventy subjects (47%) were referred to us by their employers, colleagues, or friends, and that was how we found most of our subjects in Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia,

Indonesia, Los Angeles, and Hong Kong. In Taiwan, we relied on an escort agency owner and an agent (a person who fronted the money to bring a Chinese woman to Taiwan) for referrals; likewise in Malaysia, the owner of a large escort agency made referrals. In Indonesia, we were helped by several agents (representatives) and middlemen, and in Los Angeles, by two house owners. A street mommy in Hong Kong referred to us several women for whom she was soliciting business near a park in a tourist area.

Interviews with the women we recruited on the streets were conducted at a nearby coffee shop, restaurant, or hotel; whereas interviews with women we located at their workplaces were conducted in their own environments. For those who were referred to us, we interviewed them at a hotel's coffee shop or restaurant. In sum, 31 interviews (21%) were conducted in our hotel's coffee shop, 45 interviews (30%) in a public place outside our hotel, and the rest (49%) in the subjects' own setting.

Most of the interviews lasted for about an hour to two hours. When we were in Macau interviewing women working out of the lobbies of small hotels, we were asked to complete the interviews in just 30 minutes, the amount of time they would offer a customer per session. Since it was not possible to complete an interview in 30 minutes, we decided to pay for two, three, or four sessions per interview, thereby allowing us to have 60 to 120 minutes to conduct the interviews. For certain subjects, the interviews lasted more than two hours, especially if they were not working that day, or they were in the mood to talk, or we were willing to pay them more money. As will become clear later, we are confident that the money we paid for the interviews was kept by our subjects, and was not taken away by their pimps, agents, or employers.

### **Validity and Reliability**

A study of this nature poses many challenges in terms of validity and reliability. Our subjects from the sex business risk being ridiculed, arrested, deported, or imprisoned if their identities and activities were revealed to the media or the authorities. Their willingness to participate and the level of their truthfulness may therefore be affected by these concerns. We employed the following strategies to increase the validity and reliability of the data collection.

We were especially aware of the sensitive nature of interviewing women who engaged in prostitution and had explored the field logistics and reliability issues repeatedly during our prior interviews with prostitutes in various Asian cities for another project. To ensure that we would collect rich and reliable data from these subjects, we took a number of precautions. First, we conducted all the interviews face-to-face, one-on-one without the presence of another person. Second, we conducted the majority of the interviews in the subjects' own settings or in public places with which they were familiar. Third, we employed conversational interview techniques to gain the trust and confidence of the interviewees. Fourth, we did not collect any identifiable information. And last, we told our subjects before the interviews that if they did not want to answer a question, to just say "I don't know" or "I forget" and we would move on to the next question right away. In fact, some subjects did just that.

Despite these many precautions, we could not have completely avoided or prevented our subjects from giving us misleading or incomplete information. We also realize that interviewing prostitutes inside a sex venue or a public place for a short period of time has its own restrictions in trying to understand transnational sex trafficking. But

by maximizing the variety of the prostitutes and the sex ring operators we interviewed, and by utilizing other sources of data (e.g., court cases, interviews with government authorities and NGOs, analyzing secondary materials, and especially fieldwork and participant observation), we hoped and believe that we have succeeded in learning much more about the pieces of the puzzle known as the international sex trade.

### **Ethical Issues**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2003: 1), “interviewing a woman who has been trafficked raises a number of ethical questions and safety concerns for the woman, others close to her, and for the interviewer. Having a sound understanding of the risks, ethical considerations, and the practical realities related to trafficking can help minimize the dangers and increase the likelihood that a woman will disclose relevant and accurate information.” WHO (2003: 4) recommends the following ten guiding principles for interviewing trafficked women: “(1) Do no harm; (2) Know your subject and assess the risks; (3) Prepare referral information – do not make promises that you cannot fulfill; (4) Adequately select and prepare interpreters, and co-workers; (5) Ensure anonymity and confidentiality; (6) Get informed consent; (7) Listen to and respect each woman’s assessment of her situation and risks to her safety; (8) Do not re-traumatize a woman; (9) Be prepared for emergency intervention; and (10) Put information collected to good use.” Five years later, the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) (2008) also developed a guide to ethical and human rights issues in conducting research on human trafficking and recommended seven guiding principles that were similar to the WHO guidelines.

When we were in the field interviewing our subjects, anticipating that some of them might be transnational trafficked victims, we paid full attention to all the recommendations made by WHO and UNAIP. We did nothing to harm our subjects; we went in with information about various local intervention agencies in case our subjects needed it; we did not collect any identifiable information about the subjects; we asked for their verbal informed consent and we did not pressure anyone to participate in our study; we did not ask any questions that might upset our subjects and let them decide what questions they would answer and to what extent; and, we believe we are putting the information collected to good use. We were especially concerned about the first principle – not to do any harm to our subjects. As a result, we never tried to achieve anything at the expense of or risk to our subjects.

We also did not deceive our subjects. Once our interviewer was alone with a *xiaojie*, he immediately told her who he was and the purpose of his being there. He then told her the key points in our verbal informed consent statement, emphasizing that (1) participation is completely voluntary, (2) refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefit, (3) even if consenting to participate, the subject can refuse to answer any question she wishes to, (4) the subject may also terminate the interview at any time, and proceeded only if the subject said that she was willing to be interviewed. Not ONE interview was conducted without the subject's full consent and understanding of the process.

### **Limitations of this Study**

As is true with any research, there are limitations; and this study has several such limitations. It is important to point these out in order to give our reading audience a basis for judging for themselves the weight to be given our findings and conclusions.

\*We have studied only sex trafficking, meaning we have excluded other forms of human trafficking such as labor trafficking and child trafficking. Consequently, our findings are only relevant to sex trafficking and cannot be generalized to other forms of human trafficking. We fully agree that there is a need to pay more attention to other forms of human trafficking as well (Gozdziak and Collett 2005; Gozdzia and Bump 2008).

\*We studied only Chinese women and the people and processes involved in the transnational movement of Chinese women. As a result, our findings are pertinent to that population, but may not be applicable to the experiences of women from other source countries.

\*Our samples of *xiaojies*, sex ring operators, law enforcers, and NGOs are all small because of time and resource constraints, and are also not fully representative samples. Even though we recruited women with diverse backgrounds in terms of age, marital status, and place of origin; included women from a variety of sex markets (street, massage parlor, brothel, nightclub, etc.); and interviewed women in eight Asian and two American cities, the sample could be skewed in terms of age, marital status, earnings, etc. Women who are younger, single, and capable of making substantially more than the average prostitute are probably underrepresented in our sample, simply because we were

constrained by our budget to reach them. In other words, what we would have had to offer to pay them would have been quite substantial as our NYC contact informed us.

\*The sex ring operator sample is not equally distributed by research site, and the majority of the subjects in this sample are the mommies. Certain other actors such as chickenheads and fake husbands are not included because we did not have the opportunity to approach persons in these roles for a formal interview. This too limits generalizability.

\*Some of the interviews were conducted under circumstances that were not fully conducive to frank and candid conversations. More than half of the women we interviewed were not through referrals, and some of these women might not actually been willing to tell us the whole truth or story about themselves. Areas for skepticism are with respect to age (many women said they were younger than they actually appeared to be), marital status (married women might be inclined to say they are single or divorced), place of origin (some women could have been unwilling to reveal where they were from or simply gave the name of a nearby big city instead of their actual hometown), and how much money they were making from providing sexual services (the inclination would be to understate this figure). We also believe that many women knew more about their intermediaries and their intermediaries' operations than they were willing to share with us. This would have been because these persons were sometimes boyfriends or relatives or other persons with whom they had a personal relationship.

\*All the interviews with Chinese female subjects were conducted by a male interviewer. Not having a female interviewer could be construed as a weakness because



female subjects might not be as candid with a male interviewer, or be willing to tell a male interviewer about physical aspects of their work.

\*A number of the interviews were conducted in the subjects' own settings. Some may consider this to be a major limitation because they assume that most subjects would be afraid to tell us the truth while they were under their controllers' watchful eyes. But many of these women were independent prostitutes, i.e., they worked on their own, and so the question of being watched by controllers was not an issue. We did not find that the nature of the venue had much effect on what the women told us about whether they had been abused or deceived in some way.

\*Some subjects were referred to us by their employers, agents, or mommies, and thus there could be a concern that these subjects were instructed by their sex ring operators to tell us that they were willingly engaged in prostitution and that they were not being victimized or exploited by their handlers. But again, we did not find differences in this respect when we compared these particular subjects with others.

\*The last issue may or may not be a limitation, but it clearly is a finding. It is the issue that will perhaps (probably) be likely to garner the most attention and controversy. This is the fact that, even though we set out to study the transnational movement of women for commercial sex and its possible links to sex trafficking, and given our best efforts using the approaches described, we were not able to find many *transnational* trafficked victims who either explicitly told us they were, or who otherwise gave the appearance of or described experiences of being deceived, forced, or coerced into their current situation. One of the exceptions was an underage subject, a 17-year-old streetwalker in Singapore, who was by legal definition a trafficking victim simply

because of her age. A woman in Bangkok said she was deceived by her aunt who had brought her there, because the aunt did not tell her that as a hostess she would have to sleep with men. This is not to say that some other subjects, more than a few as will be seen, had not been victimized or otherwise exploited at some earlier point during their involvement in commercial sex. We did encounter a number of subjects who can be classified as *domestic* trafficking victims because they were coerced or tricked into prostitution while still in China.

We believe that seeking subjects by using the approaches likely to be used by potential commercial sex customers is a reasonable and defensible sampling method. After all, the money made from sex trafficking comes from selling sex to such customers. Especially important is the fact that when we asked our female subjects if they knew any sex trafficking victims, they answered no. Only a few had even heard of such cases. Thus, referrals from these subjects, a la the RDS method, would have been highly unlikely to lead us to trafficking victims.

We have already detailed our research approach and rationale, as well as why we rejected the notion of depending upon defined groups of trafficking victims such as other studies have done. Nevertheless, we were made starkly aware of the potential risks we were running in using that strategy very early on in the study. A college-educated, 33-year-old *xiaojie* from Harbin (Heilongjiang Province, in northeastern China) working in New York City criticized our proposed approach after she was told that we were looking to interview women who were trafficked:

If you are looking for trafficked victims like this, you are never, ever going to find them. If you can find a girl through a newspaper advertisement, that means the girl is not being deceived or controlled,

because the girl can tell her customers about this. Those who are tricked here are most likely to be locked up, and the brothel owner is unlikely to advertise his business. He is going to do business with only regular customers, and the girls are going to be locked up in a small hotel or an apartment.

Interestingly and importantly, we believe, she then added: “Of course, I know this happens in China, but I don’t know whether it also exists in the United States.” Our subjects, while denying that they had been forced, deceived or coerced into doing what they were currently doing, also indicated that they knew of no such cases involving other women, although sometimes some had heard of this happening.

No matter how reasonable the criticisms from the above woman about our ways of locating our subjects, we firmly believe in the end that it would be very difficult (albeit not impossible) for sex ring operators to do a lucrative business the way she described: locking up women and accepting new customers only with referrals from regulars. Tyldum and Brunovskis (2005: 26) made the same point when they wrote: “Even women in situations of serious exploitation and abuse can never be totally invisible in the prostitution arena, as their organizers need to sell the women to clients.”

### **III. Findings**

#### **The Women**

##### **Background Characteristics**

Contrary to the popular image, our data show that indeed a variety of Chinese women from diverse backgrounds in fact go overseas to engage in prostitution. This suggests that there may be more diversity among the parties involved in transnational prostitution than is commonly supposed. Of the 149 women we interviewed outside China, many were

young, single women, but also a large percentage of them were married women in their 30s or 40s (see Table 3). Most of them were from rural areas, but many also came from urban centers. About 4 out of 10 of them had engaged in prostitution when they were in China.

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Table 3 about here

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### Age

Almost all of the Chinese women we interviewed were 20 or older. The average age of our subjects (N=149) was 30.79; only one subject in our sample was a juvenile – a 17-year-old girl we met in Singapore. Forty-four percent of the subjects were between 21 and 30, thirty-nine percent of them were between 31 and 40, and eleven percent of them were 41 or older. A couple of subjects were in their 50s. It is also possible that our subjects were actually older than their reported age, as it is a common practice among prostitutes to under-report their age so that they can be more attractive and generate more business. We do not believe that anyone told us they were older than they actually were.

### Education

Most of our subjects either graduated from middle or high school, with the mean years of education being 10. Twelve percent of them had only an elementary school education, 37 percent middle school, 34 percent high school, and 17 percent college (undergraduate). Taken together with age, these women are both older and better educated than is commonly believed, and both of these factors are related to vulnerability to exploitation. Many subjects said they did not like school when they were young, so

they stopped attending school after graduating from elementary or middle school and stayed home to do house chores. When they reached a certain age, they went out to work. Some of them just spent time with a bunch of friends every day: singing, dancing, and having fun until they became acquainted with someone who brought them (not necessarily using force, fraud, or deception) into prostitution.

Some dropped out of school because there was a crisis in the family and they had to work to support their families. Some said they did like school and hoped to receive a good education, but that their parents were not very supportive simply because they were girls. Since some of our subjects were from poor families in rural areas, their status as females put them in a precarious position because poor families in rural areas have traditionally preferred to have sons, not daughters. Xiao Zheng (all the *xiaojies* we interviewed have been given pseudonyms), a 23-year-old from Liuzhou (Guangxi Province, southwest China) told us why she was forced to quit school:

I dropped out of school two months before graduation from middle school because my father was diagnosed with cancer. I am the youngest of six siblings. Actually, I really wanted to continue school. My father was always against my desire to attend school – he said that girls should not attend school. It was my mother who insisted that I go to school. Because of this, my father put a knife to my mother's neck and demanded that she stop me from attending school.

Some of these women, with relatively little education and/or connections to people of influence and power, ended up working in the manufacturing or service sectors. There, because of low pay and unrewarding work experiences, many changed jobs frequently, until they ultimately entered into prostitution.

## Family

Even though our female subjects came from all over China (a total of 59 towns or cities), many of them were from areas around Chongqing and Changde (Hunan Province) in central China, from Harbin (Heilongjiang Province), Changchun (Jilin Province), and Shenyang (Liaoning Province) in the far northeast, and from the capitol Beijing (see the attached Map of China). Subjects from Hunan Province made up 14 percent of the sample, Chongqing City and Sichuan Province made up 13 percent, and Liaoning Province 12 percent. The three major source areas for *xiaojies* in China are believed to be Sichuan Province, Hunan Province, and the three provinces in the northeast (Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning). It is important to point out that very few of our subjects were actually born in the major cities mentioned above; they were mostly born in the rural hinterland around those big cities, and it was not unusual for them to travel for many hours by bus or train from where they live to a big city nearby. Moreover, many of them were already living away from home, usually in coastal areas, for a few years before they left China.

Most of our subjects came from poor families. Thirty-six percent of our subjects said their fathers were farmers, 30 percent laborers, and 8 percent of fathers were retired or unemployed. Thirty-six percent of the subjects said their mothers were farmers, 22 percent laborers, and 21 percent were retired or unemployed. Only a very small percentage of our subjects' parents had professional jobs. There is no doubt that the majority of our subjects belong to very ordinary families with very little power or privilege.

### Marital Status

Half of our subjects were either married (24 percent) or divorced (26 percent), and 40 percent of them had one child or more. All the married or divorced women became prostitutes only after their marriages. There is a possibility that a very small number of subjects might have lied to us about their marital status, telling us they were divorced when in fact their marriages were intact, or saying they were single when they were actually married. Juan Juan, a 42-year-old married woman from Yingkuo (Liaoning Province, northeast China) who was working as a hostess in Bangkok, explained why: “I am married and I have a good relationship with my husband, but I tell my customers here that I am divorced. Otherwise, why would they give me money? If I say I am married, they will think that I will give all the money they give me to my husband.”

### Work Experience

Since many of our subjects came from poor families in rural areas and had limited education, it is not difficult to imagine that they did not have good, high paying jobs in China. But, nearly a third were neither ordinary workers nor unemployed. Instead they did what was considered professional work, or worked for the government or in a private business, or were involved in the entertainment business. The latter is of interest because the entertainment sector has been considered a target for the recruitment of young women with aspirations for glamorous jobs as dancers, singers, actresses, and so on. As previously indicated, the largest portion (41 percent) told us they were already engaged in commercial sex before they went abroad. Let us repeat that this does not preclude the possibility that they may have been victimized earlier. Likewise, it also does not preclude

the possibility that prostitutes can be subsequently victimized through physical abuse or various forms of deception or coercion when they go overseas. What it does say is that four in ten of these women were at the outset not the typically portrayed victims of sex trafficking.

### **Choices and Bounded Rationality**

In all the instances described to us, we saw that economic factors were a driving force behind the choices the women made. Many had already been the victims of circumstances. Whether they would have behaved differently or made different choices if they had had other options is, of course, unknown. Nevertheless, greater economic opportunity for women in China – and elsewhere as well – would certainly reduce the pressure of economics as a major push factor in prostitution. That said, once they had already entered into prostitution, many of these women were then receptive to or actively sought out the possibility of moving abroad in order to increase their earnings. Again, this suggests that the definition of who is and is not a victim is not as clear cut as might be supposed.

One way to view the process through which these women moved is in terms of what some scholars call “bounded rationality” (see Simon 1982). Originally theorized to explain organizational behavior and various forms of economic and management decision-making, bounded rationality has since been taken up by various social scientists, including some criminologists (see, e.g., Clarke and Cornish 2000; and Miller 2001). The Miller analysis is particularly apropos here because she describes the role of gender inequality as a factor limiting the rational choices of women. She points out that the



structural inequalities in society certainly shape the choices girls and women have available to them, but that they do nevertheless exercise choice, and are not “simply passive victims of male oppression” (Miller 2001:26).

These and a number of other works addressing bounded rationality attempt to explain decision-making in a variety of contexts. In essence, the theory of bounded rationality posits that when individuals make decisions, they do not do so under optimum conditions that allow them to be completely rational and able to fully weigh all the possible risks and rewards surrounding their decision and choice. There may, for example, be time constraints; there may be a lack of information or there may be misinformation about certain options; there may be peer pressure; certain alternatives may simply not be accessible, and so on. Because they lack information and/or are unable to fully comprehend the information they do have, people are said to “satisfice.” That is, they make what may appear to them to be the best decision or choice given their circumstances at the time. Consequently, their decision making is bounded – constrained or restricted – by their social, physical and situational contexts, and their perceptions of those contexts. The individual assessments of the costs, risks and benefits involved are subjective, which is why in this case different women in the same circumstances might make different choices; and why the same women may make different choices at different times.

In her study of prostitution in China, Min Liu (2010) looked specifically at this issue of bounded rational choice among the prostitutes she interviewed. She concluded that there are a number of factors in contemporary China that effect both the range of options available and the perception of those options by Chinese women. Liu notes that

attitudes toward sex have become more liberal, with both premarital and extramarital sex being more acceptable. At the same time, traditional Chinese views of women as being subordinate to men have re-emerged, putting women in a less advantaged position than before. In addition, the expanding and omnipresent entertainment venues and countless customers mean the opportunities to work as prostitutes are numerous. And finally, attitudes toward money and wealth have changed dramatically, giving way to much more materialistic perspectives. “The extent to which a woman accepts these liberalized attitudes toward sex, how she views her body, and her attitudes about money are,” says Liu, “the decisive forces determining whether she will enter prostitution, given certain financial circumstances” (Liu 2010: 245). This last point suggests that personal economic circumstances are usually the critical spark for considering sex work as a viable option.

There is another consideration that might enter into the choice to become a prostitute as well, and that is the moral qualms that may have to be addressed. Liu found, for example, that one of the greatest concerns of her subjects was the fear that their friends or families would find out what they were doing. This suggests that they are ashamed of what it is they are doing. Therefore, their choice process would seemingly also be bounded by the force of any moral qualms, and in instances where women choose to act against their deeply held values, they are probably going to have to rationalize and adopt what Sykes and Matza (1957) originally termed “techniques of neutralization” in order to justify their deviant behavior.

Chinese women have clearly been treated unfairly by both the legal system and the society at large throughout Chinese history. Chinese norms and values put considerable pressure on women through the cultural expectation that a daughter must obey her father, a wife must obey her husband, and a widow must obey her eldest son (Hsu 1967). Under many rigid gender norms and values, the exploitation of women has been a serious problem in China for many centuries (Ren 1993). Even in modern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, women face many forms of victimization: infanticide, slavery, child prostitution, forced marriage, rape, and wife abuse. Traditionally, boys have always been considered more precious than girls among the Chinese people for both economic and cultural reasons. Compounded with the one-child policy adopted in contemporary China to control population growth, this has resulted in the pervasive practice of Chinese couples abandoning newborn girls in hopes of having a son instead. If the baby girls are not discarded, they often become the sacrificial lambs when there is a crisis in the family (sickness, legal problems, failed business, divorce) and a large amount of money is needed to deal with the crisis.

As described by our female subjects, most felt that their parents (especially their father) had not treated them as being as equally valuable as boys. Most parents, particularly those from rural areas, were not supportive of their daughters' wishes to receive a good education because the parents wanted to retain their limited resources for the use of their sons, and/or they thought their daughters would belong to their husbands' families and thus become "outsiders" after they were married. As a result, as illustrated in table 3, most subjects received very little education; and the parents' indifference was a key factor in prompting them to terminate schooling while they were still very young.

Women with limited educations are naturally not in a position to enter the already small white-collar job market in China. For women from ordinary families in rural areas, their families' lack of connections to people in power also denies them the opportunity to land good, government jobs. Thus, for the majority of these poorly educated women from rural areas, the only jobs available to them are low paying jobs in the manufacturing, food, and retail industries that do not offer much of a career path. Inevitably then, some women enter certain service industries that serve as pathways to their ultimate entrance into commercial sex.

Financial pressure aside, the labor market is structured in a way that compels many women towards the eventual career of prostitution – women are not fit for most demanding employment opportunities such as construction and other heavy lifting jobs. There are only so many electronic and clothing businesses that tend to concentrate along the coastal provinces, whereas other available jobs tend to concentrate in the service or entertainment industry that often involve much physical contacts with men. Massage, hair salons, tea houses, and karaoke bars, places where men with money and looking for sexual adventure frequent. There is no shortage of fringe demands at these locations and these women naturally become their targets. Such career path puts women at a clear disadvantage and often sets them in a trap. Lured by money and pressure from their bosses, these women are pressured into selling sex. This is not to downplay the earning potential in these businesses. Without sufficient financial returns, few women would give in to the fringe demand. But once these women realize how much money they can make and the lifestyle they can attain, it becomes difficult to return to their previous existence.

The strong demand for sexual services in China is also a major factor in causing so many Chinese women to enter the sex business. Young women who migrate to urban centers for work are bombarded with the hiring announcements posted in newspapers, on street poles, in restaurants, in public phone booths, and at the entrances of entertainment centers and hotels; and it is simply impossible to ignore them or not notice them. Selling sex is also glorified or romanticized by the existence of a large number of so-called *xiaomi* (little honey) or *ernai* (second wife) – the mistresses of high-ranking government officials and rich businessmen who can be seen living in luxurious apartments in many “mistress villages” in coastal cities. The reality for young women from rural areas who have migrated to the big cities along the coast and are struggling to survive is this: find a relatively easy job as a salesclerk in a retail store and make \$50 to \$100 a month; work in a factory for long hours and with limited freedom for \$150 to \$200 a month; work as a masseuse or a hostess and make about \$1,000 a month; or sell sex and earn more than \$1,500 a month. Of course, there are also women who do not want to go into commercial sex regardless of how much money they can make, but they are compelled to sell sex when they are desperate for money to deal with a family crisis; they soon find out that the only way to earn a large amount of money in a short time is to sell sex. As explained by some of the subjects quoted above, there was a crisis in their family – one of their parents was sick, one of their siblings got into trouble with the law, their father’s business failed, or their husband left them – and they became the sacrificial lamb who had to sell herself to overcome the crisis in the family. According to our subjects, their parents were ready to sacrifice them, but not their brothers, because their sons were more precious to them. Cola, a 25-year-old single woman working for a *falang* (hair salon-style brothel) in

Shenzhen (near Hong Kong), had this to say about how daughters and sons are treated so differently in China:

In China, sons are not required to take care of their families. All they have to do is grow up, marry, and have children to continue the family lineage. They also need not travel far to make money because parents want them to be nearby. As a result, only girls are asked to support their families. Since parents do not care whether their daughters are around or not, girls can also travel far away to find jobs. It's all taken for granted. Like me, when I was working at a factory, I sent all my salary home; I did not keep much for myself.

The other factor in the push and pull of prostitution in China is the existence of male pimps who are called chickenheads. In many source villages in the provinces of Sichuan, Hunan, and Liaoning, networks of chickenheads work aggressively to recruit young women to move to the coastal areas to engage in prostitution. There are also substantial numbers of women pimps called *chipor* (chickenlady) who are orchestrating the movement of girls and women from villages in the inland provinces to coastal cities like Shenzhen to engage in street prostitution. As mentioned by a spa manager in Shenzhen, many women he met in the sex business were being “brought” to Shenzhen by someone, simply because it is not easy for a village woman to come to Shenzhen on her own and to enter prostitution without an intermediary (see Figure 1 for a pathway of entering prostitution in China).

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Figure 1 about here

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As Figure 1 demonstrates, socioeconomic circumstances clearly put many Chinese women into a vulnerable category. Faced with these circumstances, some of these women end up in prostitution. Apart from the domestic trafficking victims already described, some of the other women who were involved in prostitution in China may subsequently choose to go abroad to practice their profession in what they see as more lucrative environments. It may be that once the crucial threshold of opting to make a living by selling sex is crossed, the further decision to seek to go abroad for that purpose is quite simply an economic one. For yet other women in our sample, although they had not become prostitutes initially, they later had the opportunity and chose to go abroad, and once relocated, they ended up in prostitution. And then there are, of course, the faceless majority of similarly situated Chinese women – faceless because they were not included in our study – who struggle on, not becoming prostitutes either at home or abroad.

### **Reasons for Becoming a Prostitute**

Of the 59 subjects who said they had started in prostitution in China, 44 (75%) of them said they went into the commercial sex business voluntarily. Most single women became prostitutes so that they could make money for themselves. Most of them began their career in commercial sex as hostesses at nightclubs or karaoke establishments. In China, to be a hostess in these two types of venues means only that a woman is entertaining her customers through singing, dancing, drinking, and chatting, even though most people also know that very few hostesses can refuse to go out with customers who want them to engage in sexual transactions (Zheng 2009).

The reasons offered by our subjects for taking up commercial sex can be categorized into five groups: (1) they wanted to live a good life but did not want to work that hard; (2) they tried to make money through conventional work but found that it was a bitter life and the money was not enough; (3) there was a financial crisis in the family and they needed to do something quickly to help their families; (4) they were divorced and were desperate to earn and save some money while they were still young; or (5) they (the domestic trafficked victims) were deceived or coerced into prostitution by their boyfriends, or by pimps or chickenheads.

### Easy Money

Some of our subjects told us they became prostitutes simply because they realized that they can make a lot more in the commercial sex business than they can make in the legitimate labor market. Meng Fei, a 32-year-old single woman from Hefei (Anhui Province, west of Shanghai) and a streetwalker in Hong Kong, described how she originally entered the sex sector in China:

I worked with my sister as a tailor after I graduated from middle school. Then I went to Wenzhou (Zhejiang Province, south of Shanghai) and worked in a garment factory. Later, I worked in a hair salon in Shanghai, where I met a Taiwanese man. He invited me to dinner and then to a nightclub. There, I saw *xiaojies* making \$24 to \$36 just by drinking and chatting with customers. At that time, I was making about \$85 a month in the hair salon. It was very easy for those *xiaojies* to make money. As a result, I went back to the nightclub the next day and told the boss that I wanted to be a *xiaojie*. He hired me. . . . I made about \$1,000 a month just sitting at tables. After working there for two to three months, I began to go out with customers and my monthly income increased to more than \$1,500.



Xiao Dai, a 24-year-old woman from Leshan (Sichuan Province, southwest China) whom we interviewed in a spa in Jakarta, told us why it was easy for her to make up her mind to become a *xiaojie*:

After I finished middle school, I had a variety of jobs, but nothing lasted long. I was very lazy, so I tended to look for work that was easy. Finally, I worked as a DJ at a nightclub and began to have contact with *xiaojies*. Working as a DJ was relatively easy and my monthly income was more than \$375. However, I also thought that being a *xiaojie* might be even easier, and I would make more money. Therefore, I eventually entered this line of work. I do not like hard work and I am vain. I like to eat well, dress well, and gradually I inched toward this type of work. How else can girls like me make \$1,250 to \$2,500 a month?

Qian Qian, a 34-year-old divorced woman working in a massage parlor in Singapore, was quite straightforward when asked why she became a *xiaojie*: “I needed money. What can I do when I don’t have much of an education? If I had an ordinary, regular job, I would make less than \$100 a month. How can I survive in a place like Shenzhen with less than \$100 a month? Besides, I like name-brand handbags and perfume. So I decided to work in a KTV.”

### Desperate for Money

Some of our subjects sacrificed themselves to help their parents or siblings overcome financial crises or to provide their family members a better life. According to Chun Chun, a 24-year-old street prostitute from Chongqing in Hong Kong:

My mother worked part-time in a variety of manual jobs. My father used to be an auto mechanic. Later, he borrowed money to lease a bus and start a small transportation business. But the business failed and he lost a lot of money. Debtors came to our home and asked us to repay them. I am the only child and life was hard when I was young. I did not want to study anymore after my father’s business collapsed, even though I liked school. At first, I worked as a waitress at a

restaurant and made a little more than \$25 a month. That was not enough to help my family. So I went to Yunnan Province with a friend and we both decided to enter the sex industry. We worked at a hair salon (*falang*)-style-nightclub at Yiliang (a small county not far from Kunming). It was actually a very small establishment. Customers walk in, select a girl, and then go to a nearby hotel. Customers pay us \$38 per sexual transaction, and an additional \$6 to the hair salon as *taifei* (“table money”).

When I arrived in Yiliang, I was only 18 and I was a virgin. That’s why I had to wait for about half a month for a customer who was willing to pay a high price for a virgin. I believed that first customer of mine was a crime boss; he went to Burma frequently and he must have been trafficking something from Burma to China. He was charged \$1,000 for the session; my share was \$750 and \$250 for the house. That experience cast a shadow on me for the rest of my life. I remember once he closed the door, he did not say a word and immediately climbed on top of me and penetrated me. There was no foreplay whatsoever and he did it to me twice. When he was on top of me, I was crying and crying. He shut my mouth with his hands and he was very forceful.

The price decreased to \$312 when I had sex with my second customer. I got \$250 and the store \$62. On the third time, my price was only a little more than \$125 and several times later my price decreased to the same as other girls, \$38 per transaction. . . . My family paid off the debt soon and then they bought a house. My parents also began to live a very comfortable life, a life that could have never ever dreamed of. Every day, they eat, drink, and play mahjong. They even have a dog!

I looked down on *xiaojies* before I became one. I thought they were cheap and that I would never become one of them under any circumstances. But because my father lost money in his business and we were indebted, I ended up being a *xiaojie*. I never expected myself to get involved in this line of work.

Some of our subjects were married women, and they turned to prostitution after they realized that their husbands were not supporting them and their children. Ah Ping, a 36-year-old woman from Jinzhou (Hubei Province), married with a 14-year-old daughter, remarked:

My family was very poor when I was young; we went hungry frequently. When I was 14, I worked in a factory. At 17, I began to date. At 20, I married a man 10 years older than me who had just got out of prison after serving seven years. I married him because he was handsome. But he was also a ruffian; he fought

frequently, and had a very bad reputation. After the marriage, we operated a dance hall, and then a karaoke nightclub, and were also involved in other kinds of businesses. But all failed. Two years after the marriage, I went to Guangzhou (Guangdong Province) to be a *xiaojie* because I needed money.

Chen Hung, a 39-year-old from Jinzhou (Hubei Province, central China) became a prostitute because her husband was arrested. At the time of the interview, she was divorced and was soliciting clients at a food court in Kuala Lumpur; her daughter was a college student in Wuhan:

I married when I was 20. My husband was a gangster. We had a baby girl one year after the marriage. My husband not only gambled, he also frequented sex venues. One day, my husband demanded that a friend repay his debt, and under pressure the friend killed a taxi driver and took his car. He gave the car to my husband and asked my husband to sell it or consider it as repayment. Later, the man was arrested, and he told the police that he and my husband conspired to commit the murder. As a result, my husband fled to Haikuo (Hainan Province). I went to Haikuo to find my husband, and when I got there, I saw him with another woman. At that point, I was deeply hurt, but what could I do?

Eventually, my husband came back to Jinzhou and surrendered to the police. He was sentenced to three-and-a-half years. At that time, I was really desperate; I had a daughter to raise, and we owed lawyers and others a lot of money. I had no choice but to go to Taizhou to be a KTV hostess. On my first day at the KTV, a customer dragged me to a small, private area and ripped off my underwear. He was about to rape me, but I cried and cried and he gave up. I thought about quitting then, but going home wouldn't solve my problems, so I stayed. At that time, customers paid \$12 per hostess, and the hostess got \$6. Hostesses also went out with customers they liked. I made more than \$750 a month just sitting at tables.

### Deceived into Prostitution

Some girls and women were lured into prostitution in China, either by their boyfriends or by the so-called chickenheads. These are the subjects we categorize as domestic

trafficking victims. For example, Xiao Ya, a 20-year-old single woman from Chongqing whom we interviewed at a one-woman brothel in Hong Kong, said:

I worked as a waitress in a restaurant after I dropped out of middle school. I quit a few days later because it was hard work. Then I became an apprentice at a hair salon. I was there for more than one year, and I was not paid at all. Thereafter, I went back to work at a restaurant, met a man, and had sex with him. My mother slapped me when she found out about this. She dragged me to a park, and she was crying and crying. She said that I was very stupid and that she would tell my father, who was working in Guangxi Province at that time. After we returned home from the park, I took it hard and fled to another city with a female friend. We checked into a small hotel. I bought ten sleeping pills and swallowed all of them, but I woke up the next morning. At that time, all we had left was \$3. We took a bus to where my boyfriend lived and he took both of us to a place to sell sex. It was a three-story building; I did not know what kind of business it was. The girls hang out in the lounge on the first floor, waiting for customers. After a customer picked a girl, the two went to the second floor lounge. There, they have a drink, and then go to a room to have sex. It was \$12 per session. The girls all lived on the third floor.

Xiao Zheng, a 23-year-old woman from Liuzhou (Guangxi Province), described how she was coerced into prostitution by a man:

I went to Liuzhou to work after quitting middle school. My elder brother, his wife, and I sewed clothes at home. We got paid 12 cents per piece, and we sewed about 40 to 50 pieces a day. Later, I worked in a factory in Guangdong and earned about \$50 a month. Then, I returned to Liuzhou to sell clothes. I made \$50 a month in the beginning, and after a while, I was making more than \$125 a month. Then my mother became seriously ill. She said she was concerned that I was still single and hoped that I would get married before she passed away. That put a lot of pressure on me to get married.

A friend introduced me to a man who was about 30. He treated me very well and he was aggressively after me. Later, we lived together. I was working and financially independent at that time. He asked me not to go to work and often made me late for work so that I would lose my job.

In order to show that he intended to marry me, he took me to meet his parents. He was also from the Liuzhou area, but came from a different village than mine. His parents were honest people; they did not know what their son was up to.

Not long after, I stopped working because my boss was unhappy that I often did not show up for work. Even without a regular income, we went out every day and we spent all our money. That's their [the pimp's] tactics. First, they make you lose your job. Second, they make you broke. Third, they ask you to go to another city to make money, insinuating that after we make enough money together, we will go home to marry, build a house, and buy a car.

He brought me to Foshan (Guangdong). There were plenty of chickenheads there and they had girls they brought from all over China working for them. I did not know until I arrived in Foshan that he wanted me to be a *xiaojie*. I, of course, said no, and a few days later he yelled at me: "Now that you are here, why the hell are you not making money right away? If you don't act quickly, I am going to tell your family that you are a *xiaojie* here in Foshan." I was very scared. I came from a very conservative village located in the hills. I can stop going home, but what about my family? He also said something like: "I am also going to tell your family that while you were working as a prostitute, a customer stabbed you to death, and the police could not find your body."

After resisting it for a few more days, I gave up. He also asked other chickenheads to talk to me, emphasizing that I can make good money and the job is easy. Once I agreed to work, he asked a *xiaojie* to take me to a small hotel. I had to pay the hotel \$50 a day to work there, and he gave me that money. The hotel kept all the girls in a big room, where there were more than a dozen girls working at any given time. When a guest in the hotel needed a girl, we all went to his room for him to select. The charge was \$12 per session, and all the money went to the girls.

At that time, there were many people from other parts of China living and working in Foshan, so business was very good. I saw about 20 to 30 customers a day, at least more than 10 even when business was slow. I gave all the earnings to my boyfriend, but I also looked for an opportunity to leave him, because I began to doubt that he was serious about marrying me.

Working at that hotel was nerve-racking. The price was cheap, so there was not much bargaining to do. We had sex immediately after entering a room, and after that, put on our high heels and dashed off to another room to solicit business.

My boyfriend treated me very well after I returned home from work. He massaged my feet, cooked dinner for me, and washed my clothes. He treated me very tenderly, and he often made love to me.

Li Na, a 30-year-old from Guilin (Guangxi) who was working as a freelance prostitute in Kuala Lumpur when we interviewed her, was also forced into prostitution by a group of men she and two female friends met at a train station in China:

I stayed at home for a while after quitting elementary school, and then I went to work in Mudanjiang (Heilongjiang Province, northeast China). When I was 16, I went to Harbin with two other girls. We slept at a bus station for two nights because we had no money. We met three men who found a hotel for us and later introduced us to hostessing at a KTV. They told us we will make \$4 an hour sitting tables. After working for a week, we thought that we had earned about \$125 and we could go home. But these men told us that we owed them another \$125 because they provided us with meals, lodging, clothes, cosmetics, and transportation. So we had to continue to work. We also had sex with them. One of us got pregnant and had an abortion. A customer at the KTV kindly helped us to escape. We lived at his home for a while, but he was poor, so we went home.

Some subjects were not deceived or forced, but they could be considered trafficking victims because they were brought into this line of work by their boyfriends when they were teenagers. Xiao Tao, a 20-year-old woman from Changde (Hunan Province) whom we interviewed in a small hotel that doubled as brothel in Macau, told us:

I studied in a technical high school after graduating from middle school. I had a boyfriend at that time. After he was expelled from school because of fighting, I also dropped out of school to be with him. We hung out every day; I was 16 then. Soon, a friend of my boyfriend who was living in Zhanjiang (Guangdong) told us that I could earn \$12 a table as a hostess. So my boyfriend and I went to Zhanjiang. I found a job at a big nightclub that was located inside a five-star hotel. At first, I made \$12 per table, and later \$24 a table. Those tall girls from northeast China made \$40 per table. I gave \$6 to the nightclub when I was getting \$24 per table; \$1.25 to the nightclub when I got \$12 per table. I did not go out with customers when I started. Later, I felt pressure from the mommy. She said: "We get into this line of work simply to make money, how can you not go out with customers?" Besides, while other girls were earning more than \$125 a day, I was only making \$20 a day, so I wasn't very happy. So I decided to go out with customers. After I went out with a customer for the first time, I cried after returning home and my boyfriend asked me what had happened. I told him I went out with a client and he consoled me by saying that we would be together for a long time in the future. . . . My boyfriend did not work. He did not have much education, so it was hard for him to find a job.

Zhang Li, a 24-year-old single woman from Huangmei (Hubei Province), worked in a small hotel in Macau at the time of the interview. She explained how she was tricked into prostitution by a co-worker's sister.

After dropping out of middle school for more than half a year, I went to Wenzhou (Zhejiang) to work [in the legitimate sector]. Then I returned to Huangmei to learn haircutting with my aunt. I studied for one year without payment, and needed to pay her because she provided me with food and lodging. Later, I went to work at a hair salon. I also provided massage service, but it was pure massage. I made a little more than \$90 a month. At that time, one of my colleagues had a sister in Zhuhai who worked as a restaurant waitress and made more than \$125 a month. So we went to Zhuhai to visit her, and we had a great time together. One week later, the chickenhead of her sister (it turned out that she was a prostitute) said that we owed him money and tried to persuade us, including making threats, to work for him by providing sexual services in hotels. That chickenhead had many pimps who solicited customers for him at various hotels; they called the chickenhead when there was business and the chickenhead would send the girls to the hotels. At that time, I was still a virgin and did not know how to have sex. So, for the first two or three assignments, I was sent to the hotel but I came back without completing the deals. My first completed deal was with a customer from Taiwan who paid me \$375 and I split the money half and half with the chickenhead. After that, the price became \$25 per sexual transaction; \$100 or \$125 for overnight booking. I kept half of the money, and the chickenhead got the other half. Two months later, my friend and I went back to Huangmei without informing the chickenhead.

Yang Fei is a 21-year-old call-girl whom we interviewed in Kuala Lumpur. She was originally from Changde (Hunan), and she described how she was forced by her boyfriend to engage in commercial sex:

I did nothing but have fun for two years after quitting middle school. Later, I went to work in a factory in Changping (Guangdong). There, I met my boyfriend. Later, we moved to Haikou and he forced me to work at a bar lounge. A lot of girls sat in the lounge for customers to choose from, and after being chosen, went into a room to have sex. I gave all the money I made to my boyfriend. I still remember that my boyfriend taught me how to pretend to be a virgin when I had the first customer. I put some kind of medicinal water inside my vagina. I closed my eyes from the beginning to the end and red water did flow out. The customer

was satisfied, and he gave me \$375 as a tip. But my boyfriend took the money away right after I came out. I worked for six months at that place and my boyfriend gave me only \$200 to send home. He let me go home for a while half a year later. Later, I came here [to Malaysia] and I also gave him \$625 as a breakup fee.

Another subject, Jiao Jiao, the 17-year-old girl we interviewed in Singapore, told us how she became a prostitute with the help of a chickenhead after realizing that she could make significantly more being a *xiaojie*. She was not deceived or forced, but since she was a teenager, she was a victim (both domestic and transnational):

After I graduated from a middle school, I worked at a restaurant as a hostess. Later, I worked at an artificial flower factory and made \$38 to \$50 a month. I also used to work as a cashier, a mobile phone salesgirl, and in a variety of other jobs. My cousin, a *xiaojie* in Shenzhen with her own chickenhead, persuaded me to go there to become a prostitute. I figured that the most I could make in Dongfeng is a little more than \$125 a month, why not go to Shenzhen to make more than \$1,250 a month? By introducing me to a chickenhead, my cousin was entitled to take a cut of my future earnings. That's why it was agreed upon that I will give my chickenhead half of whatever I am going to make in Shenzhen. The agreement was that I will give the chickenhead half my income as long as I am working, there was no time limit or amount limit. The chickenhead flew to Changchun [the capital of Jilin], and then the two of us took a train for more than 30 hours to arrive in Shenzhen. I worked at a sauna located inside a five-star hotel. I also had sex with him, but we were not emotionally attached. He was a married man in his 30s.

We also interviewed a 21-year-old woman in Jakarta who was working in a spa at that time. She recalled how she was forced into prostitution by more than one man:

When I was 14, I and a female friend were raped by two men. Later, I was brought to Changde (Hunan) by a man who forced me to provide sex in a hotel. Not long after, I escaped and returned to Changsha. Then I went to a place near Guangzhou to work, but I met a man (called *Bailong* or White Dragon) who forced me to work at a sauna establishment. He beat me, and took away all my earnings. I ran away after working for a while and took a bus back to Changsha from Luohu. In Changsha, I ran into that man who brought me to Changde, and he



again took me to Guangzhou. After arriving in Guangzhou, he was worried that the man from Shenzhen – *Bailong* – may be looking for me. So he left me alone.

Gui Gui is a 25-year-old woman from Jilin who was working at a spa in Jakarta at the time of the interview. She was also brought into this profession by her boyfriend, although there was no use of deception or force.

When I was very young, I stayed home and helped my parents' farm. My family was very poor. Later, I worked as a waitress. When I was 18, I met a man who was 18 years older than me. My aunt introduced him to me. At first, he bought me nice meals and beautiful clothes, and then we had sex. Later, he told me he was desperate for money because his business was failing. He brought me to a sex venue. The first time I had sex with a client, I dashed out of the room, crying. At that time, the charge was \$30 per transaction. I got \$25 and the store took \$5.

The majority of the domestic trafficking victims we came across were from Chongqing City, Guangxi Province, and Hunan Province in China, and most were interviewed in Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These women generally were less well educated than the others, and they were more likely to owe money to a sex ring operator for bringing them overseas. None of the 15 former domestic trafficked victims were in the United States.

Our estimate of 10 percent as the prevalence rate of domestic sex trafficking in China is probably an underestimate. Of the other 90 percent who said they were not forced, deceived or coerced into prostitution and are thus not considered trafficking victims, some of them could have become prostitutes while still minors and thus would also qualify for this definition. But because we do not have data for all our subjects on what age they first entered into prostitution, we are not able to answer this question.

## Trajectories and Paths to Prostitution

Most of the subjects who had worked in the commercial sex business in China went through various stages before finally becoming a *xiaojie*. Typically, after quitting school at a tender age, they stayed home for a short period of time before they ventured out to look for work. Because most of them were from rural areas in the inner provinces, they traveled to a nearby city to find work. Some of them even traveled all the way to a distant coastal city for employment. Very often, they began by working in the manufacturing industry, making about \$50 a month and working long hours (Chang 2009). Yan Yan, a 20-year-old *xiaojie* in Macau worked in a few factories before she made up her mind to engage in providing sexual services:

After dropping out of middle school, I worked in a relative's factory in Changde (Hunan Province). I was only 13 then. Later, I went to work in another factory. I also went to Jiansu Province to work, also in a factory. After returning to Changde, I stayed home for a while and eventually decided to go to Shenzhen. Before I left for Shenzhen, I had already made up my mind to be a *xiaojie*. It was a decision I made on my own.

Some subjects became prostitutes after they began to work in one of the precursor venues: a hair salon, a pure massage parlor, or a nightclub/KTV lounge, even though they did not intend to sell sex when they initially applied for the job in these venues. For example, there are large numbers of so-called *falang* (hair salons) in China and some hair salons are actually legitimate businesses that provide haircuts and shampoos, facial care and facial massages, and sometimes body massages. However, there are also many hair salons that are essentially brothels, and some that provide both licit and illicit services.

Many girls and young women in China are employed in the hair salon business because there are plenty of job opportunities which do not require a lot of education, and the nature of the work is much more appealing and trendy than working in a factory.

However, many young women working in this business also end up as prostitutes simply because the business is poorly regulated and many places function as a venue for male customers and female employees to engage in paid sex. Xiao Qian, 22, an independent, hotel-based *xiaojie* in Macau, explained how she entered the life:

I dropped out of middle school after attending for only one year. I then went to work in a factory in Zhuhai (near Macau). A year later, I found a job at a hair salon because the pay at the factory was very poor. Not long after, I met my boyfriend and I began to do bad things. With my boyfriend's tacit approval, I began to enter this line of work. I became a prostitute at the same hair salon where I was already working. If a client wanted sexual services, I took him to a nearby place. I charged \$25 for sexual intercourse; if he wanted other, additional services such as oral sex besides intercourse, the fee was \$38.

Massage parlors are another venue where many young women who started as legitimate masseuses may gradually move into commercial sex. In China, there are large and small massage parlors everywhere, and these venues provide ample employment opportunities for young women who want to make good money, but who do not have the educational qualifications or professional skills to find good-paying jobs. However, many females employed in massage parlors also are lured into providing sexual services by their employers, or they shift their role after they find out that they can make substantially more if they are willing to be accommodating. Xiao Tan, 20, single, was an independent, hotel-based prostitute in Macau at the time of the interview. She described how easy it was for her to move into sex massage from pure massage:

After graduating from middle school, I worked near my hometown (Changde, Hunan Province) and earned \$25 to \$30 a month. I left my hometown to go to Dongguan (Guangdong Province) and worked in an electronics factory and made about \$100 monthly. But I still felt short of money. Later, I went back to my hometown and worked at my cousin's restaurant. Then I went to Hebei Province to operate a restaurant with other partners. Eventually, I came back to my hometown and worked in a massage parlor (pure massage) and earned almost \$250 a month, but I still felt the income was not enough. At that time, even though I was doing pure massage, it wasn't difficult for me to get acquainted with women who were doing sex massage. Once you have connections with these people and know that they make plenty of money, it is not hard to enter this line of sex work. So I went to Shenzhen to do sex massage. I was 21 then. I still remember the first time I provided a hand job to a client in Shenzhen. The customer held my hand to his penis and pretty much did it on his own. That's because I did not know how to do it at that time.

The third route to prostitution is through hostessing. In China, there is a huge demand for hostesses because there are many nightclubs and karaoke TV (KTV) clubs where young women entertain male clients by singing, drinking, and chatting with them in private rooms. For many businessmen and government officials with money and power, these places are ideal to entertain their friends, business partners, clients and superiors. When men go to these places for fun, buying sex is not an inevitable outcome; many men simply go there and have a good time with a bunch of hostesses and then go home. However, there is also always the possibility that a hostess may catch a man's eye, and he will then try to get her to go out for sex. There is no rule that a hostess must go out with a client, and many hostesses never venture out of their workplaces with customers. According to our interviews, however, it is rather difficult for a hostess to refuse a customer's request for extra service, simply because a customer can come back again and again until he gets his wish; and other hostesses, the mommy, the manager, or the

employer put pressure on her to sleep with the customer. Certain men will double or triple the payment offered for taking out a hostess until she gives in.

Zhao Yan, a 24-year-old single woman from Yongzhou (Hunan Province), explained how she ended up as a *xiaojie* after working as a waitress, a regular masseuse, and a teahouse hostess:

I worked as a restaurant waitress in Yongzhou after dropping out of middle school. Later, one of my relatives in Changsa (the capital of Hunan Province) asked me to come there and I found a job in a massage parlor. I was trained for a month and I needed to pay several hundred yuan as deposit. At that time, I made 50 cents for washing hair, 75 cents for foot massage, and \$1 for 45 minutes of Thai massage – no sex involved. I made less than \$100 a month. Later, the owner opened a tea house on the second floor of the massage parlor. Besides drinking tea, customers could hug and fondle the hostesses. Later, the owner set a wooden bath barrel in the massage parlor and the nature of the massage changed. Customers were allowed to have sex with a masseuse inside the parlor. From working as a pure masseuse, I became a teahouse hostess, and then a *xiaojie*.

Another subject moved from a position as a liquor salesgirl to a hostess to eventually becoming a *xiaojie*. According to Lin Nuan, a 24-year-old single woman from Chengdu (Sichuan Province) who was working at a one-woman-brothel in Hong Kong at the time of the interview: “I worked as a waitress after I graduated from middle school. I made \$50 a month and it was almost nothing. So, two months later, I went to work at a night club as a liquor salesgirl. I made almost \$250 a month. It was not easy to keep your distance from customers as a liquor salesgirl, so I decided to become a hostess at the same nightclub.”

## Going Abroad

### Reasons

Of the 149 Chinese women interviewed outside of China, 106 or 71 percent, said they knew they were going overseas to engage in the sex industry even before they left China (see Table 4). Four subjects (or 3 percent) said they realized they would work as prostitutes right after they arrived in the destination country, twenty-two not long after they had arrived, and seventeen long after they had settled down abroad. The last two categories of subjects – those who entered the sex sector either not long after or long after they had gone abroad – were predominantly women we interviewed in Los Angeles and New York. These women in the United States were quite different from the other women in Asia in terms of age (older), marital status (more likely to be married or divorced), education (better educated), region of origin (came from the northeast rather than from the south or southwest), or commercial sex experience (most were not prostitutes in China). Even though these women said they did not go to America with a plan to sell sex, we do not know how many of them knew back in China that, if they struggled in the United States, there was always a chance for them to enter prostitution as a last resort. If we exclude women in Los Angeles and New York out of the calculation, then 105 out of the remaining 117 (90%) said they went overseas with the knowledge that they would engage in providing sexual services.

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Table 4 about here

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For our subjects, the reasons for engaging in prostitution overseas include two main ones: making money for oneself (54%) and making money to help their families (31%). As discussed above, these two reasons were also often cited by our subjects when asked why they got into prostitution in China. The other 15 percent offered a variety of other reasons for being involved in commercial sex overseas, including (1) it was not so easy to make money as prostitutes in China anymore, especially given the frequent crackdowns on prostitution by the authorities; (2) they had run into a chickenhead who urged them to go overseas; and/or (3) to get away from certain people, mainly husbands or boyfriends.

### **The Intermediaries**

Of the women we interviewed, only ten (less than 7 percent) said they went abroad on their own without any help from anyone. The majority of the subjects (79 out of 145 or 54%), were assisted by a returned *xiaojie* (a woman who has been abroad and returned to China) only, or a returned prostitute *and* a company (a labor broker in China), or a returned *xiaojie and* an agent (an investor in Taiwan or a representative in Indonesia). In the first scenario, a returned *xiaojie* helps a subject to apply for a visa, brings the subject along when she goes overseas again, or simply introduces her to a mommy or a sex venue owner in the destination country. In this process, no third party is involved. In the second and third scenarios, the returned prostitute needs someone else, either a company or an agent, to help the subject obtain the necessary travel documents or to make employment arrangements with a sex venue in the destination country. Women we interviewed in Taiwan, Thailand, and Malaysia were most often helped by a returned *xiaojie*, who

assisted them in going abroad, with or without the assistance of a company or an agent (see Table 5).

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Table 5 about here

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Returned *xiaojies* were interested in helping other women to go overseas for one or more of the following three reasons. First, they make money. The woman who was being helped, or the agent for whom the returned prostitute was recruiting, or the sex venue owner for whom the recruit was going to work, will pay the returned *xiaojie* a certain amount of money for her help. This payment is usually made without being requested, and money is usually not the strongest factor for these particular recruiters. Second, by bringing someone along on their next overseas trip, returned *xiaojies* can establish a small and close network among the group so that they can look after one another in a foreign country. For many Chinese women working in overseas commercial sex, having someone they can trust, rely on, or at the very least talk to after work, is as important as making a commission. Third, for many women in Thailand, bringing a younger and prettier friend, relative, or neighbor with them on their next trip to Thailand was also one way for them to maintain a niche in the sex market.

Twenty eight subjects (19%) were helped by a company to go overseas. These subjects, most of them in Los Angeles or New York, were helped by “broker companies” that specialize in assisting Chinese citizens to go abroad. In this scenario, no returned prostitutes are involved; the subjects take the initiative, contact a broker company, and ask the company to help them leave China. After these women arrive in the United



States, their relationship with the broker company ends, and they later enter the sex business on their own. Their migration experiences are actually quite similar to the Fujianese who are smuggled into the United States by human smugglers for a fee, except that these women paid significantly less than the Fujianese and almost always flew into the United States as opposed to the Fujianese use of sea or land routes (Kwong 1997; Chin 1999; Zhang 2008).

As mentioned above, thirteen subjects (9%) were assisted by chickenheads – men who help Chinese women to enter the profession and then take a cut of the women’s earnings, or in some cases, take away all the earnings. Women we met in Macau were significantly more likely to be assisted by chickenheads than subjects in any other sites.

Another 10 subjects (7%) were helped by their husband or boyfriend to go overseas. Of the 10, six were women we interviewed in Los Angeles and New York, and they arrived in the United States after they had married American citizens.

The issue of the intermediary is very much related to the definition of sex trafficking. Some scholars and practitioners have argued that if a woman is helped to go overseas to engage in commercial sex, then she is a trafficked victim, regardless of who the helper is. If this is the case, then more than 93 percent of our female subjects would be considered to be transnational trafficking victims. This issue will be picked up again when we discuss the definition and prevalence of sex trafficking at the end of the report.

### **A Comparison of Subjects in Various Sites**

Table 6 shows the individual characteristics of the *xiaojie* subjects by research site. As far as age is concerned, subjects in Macau were the youngest, with a mean age of 25,

followed by subjects in Taiwan (26). Subjects in New York were the oldest (39), followed by Los Angeles (38). The average age for the entire sample of women we interviewed outside of China was 31, and it suggests that many women who go overseas to sell sex are not teenagers, but rather women who are at least in their mid-20s or early 30s.

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Table 6 about here

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Women in New York and Los Angeles were comparatively better educated than those in Asia. Many subjects in Los Angeles had attended or completed college, whereas subjects in Thailand and Malaysia were the least educated, with an average of only 8 years of education (meaning most of them did not complete middle school). The average years of education for the entire overseas sample was 10 years, meaning most of them did not finish high school.

Table 6 also shows subjects' marital status by research sites. Subjects we interviewed in Taiwan are most likely to be single (93.8%), followed by Macau (77.8%) and Indonesia (72.2%). Subjects in New York were the least likely to be single (6.2%), followed by Los Angeles (18.8%) and Thailand (23.5%). For the entire sample, 50 percent said they were single. Again, it shows that one in two Chinese women who are selling sex overseas were or had been married and many of them were mothers.

Table 6 also shows the percentage of subjects who said they had been *xiaojies* in China by site. This commercial sex experience was significantly different by site; few if any of the women in New York and Los Angeles had engaged in prostitution before they

arrived in the United States, whereas the vast majority of the women in Hong Kong (85%), and slight majorities in Macau (56%), and Malaysia (56%) said they had been selling sex in China. Some four out of ten women in our sample told us they had engaged in paid sex in China before going overseas. And most of these women had been involved in commercial sex in China for quite a few years before they went overseas to continue their involvement.

When we compare the backgrounds of the persons who helped our subjects go overseas by research site, it is clear that the vast majority (59%) of the sample was assisted by a returned prostitute, with or without the help of another party such as an “agent” or a “company.” Subjects in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, and Malaysia were most likely to be assisted by a returned *xiaojie*, whereas subjects in Macau were more likely to be helped by a chickenhead and subjects in Los Angeles and New York City aided by a broker company. None of the women in New York arrived with the help of a returned prostitute.

The mode of entry also differed by site. Whereas most subjects went to Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore as tourists, subjects entered Macau as tourists in transit who were heading for a Southeast Asian country. By contrast, subjects in Indonesia, Los Angeles, and New York were most likely to arrive with a business visa. Because Chinese women are highly unlikely to enter Taiwan with a tourist or a business visa, the majority of them entered Taiwan as the “wives” of Taiwanese men through fake marriages.

Examining the information in Table 6, it is clear that the transnational movement of Chinese women for the purpose of commercial sex is quite country-specific. We

cannot therefore equate the situation, for example, in Taiwan with the situation in New York, and vice versa, because we are talking about two very different groups of women with very different motives, different travel arrangements, and different commercial sex experiences both in China and in the destination countries. This echoes our observation that the reality is a fairly nuanced one, and one size does not fit all. However, we must also remind our readers that our *xiaojie* sample is not a random sample, and as a result, the characteristics of our female subjects may not be a good representation of the population of Chinese women who are engaged in transnational commercial sex.

### **The Sex Markets**

When Chinese women go overseas to engage in prostitution, there are a number of ways for them to make money. They can, for example, work independently, meaning they do not have to rely on anyone else. Although at first blush this may seem improbable, given that they are in a foreign country and engaging in an illicit activity, the women with whom we spoke describe how this is indeed possible.

Women interviewed in this study, whether independent or self-employed, typically work in one of the following four settings.

On the street: In this venue, a woman solicits business on the street, and then provides sexual services in her apartment, or a nearby hotel, or at the customer's place. A Chinese woman working overseas is highly unlikely to engage in specific sexual transactions in a public place or outdoors because of the fear of detection and arrest. Although being a street walker is by definition being publicly exposed, the women must be very careful and subtle in soliciting customers so as not to attract unwanted attention. We found street

walkers to be most likely in the streets of old residential areas of Hong Kong and Macau, and in the Chinatowns of Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Restaurants and other public places: Here a woman solicits customers in a restaurant, a tea shop, a bar, or a food court by approaching men and asking them if they want her companionship. While drinking or eating, the woman plays the role of a hostess and tries to create a lively and pleasant atmosphere. Paid sex after the drink or the meal may or may not follow, but the woman receives or expects to receive a tip in any event. This form of approach occurs especially in the restaurants and tea shops in a red-light district of Singapore, at a food court in Kuala Lumpur, and in the Chinatown of Bangkok.

Hotels: A woman rents a hotel room, solicits business in the hotel lobby, and then sells sex in her room. Neither the women nor the hotel management advertise the availability of sex services. Instead, through word of mouth, local people (and in some places repeat foreign visitors) know which hotels to go to if they want to buy sex. This is the kind of street knowledge to which we referred earlier, and it is a critical link in the demand/supply chain. In this type of arrangement, there are no formal agreements between the hotel management and the women. In essence, hotel management cares only that the women pay for their room; beyond that the women are free to work as they please. Although somewhat similar to the home-based women (discussed later), the hotel-based women do not have as much autonomy as the home-based women. This hotel based commercial sex is particularly prevalent in certain hotels in Macau and Malaysia.

Home: A woman rents a place (an apartment, a townhouse, or a one-family house), advertises her business in a newspaper or on the Internet, answers the phone herself, and provides sexual services in her home. Unlike the independent street prostitutes mentioned above, she does not venture out of her place to seek clients. She takes care of every aspect of her business herself, and her only major expense is the rent. This type of business is called a “one-woman brothel” in Hong Kong, a “house” in Los Angeles, and an “apartment” in New York.

Of the 149 overseas Chinese women we interviewed, 36 (24%) identified themselves as independent and self-employed *xiaojies*. Of these 36 women, four worked the streets, 16 solicited their business in restaurants, eight waited for clients in hotel lobbies, and eight worked from their homes or apartments. Our data suggest that selling sex overseas does not have to be particularly organized; and that women can enter and exit certain sex markets at will without having to gain the approval or assistance of local people or criminals. Under these circumstances, these women are unlikely to be exploited or victimized by operators in the local sex business, because these women have little or no contact with any sex ring operators or local criminals in the destination country.

If she does not choose to work alone, a woman can work in collaboration with a mommy who will solicit business for her or with a local chickenhead who will look out after her. This type of arrangement is a kind of partnership. There are two types of these partnerships – the first being one in which a mommy is the solicitor: To avoid being arrested for seeking customers on the street, some women may ask one or more mommies to recruit customers for them. The mommy will charge a customer according to her judgment of how rich and anxious for sex the customer is, and the woman who provides

the sexual services will get only a standard fee. She may, however, keep any tips. This type of arrangement exists, for example, on the streets of Hong Kong's tourist areas and in certain restaurants in Jakarta.

In the second type of partnership a local man agrees to act as a protector – a protector from the police and difficult customers. This local man, working in concert with other local men who play the same role, will keep an eye out for the police, and will make sure that the woman he is working with is in and out of a hotel within a certain time when she is with a customer. The women decide how much they will charge their customers per session; they need only to pay the local man a certain amount of money per transaction or per day. This form is most prevalent in the streets of Hong Kong and Singapore.

In yet a third form, the women work for a group of people or an establishment as employees. In this type of arrangement, a woman is most likely to be working for a nightclub/KTV/flower hall, a sauna/spa/massage parlor, a brothel/apartment/house/*falang*, or an escort agency. In the nightclub, KTV, or flower hall venues, which are indoors, women are called hostesses or “public relations officers,” and they drink, sing, chat, or dance with customers in private rooms. Some customers may also want these women to take drugs with them. In some of these venues, customers are allowed to have sex with the hostesses without having to leave the establishment (Zheng 2009). More often though, the customer is required to take the hostess out if he wants sexual services. Chinese women are most likely to work in this fashion in nightclubs in Malaysia and Indonesia, in nightclubs and KTV lounges in Singapore, and in the flower halls in Thailand.

The saunas or spas are places where men go to have a bath, a sauna, and a massage; but most men also want to buy sex as well. The size of the establishment and the prices they charge vary significantly. Some massage parlors in New York may have only two female workers at any given time, whereas the saunas in Macau and the spas in Jakarta might have more than a hundred. Prices can range from \$50 to \$250 per visit.

The massage parlors are actually usually a simpler and smaller version of the sauna or spa. A customer can take a bath and have a massage in one of these parlors, but he can also buy sex if he wants. The massage parlors have only a few women, and the facilities are usually sparsely decorated.

The brothels, apartments, or houses, unlike the venues described above, do not provide any entertainment or massages. Their only commodity is sex. And unlike the self-employed, home-based brothels, these locations normally have two or more women working at any given time. This particular form is called a *malan* (horse barn) or brothel in Hong Kong and Macau, an apartment in New York, a house in Los Angeles, and a *falang* (hair salon) in China.

The final venue form is the escort service. Here an escort agency delivers women to wherever the customers are – mostly to hotels or motels where they are staying, or to a flat operated by a pimp who has connections to the escort agency, or to the customer's home. Chinese women in Taiwan, Malaysia, and New York are relatively active in the escort service business.



### **Road Fee, Debt, and Income**

One of the weaknesses of much of the literature on sex trafficking has been the lack of information and discussion about its financial aspects. The fact is that researchers know very little about the specific fees women from sending countries have to pay to go overseas; and yet the common conclusion is that these fees are exorbitant and that the interest attached is so high that it takes many years for the women to repay their debts. This is the basis for the conclusions that are generally reached about debt bondedness. We also have little data on specifically how much money these women are making overseas; but again the generally accepted conclusion is that they basically earn nothing, and that they often end up returning home empty-handed.

In this section, we describe what we have learned about this issue from our interviews with 350 respondents who have knowledge with respect to Chinese women in this regard. In particular, we were told how much our respondents paid facilitators for the chance to go abroad, how much they charged their clients per sexual transaction, how many transactions they had a day on average, and how the money from the clients was distributed among the women and the various facilitators and employers. Harking back to the critically important role of economics as the dominant push factor in the transnational movement of women for commercial sex, we believe that these sort of data shed light on the economic aspects of the global sex trade, and help us better understand the force behind the massive movement of women across international borders.

We want to make clear at the outset of our discussion of specific money issues, that all the monetary calculations we will present are just that – calculations. They are rough estimates, but they are the best estimates possible given the nature of the

information available. For example, most of the figures in American dollars have been converted from foreign currencies, and because of the fluctuation in exchange rates, the U.S. dollar amounts we present had to be ballpark estimates. Second, when we calculated the female subjects' daily or monthly incomes, we did not have information about amounts they may have received in tips. We know that some women, especially those who work in nightclubs and KTVs, rely substantially on tips. For these women, our estimates are going to understate their possible incomes. We have also not included in our estimates the regular stipends some women receive from their "husbands," again resulting in a lower estimate than might actually be the case.

### **Road Fee**

Many respondents used the words *lufei* (road fee) or *shouxufei* (processing fee) to refer to the money they had to pay to go overseas. Of the 149 Chinese women we interviewed outside of China, 141 answered the question about a road fee, and 99 (70 percent) said they had paid someone to help them get out of China (see Table 7). The other 30 percent said they did not have to pay anyone, even though they did spend some money to obtain travel documents such as a passport or visa, and to buy a plane or train ticket. In other words, for nearly a third of our subjects, they did not incur any financial obligation in order to be smuggled abroad.

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Table 7 about here

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Table 7 shows that subjects in different sites were in different situations in terms of paying someone for their overseas travel. For example, subjects in Hong Kong and

Macau rarely had to pay (only one out of five), simply because many Chinese citizens can make the arrangements to travel to Hong Kong and Macau without outside help. A substantial portion of our subjects in Thailand (35%) also did not have to pay anyone to go to Thailand. Many of the subjects in Los Angeles (47 percent) and some in New York (19 percent) did not pay because they came as legal immigrants or with an F-1 (student) or B-2 (business) visa – a visa they obtained without having to spend any money. On the other hand, almost all the subjects in Taiwan (94 percent), Malaysia (100 percent), Singapore (100 percent), and Indonesia (100 percent) said they had to pay someone to help them leave China.

Table 7 also indicates the amount of money our subjects paid for their trips. For those ninety nine subjects who did pay, the average road fee was just over \$7,000, but the makeup of charges was significantly different depending on the site. The three subjects in Hong Kong paid an average of only about \$900, compared to almost \$27,000 for the eight subjects in Los Angeles. Subjects in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia also did not pay a lot – roughly a thousand dollars. For Taiwan, the average road fee was over \$6,000, and it was one of the more expensive places to go among our research sites in Asia.

Most of the women we interviewed in Taiwan did not think that the amount of money they owed their agents was unreasonable. The \$6,000 road fee to Taiwan was so taken for granted by both sides that it was not even discussed when the two sides met to discuss about the trip to Taiwan.

Even though only 24 percent of the women we interviewed in Macau had to pay someone to go to Macau, the four women who did pay had to spend an average of almost

\$10,000 for the trip. The explanation for this high fee is that for these four, their trips to Macau or their initiation into commercial sex in Macau was assisted by a chickenhead.

In sum, as illustrated in Table 7, not all the Chinese women had to pay someone to go overseas, because some of them were able to obtain the necessary travel documents on their own or with the help of a returned *xiaojie* who helped them for nothing. The odds on paying or not paying seem to depend on the person, the helper, and the destination. We also see that for the majority of the women, the road fee was not as exorbitant as generally suggested in the human trafficking literature. Most women paid one or two thousand dollars for their trips, and consequently they did not have to work all that long to repay this amount of money.

It is also the case that many women were able to pay for their trip with their own savings, or could borrow the relatively small amount of money from friends and relatives. Our data in fact show that this was exactly what happened with most of our subjects. Table 8 shows that 47 (44%) of the 106 subjects who paid someone for their trip, paid with their own money. Another 25 subjects (24%) said they borrowed the money from their friends or relatives. Only 34 (32%) subjects owed money to someone who was not an acquaintance. All the subjects in Taiwan arrived in Taiwan with debts to various agents, but none of the women we interviewed in the United States, even though they had to pay significantly more than did the subjects in Asia, were under debt bondage. Moreover, when we asked those 34 subjects who arrived overseas owing money to sex ring operators whether they were still under debt bondage at the time of the interviews, only 14 (10% of the total sample) said they were. This means the other 20 subjects had already cleared their travel debts by the time we interviewed them. This is a very

different picture than that presented by, for example, Human Rights Watch (2000: 5). Referring to the experience of Thai women in Japan, Human Rights Watch concluded that most Thai women who were working in the Japanese sex business took anywhere from several months to two years to repay their debts. Our findings suggest that perhaps we need to re-examine some of the assumptions about sex trafficking and debt bondage.

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Table 8 about here

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### **Charges and Earnings**

In the sex trafficking literature, there is an assumption that when women go overseas to sell sex, they are going to be exploited by pimps and brothel owners, especially if they are tricked or forced into commercial sex under the debt bondage system. One of the most often mentioned types of exploitation is monetary, as Louise Brown has asserted in her book *Sex Slaves*: “We can guarantee that the women who are held in sexual slavery see very little of this (money)” (2000: 157). Our data do not support this conclusion.

In the main, what we find is that there are two ways a *xiaojie* makes money. She has sex with a customer and the customer pays her for the sexual services. These sexual transactions can take place in a hotel, a nightclub or a KTV, a sauna or a spa, a massage parlor, a brothel, or an apartment. Or, she can drink, sing, dance, and chat with a customer or a group of customers as a hostess in a nightclub, a KTV, or a flower hall, and then receive tips from her customers.

As shown in Table 9, customers paid our respondents an average of \$96 per session for sexual transactions and \$38 per table (not per customer) for hostessing. Subjects in Macau were paid as low as an average of \$30 per sexual transaction, whereas

respondents in Indonesia were paid as high as \$145. Of course, most of our subjects in Macau were women providing quick sex out of cheap hotels, whereas subjects in Indonesia were mostly working for upscale spas where a variety of sexual services must be provided before the ending sexual intercourse. As a result, the amount of payment from customers is significantly different. But the price difference reflects the nature of the sex service rather than the nature of the sex business in Macau and Indonesia. If, for example, we had interviewed more women working in the upscale spas of Macau, we clearly may have had a different finding. Lest one would question the \$96 per transaction figure, we would point out that this is very close to the average charge per client of \$94 for trafficked victims recorded in the Counter-Trafficking Module Database of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Tommaso et al. 2009).

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Table 9 about here

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Another key issue addressed in Table 9 is the percentage of the charges that actually went to the respondents, to the women themselves. On average, our respondents received an average of \$66 per commercial sexual transaction, which is equivalent to about three-fourths of the money that the customers paid. Respondents in Taiwan received only 43 percent of the payment, whereas respondents in Macau obtained as high as 97 percent of the payment. Our data suggest that the majority of the women who went overseas to engage in commercial sex were not, as is often noted in the trafficking literature, subjected to grossly unfair treatment at the hands of those who helped them to sell sex. We think the reasons for this are twofold. First, as mentioned above, many women engage in prostitution as independent entrepreneurs, so there are no pimps or

brothel keepers to take advantage of them, and they are able to pocket most, if not all the money their customers paid them. Second, the people who are intermediaries or facilitators know quite well that they must rely on these women to do a profitable business. It is not good business practice to take an unreasonable share of the profits if they want the women to continue to work for them, or better yet, want them to help recruit friends and others into the business.

### **Monthly Income**

As indicated previously, the monthly income estimates have a number of caveats: accuracy of subject's earnings estimates; number and amount of any tips; how many days and weeks they actually work in any given time period, etc. But based upon what the women told us about how much they charge their customers per session, how much of the money belongs to them, approximately how many clients they see a day, and how many days they normally work a month, we have calculated their approximate monthly earnings. We believe this is a useful exercise because it provides a benchmark, as rough as it is, against which to compare the monthly income possibilities if the women had stayed in China working in jobs not in the commercial sex business.

Table 10 shows that our subjects made an average of \$188 a day for about an average of just over \$4,000 a month. For a woman who might have been making one or two hundred dollars a month in the legitimate job sector in China, four thousand dollars a month (tax free) is certainly a very attractive income. We also found that our respondents were not getting rich from being a prostitute, regardless of the kind of sex venue in which they were involved.

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Table 10 about here

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Table 10 indicates that women in Los Angeles were making the most, about \$7,800 a month, and this monthly income was almost seven times the amount of money a woman in Thailand made, which was about \$1,100 a month. Taiwan ranked second in income where respondents averaged about \$7,200 a month, followed by subjects in New York with an average monthly income of almost six thousand dollars.

### **The Traffickers**

In the sex trafficking literature, the word “trafficker” is normally used to refer to all the actors who are involved in the recruitment of women in the countries from which they are sent, the transportation of victims across international borders, and the facilitation and management of these women in commercial sex overseas. As a result, a “trafficker” can be a recruiter, a transporter, a pimp, a sex venue owner, or anyone who plays a role in the promotion of transnational prostitution. In this section, we will examine all the people we interviewed in this study who would fit the definition of “traffickers” according to the literature on human trafficking. We will explore their background characteristics, the reasons for their engagement in helping women to sell sex, their roles and functions in the sex industry, and the nature of their relationship with women who sell sex. We will also discuss the issue of whether, and to what extent, organized crime groups are involved in the transnational sex trade.



## Chickenhead

Chinese people often use the word *ji* (chicken) to refer to women who sell sex, so men or male pimps who are in charge of the “chicken” are called *jitou* (chickenheads). As discussed above, some of our subjects were “turned out” by chickenheads when they first entered into prostitution in China. After they went overseas to engage in commercial sex, only women in Hong Kong, Macau, and Singapore mentioned that they were either brought overseas by a chickenhead or they were working with, or for, a chickenhead whom they met abroad. Liu Yan, a 36-year-old woman from Harbin (Heilongjiang Province, located in northeast China) recounted how she was helped by a chickenhead to go to work in Hong Kong and how she eventually got rid of him with the help of another man:

I applied for a business visa on my own for my first trip to Hong Kong. After arriving in Shenzhen, I was brought to Hong Kong by a chickenhead. He had helped many girls go to Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, he introduced several mommies to me, gave me food, and allowed me to sleep in his place for free. In return, I agreed to give him half of what I earn, excluding tips. I found the arrangement to be unfair after I got here because he just brought me here, I applied for the visa on my own. Food and lodging do not cost him much anyway. So I left him and went to another area to solicit business on my own. Later, the chickenhead threatened me. He said I would not be allowed to make money in Hong Kong if I ran away from him. I found a “daddy” who was a native Hong Kong man to talk to my chickenhead. My “daddy” found the chickenhead and warned him: “I can make it hard for you to make a living in Hong Kong. Leave XXX [the subject] alone; she is my woman now.” The chickenhead backed off, so I returned to the area where I used to work and the “daddy” became my protector and my pimp. I get \$53 per customer he refers to me; he decides how much to charge a customer, I get \$53 regardless of how much he charges. If a mommy introduces me to a customer, I will only receive \$40 because my “daddy” will take the other \$13. At any rate, this is better than sharing the money half and half with that chickenhead.

Many women we interviewed in Macau, especially those who were seeing clients in small hotels, admitted that they had their own chickenheads, even though some of them preferred to call these men their “boyfriends” or “husbands.” Zhao Yan, a 24-year-old single woman from Yongzhou (Hunan Province), recounted her experience with a chickenhead:

I met a Hunanese man when I was working at a massage parlor in Changsa (the capital of Hunan Province). I was very happy when we were together. He was not working, so I supported him. I often stopped working for a while and went on vacations with him. I went back to work after using up all the money.

Later, he said it was easier to make money in Shenzhen and took me there. He made the arrangements for me to work in a nightclub in Shenzhen. Customers paid \$40 for sitting at their table; I got \$35 and the house \$5. When I went out with a customer, I was paid from \$140 to \$200, and I had to pay my mommy \$30. I made about \$1,200 a month and I spent the money with my boyfriend. He did not work in Shenzhen and depended on me.

He had many friends who brought their girlfriends to Macau and therefore he suggested that we should also go to Macau. I did not object because I was fine as long as he was happy. He applied for all the documents for me and accompanied me to Macau. He also brought me to this hotel.

After we arrived at this hotel, I found out Macau was not as good as Shenzhen. I earned \$140 for going out with a client in Shenzhen, but I made only \$28 for each session in Macau. At the very beginning, I wasn't sure I can make good money in Macau because I did not know how to solicit business here; I just sit in the lobby, dully. Later, I began to woo customers aggressively like other girls here and even did *shuangfei* (“double fly,” or a threesome) frequently. So my business gradually improved.

My boyfriend went back to Shenzhen a few days after we arrived here. He came over to Macau occasionally and I gave him all the money I made. But we broke up in the first half of this year because he started to fool around with women in Shenzhen. I called him in Shenzhen but his cell phone was off all the time, he would not take calls when he was here with me, like he had something to hide from me. Anyway, he behaved like he had a girlfriend and we began to fight. Finally, he admitted that there was a woman in Shenzhen. However, he said he did not like that woman, he just wanted to take her money because she had a lot of it. As a result, I did not feel upset about this for some time. Later, I realized that

he was just lying. So we broke up eventually. Now I realize that I was exploited by him; he spent at least \$28,000 of my money over these years. But I really liked him. Even now, I still think of him occasionally. Most girls here have “boyfriends” or “husbands” and they are willing to make money for their men. People used to tell me that I was taken advantage of by him, but how could I have believed them at the time when I was so madly in love with him? (100)

Several subjects we interviewed in Macau told us a very similar story: Selling sex in the interior of China, they met someone they liked and that someone began to live off their earnings. Soon, that man would suggest that they should go to a city in the coastal areas because there was more money to make. After working for a while in the coastal city, the man would eventually bring the woman over to Hong Kong or Macau. We believe these men had been plotting the whole trip the day they first laid eyes on their targets and it was just a matter of time before these women ended up working overseas. According to our subjects, 40 to 80 percent of the women working out of the small hotels of Macau were controlled by their chickenheads.

These cases, we believe, can clearly be defined as sex trafficking victims, even though we did not interview the very women who were victimized. They illustrate the point that women who go overseas to engage in commercial sex by choice can end up being victimized as a consequence of their choices. Here, the chickenheads were willing to treat their women well only if and when the women are making good money for them. Women who willingly go overseas, but then find out that they are not attractive enough to make at least some money are the most likely to be subjected to physical and psychological abuse from their chickenheads. We know that, at least in China, Hong Kong, and Macau, there were a number of married men who work as full-time pimps – befriending women who may or may not already be working in commercial sex, and

acting as boyfriends or lovers for a while before they try to move the women to a coastal city, and eventually outside of China, to either enter or to continue to work in the sex business. These chickenheads are individuals mostly working on their own, but there are also many networks existing among them.

The so-called business chickenheads and pretend boyfriends described above are sex traffickers. They are not simply the kind of business partners discussed earlier. Through force, fraud and/or coercion they take advantage of the naiveté and lack of sophistication of some Chinese women in order to exploit them for financial gain. This more subtle, or at least less blatant, form of victimization has received much less attention in the discussion of sex trafficking that has tended to focus on kidnapping and sex slaves.

### **Agent**

While conducting field work in Taiwan and Indonesia, we ran into men and women who called themselves “agents,” or who were identified as such by our female subjects. Respondents in Taiwan used the Chinese word *jingji* to refer to this group of people, and subjects in Indonesia used the English word “agent.” In fact, agents in Taiwan and Indonesia were very different, even though they were all called by the same term.

### **In Taiwan**

A *jingji* or an agent in Taiwan is someone who “owns” a woman because he or she has fronted the money to bring the woman to Taiwan. After the woman arrives in Taiwan, she is obliged to go to work and repay her agent a certain amount of money (usually

about \$6,250). The agent places the woman with an escort agency. Most of the women we talked to in Taiwan claimed that they were not controlled by their agents.

### In Indonesia

Unlike agents in Taiwan, agents in Indonesia do not “own” any women. Instead, as the word “agent” implies, they represent the women in various affairs, including helping women to come to Indonesia, finding places for them to work, acting as agents of the women when interacting with the employers, making sure that the women they represent are happy with the working conditions and the income, and helping them change venues if the original arrangement does not work out. Agents in Indonesia are more like “labor brokers.” A Chinese *xiaojie* in Indonesia may have had an agent in China who persuaded her to go to Indonesia and helped her to obtain travel documents, while an agent in Indonesia may have a working relationship with the agent in China and will be mainly responsible for the woman’s job placement in Indonesia. Because of the strong demand for Chinese prostitutes in Indonesia, and also probably because of the weak supply, recruiters or agents in China often act very aggressively in the recruitment process.

### **Escort Agency Owner**

As discussed previously, some of our subjects worked for escort agencies in Taiwan, Malaysia, and New York. In Taiwan, we interviewed two escort agency owners. The first subject, Boss Zhang, is a man in his 40s, the owner of one of the top escort agencies in Taiwan. He showed up for the interview in a sparkling black Mercedes-Benz.

I have been in this business for 20 years. Right now, there are about a dozen Chinese women working in my agency and all of them are high class escorts who

charge a minimum of \$230 per session. We screen our escorts carefully and select only one out of ten who want to join us. Besides running this escort agency, I am also the agent of two Chinese women.

We pay our women and their agents every ten days. A woman must repay her agent a \$6,250 smuggling fee. They can pay it off in one month, but girls at our escort agency need 40 days because we provide service only to rich clients and so our customer base is small. However, by the time they go back to China six months later, they may have earned as much as \$60,000.

My company is small. There are more *xiaojies* in other escort agencies. Now, most of my girls are from mainland China. I do not do business with Taiwanese girls any more because they will exchange cell phone numbers with clients and then deal with the client directly and cut me off. Mainland women dare not exchange phone numbers with the clients. Besides, Taiwanese girls charge their clients as they please.

## **Jockey**

In Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia, there are male facilitators who are called *mafu* or jockeys. In Hong Kong, a *mafu* delivers a girl to a sex venue or a hotel on foot, and in Taiwan and Malaysia, by car. According to a *mafu* in Taiwan:

I used to import Chinese women into Taiwan (meaning he was an agent). I went to China and selected the girls myself. Soon, I gave up being an agent because it was getting increasingly difficult to bring Chinese women to Taiwan through fake marriage.

I used to be a jockey for Chinese women, but now I am working as a jockey for a Korean escort. Yesterday, the jockey for Co Co (a Chinese *xiaojie*) had a car accident, so he is having his car fixed today. That's why I am driving Co Co today. I have been a jockey for 6 years, so I am very familiar with this job.

There are a few rules a good jockey must follow. First, a jockey must protect his woman. After he drops off his woman for a sex appointment, he must make sure that she enters the premises safely. Furthermore, he must watch what is going on outside the premises. Moreover, while driving the woman around, he must know how to deal with road checks by the police. A good jockey must prevent his *xiaojie* from being arrested during a road check. If the *xiaojie* is detained by the authorities during a road check, her jockey is fully responsible. If she is arrested in a sting operation, that's another story.

Second, a jockey must react quickly and take the right measures when something goes wrong. Once, I was stopped on the road by a group of police officers. I immediately called a friend, also a police officer. When the cops were questioning me, I intentionally dragged out my answers until my friend came. He talked to the cops and soon the woman and I were released.

One main thing that a jockey must avoid is having sex with his woman. He will be beaten up and fired if the woman's agent finds out about this. Most Chinese women will not get into a sexual relationship with their jockeys unless the jockey started it. Another taboo is if the jockey persuades a *xiaojie* to work for another escort company.

My daily income is about \$80, this is what a *xiaojie* pays me. The escort company does not pay me. I pay for the expenses of car and gas. So my net daily income is a little more than \$30. It is comparatively dangerous to drive for Chinese women. We must wait nearby while these women are seeing clients.

If a jockey is arrested, he will be jailed from 4 to 6 months. It could be transferred to a fine, \$920 each month, so the fine is \$3,680 to \$5,520. But jockeys make more money than regular taxi drivers.

Every day, I get up around noon and show up at my *xiaojie*'s apartment around 2 pm. Once the woman serves the first client, we will not go back to where she lives because we do not want the neighbors see us going in and out of her apartment frequently. Neighbors can tell these women are prostitutes simply by their appearance. If we have no business, we will not drive around. Instead, we wander in a department store or sit in a coffee shop.

In Taiwan, many taxi drivers are recruited to work as jockeys and these drivers utilize their taxis to deliver Chinese women to various places to meet clients. However, when authorities in Taiwan began to scrutinize the taxi industry for its role in the sex trade, the escort agency owners started hiring drivers with private cars.

In Taiwan, a person can be an agent, an escort agency owner, and a jockey at the same time, or can switch from one role to another in response to law enforcement reactions or market demands. As a result, we should be mindful that the roles of the

facilitators or intermediaries in the sex trade are extremely fluid and most of the participants in the trade can perform most of these roles if needed.

### **Fake Husband**

A *jialaogong* (fake husband) is someone hired by an agent to go to China, marry a Chinese woman, and help her travel to the fake husband's (and the agent's) home country (in this case, Taiwan) for the explicit purpose of engaging in prostitution. The agent pays for all the expenses, including the fake husband's air ticket, hotel, wedding banquet, etc., and the woman has to repay her agent about \$6,250 for getting her out of China and into Taiwan. The woman is also responsible for paying the fake husband about \$1,000 a month during her stay in Taiwan, which is normally between six months to two years. In fact, once the woman arrives in Taiwan, there is little interaction between the fake husband and the woman, as she is immediately sent by the agent to work for an escort agency.

According to various reports in the Taiwanese media, agents normally look for the unemployed, the handicapped, or army veterans to engage in these fraudulent marriages with Chinese women. These men are willing to become fake husbands simply because they find the \$1,000 monthly stipend very appealing and relatively easy to earn.

Figure 2 illustrates the social organization of the transnational sex operation in Taiwan. An agent makes the arrangements for a woman in China to marry a man (fake husband) from Taiwan and then take the woman to Taiwan. The agent then puts the woman to work with an escort agency. The escort agency owner arranges a driver (jockey) to deliver the woman to various sex appointments set up by a female pimp (auntie) or a "store owner" (a person using a rented apartment or studio for the explicit



purpose of offering a place for sexual transactions between *xiaojies* and customers.)

Under this arrangement, the “store owner” takes a major cut of the fees from the customers.

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Figure 2 about here

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### **Mommy**

The mommies, mostly women who may or may not have engaged in commercial sex themselves, solicit business for their girls, by either approaching strangers on the streets or introducing the girls to customers in the nightclubs or KTVs. We met Wendy in Hong Kong; she was a street-based mommy who was seeking clients in a tourist area there. We also interviewed a mommy in a cheap dancing hall in Hong Kong. Stella, that mommy, was in her late 40s, and she said: “I became a *xiaojie* when I was 18. I did not attend school at all. I was a teenager when I moved to Hong Kong from Macau. I was married and had children. Now, I have several *xiaojies* under my supervision.”

A mommy in Bangkok who also worked for a few years in Indonesia explained how difficult it was to be a mommy, even though she was making good money:

“Actually, to be a mommy is hard work. Every day, I drink until I get very drunk, and throw up after I return home. I thought I was going to have my heart spit out. Although I was making lots of money, every day after work, I just ate a bowl of instant noodles and went to sleep. How could I be able to live a happy life like this?” This mommy, Sammi, showed up for the interview with her handicapped young son and told the following sad story:

In Bangkok, I worked from 1997 to 2003. During that period, I worked in several nightclubs – some of them are closed now. Most stores were operated by Taiwanese who were members of Bamboo United or Four Seas [two powerful organized gangs in Taiwan]. They opened fire on members of the Hong Kong 14K in order to occupy more turf. Those Taiwanese gang members are very smart in making money. But their life is also degraded. They use drugs, play women, gamble, and so on and so forth.

I opened a nightclub in Bangkok in 2003. At that time, business was very slow. Besides, I met a Chinese Thai and I had a child with him. My child had intestinal volvulus when he was only 5 months old. He was hospitalized for several months and had an operation. I thought he would die. His father never took care of us. I sold my house, my car, and my jewelry because it cost me a lot of money to treat my son's disease. Under such circumstances, I was unable to take care of my store. So it was closed later.

My son is 4 years old now. He is not totally recovered yet. He cannot speak very well and falls ill frequently. My life is restricted by him. I am not at ease if I ask a babysitter to take care of him. His father still does not help us. My son and I depend on each other for survival. I also have debts. I am really miserable. It may be a curse because I had been a mommy for so many years. I know that many women like me do not have a good ending.

We also talked to a mommy who was working for a large KTV establishment in Jakarta. The woman, Jessy, was in her 40s and we met at the fancy restaurant of the KTV store where she was working. While talking to us, Jessy was also busy eating her dinner (around 10 pm) and answering her two cell phones that were constantly ringing. Dressed in a business suit, she seemed to be living a frantic life.

### **Brothel Keeper**

In addition to the recruiters and transporters, brothel keepers are the third most often mentioned sex traffickers in the media and official documents. It is believed that for a woman to go overseas to engage in prostitution, someone must have first recruited her, and then another person must have transported her overseas, and finally, someone (a sex venue owner) must have employed her in the destination country. Because brothel

keepers are believed to be one of the principal persons who control and exploit these women for prolonged periods of time (from several months to several years) before they discard or resell the women, they are often considered to be among the worst of all the actors in sex trafficking.

While we were in Los Angeles, we had a long talk with Sam, a house owner who was originally from China. Sam shared with us his views on the sex business and the women who are involved in it:

My net profit is three to four thousand a month at most. As a house keeper, I definitely do not make more than a *xiaojie*. My rent is \$1,800 a month, and if you add to the rent all the other expenses, my daily operating cost is about \$100....This is just a kind of exchange; a very fair exchange. In my opinion, my business is like a matchmaking business; I provide a venue for a man and a woman to get involved in a trade. Both sides get what he or she wants, and I am just making some money as a middleman.

We also interviewed a young couple in Los Angeles who were running a house together. The female keeper, a thirtysomething, said she was from Shenyang (Liaoning) and the man said he was a boyfriend of the woman. According to the couple:

Our house is a small house, so we do not have our own, regular girls. I myself do not see clients, so we are not making much. Our rent is a little more than two thousand a month, and if we deduct all the expenses plus rent, we net about two to three thousand a month. Some house keepers also see clients, and they certainly make much more because they can keep the whole \$120 per date. With us, a client pays \$120 per date, the girl gets \$80 and we keep \$40. How much money can we make like this? Of course, I can make two to three thousand a month working in a restaurant, but running a house is an easy job because I don't have to be home every day. I can be out all the time if I want, and come home only when there is business. Plus, I only entertain Chinese clients, so I don't have to spend a lot of money for advertisement (just \$198 a month) or need to be worried about

being arrested because if you deal only with Chinese clients, your business is less likely to be targeted by the police.

Another keeper of a house we interviewed in Los Angeles was herself a former prostitute. We spent quite a few days in her house talking to her on and off on several occasions while interviewing women who were working for her:

In China, I was married, and then divorced. I came here as the wife of a Chinese man who was granted political asylum in the United States. In his application, he put me down as his wife. I knew the man's sister very well and they charged me \$30,000 for their help. After I got here, I worked in a restaurant for a few days. Later, I found a job as a telephone operator at a house. After three months, I felt like I was not making enough money and when the boss also urged me to *xiahai* ("go down to the sea"), I did. At that house, I saw about five or six clients a day, and I made more than \$10,000 a month.

In addition to the keepers of houses in Los Angeles, we also interviewed a few massage parlor owners in New York and New Jersey. A woman from China who had many years of experience as a massage parlor owner on the east coast described what her role as an owner was, and how the massage parlors catered to different groups of customers:

You don't have to have any special qualifications to be a massage parlor owner. All you need is to be able to speak some English and that's because it is the owner's job to screen the customers when they call to ask about the place. Of course, most of these stores do not have a phone installed; the owner can use a cell phone and answer the phone from any place. When a customer sees the ads, he will call and the owner will answer the phone, make sure the customer is not a police officer, and then give directions. If you don't speak English, you can't do this. Those stores that cater to only white Americans will refuse to give directions to people who speak English with a Chinese accent or who speak Chinese only. Some owners will just hang up the phone. Of course, there are also many stores that cater to Chinese customers only. It's just that these two types of stores run their ads in very different places. The first type of store places their ads in the

English-language newspapers and on the internet and the second type in the Chinese-language newspapers.

A Chinese lawyer in New York who had represented several massage parlor owners in court told us what he knew about these owners and their business practices:

I know four or five massage parlor owners. They rarely go to their massage parlors; only the girls are there, working, and the girls can take care of the business.

Most owners would not admit that they demand, or even know that the girls working for them are involved in commercial sex. They will say that their business is purely massage, and the girls are selling sex on their own. This way, they do not have to be responsible for what's going on between their workers and the customers. It is hard to tell if it is true or not. In some stores, there is this mutual understanding between the owner and the girls (that the girls will be selling sex) but in other stores, the owner may not know what's going on inside the room between a masseuse and a customer.

Most owners are ordinary people, there is nothing special about them. They are not members of the underworld. Besides, anybody can become an owner. It is a very simple operation, at least here in New York City's Chinatown. A person can rent an apartment, hire a few women, place an ad in the newspaper, answer phone calls, and that's it. There is no need to decorate the apartment at all. Of course, the establishments in the suburban areas could be somewhat different because there you might have to have a sauna and shower facilities.

For the owners, it is easy money. An owner can make up to \$20,000 a month per store. A woman who was my neighbor in China owns three stores here in the U.S. She is running the businesses along with her husband. I also know a man from China who became an owner after he married a Korean woman here in the U.S. That woman was a former prostitute. There is also another man from China who decided to open a massage parlor after he tried many other ways to make a living here in the U.S. and failed at all of them.

### **Big Business Owner**

Of course, the chickenheads, agents, mommies, brothel owners, escort agency owners, jockeys, and fake husbands are well-known facilitators, but one should also understand

that there are many big business owners who are facilitators and who have directly and greatly benefited from the existence of large numbers of Chinese prostitutes in or around their business establishments. For example, many nightclubs, KTVs, and hotels located in our research sites are actually owned by a small network of wealthy businessmen who are well-connected to the local and central authorities. This is an example of the role of corruption in supporting the commercial sex business in particular jurisdictions. The same is true with the hotel chains in Singapore. All the hotels in the main red-light district belong to one or more major hotel chains, and according to a local gangster who used to work as a lookout man there:

Hotels in this red-light district make a lot of money mainly because of the presence of these Chinese women. These hotels charge \$6 to \$8 per session. So these hotels will let the girls go inside and hide for a while when police come into the area. The chickenheads definitely get some benefit from these hotels, but we do not know exactly how. It is possible that hotel owners are the main bosses behind the whole business. They finance the chickenheads to recruit *xiaojies* because all of them will benefit from this business.

A Chinese Malay who used to work as an agent in Jakarta also concurred: “In this sex business, you rarely see the investors. We only see the people who are involved in the day-to-day operations.” A Chinese Indonesian businessman who used to be a regular customer of the various sex establishments in Jakarta said:

All the KTVs and spas you see here in Jakarta were opened only as recently as 2002. Here, several spas are actually owned by a group of bosses. For example, if I want to open a spa, I will find a group of investors as partners; then one of us will run the spa on a daily basis. The rest of us will remain behind-the-scenes. If this first spa is a success, then we will open a second spa, and pick another partner to be the front man of the new spa. The smaller partners are usually picked to run the spas; the big partners always prefer to keep a low profile.

## **The Role of Organized Crime**

As we indicated at the outset, many observers of human trafficking have claimed that organized crime groups are active in the promotion of the transnational movement of women for commercial sex (Caldwell et al. 1999; Shannon 1999; Richard 2000; Farr 2005; Sulainmanova 2006; Shelley 2007). For example, in a chapter on the relationship between the global sex trade and organized crime, Sarah Shannon (1999: 126) concluded that: “One of the most important actors in the world of illicit sex is organized crime. Mafia groups are an essential part of the structure that controls this market and their involvement takes many forms.” Kathryn Farr (2005: 94), in her book *Sex Trafficking*, suggested that: “Because of its profit potential, a number of well-established organized crime groups – most notably the Russian mafia, the Japanese Yakuza, and the Chinese Triads – have become heavily involved in sex trafficking. Newer organized crime groups, such as those in Albania, Ukraine, and Nigeria, have become active sex traffickers as well.” Another prominent scholar – Donna Hughes (2000) – also argued that organized crime groups are behind the trafficking of women from the former Soviet Union to Western Europe and the United States for prostitution.

As Maggy Lee (2007: 5) noted in her edited book on human trafficking: “Human trafficking has been conceptualized within a framework of organized crime. The role of criminally sophisticated, transnational organized crime groups as a driving force behind the highly profitable trade of smuggling and trafficking unauthorized migrants or asylum seekers has been commented upon widely.” According to Lee, the United Nations and many governments around the world, including the United Kingdom and the United States, have institutionalized the “trafficking-as-organized crime” approach. From Louise

Shelley's (2007: 134) point of view, human trafficking is transnational organized crime and it is tightly linked to all other forms of transnational organized crime activities such as human smuggling, drug trafficking, and money laundering: "The tardiness in which the international community had responded to this problem has made many organized criminals switch to this area of criminal activity from other forms of transnational crime. Some crime groups traffic in human beings at the same time that they engage in other criminal activity."

As far as the trafficking of Chinese victims is concerned, the report prepared by Amy O'Neill Richard (2000: 14) for the CIA suggested that "The Sun Yee On Triad, Wo Hop To Triad, the United Bamboo Gang, and Fuk Ching Gang are all believed to be involved in alien smuggling to the US, and it is likely that their activities include trafficking."

But many scholars have also argued otherwise (Yang 2006). For example, Yiu Kong Chu (2005: 7), an expert on the Hong Kong triads (who are generally regarded as the most sophisticated and dangerous organized crime entity in that part of the world) wrote that: "It is quite clear that Chinese criminals in China and different parts of Southeast Asia countries collaborate to bring a large number of Chinese women to the destination country for prostitution. It should be noted that these syndicate members are not necessarily triads and usually have nothing to do with Hong Kong triads."

In terms of our own research, the majority of the people we interviewed do not believe that members of well-organized criminal organizations play a major role in the transnational movement of Chinese women for commercial sex. There are indeed triads in Hong Kong and Macau (Chu 2000), organized gangs and local *jiaotou* groups in



Taiwan (Chin 2003), *jia pho* in Thailand (Finckenauer and Chin 2006), Chinese gangs in Singapore and Malaysia, and street gangs and tongs in the United States (Chin 1990, 1996), but our sources deny that members of these various groups are involved in the transnational movement of Chinese women for commercial sex, either as individuals or as groups.

Persons we spoke with who were facilitators told us they did not see organized crime involvement in their business and explained why this was the case. A manager of a spa in Macau said: “Local gangs in Macau do not get involved in the prostitution business. Their main business is gambling. They don’t pay much attention to the small profits from prostitution. As a result, there is not much contact between the local gangs and the chickenheads; the two groups are minding their own business without much interaction.” A security guard at a five-star hotel in Macau concurred: “The triads such as the 14K or the Shuifang do not get involved in this business. They mainly depend on gambling to make money. Gambling is actually big business here in Macau. Chickenheads are all mainland people.” Ah Qiang, the escort agency owner in Taiwan who is cited earlier, explained why organized crime groups in Taiwan rarely get involved in the sex trade:

Why do gangs not get involved in the Chinese women sex trade? It is because this is not a business with a lot of profit. The gangs look down on this type of business. In addition, you must be patient to do this business. You need to coax the women. Gang members tend to either beat them or spoil them. These are not solutions. It is impossible for them to run the business with patience and hard work. At best, they open a store and hire a manager. This sex business is between black and white (legitimate and illegitimate). People who run this business are those who are afraid of getting into trouble. They will not offend anybody; bear whatever they have to. But they are also very suspicious, and do not trust anyone.

A subject we interviewed in a prison in Taiwan who was doing time for sex trafficking also said: “Outsiders often think that people who are involved in this business are all gangsters. In fact, all the agents and jockeys I know are family men. They go home after work; they don’t fool around.”

Of course, not all the people we interviewed agreed that organized crime groups were not involved in the sex trade. Sammi, the mommy we interviewed in Bangkok, said that at one point most of the Chinese nightclubs in a particular area in Bangkok were owned and operated by the Taiwan-based Bamboo United and Four Seas, and these organized gangs were engaged in a power struggle with the 14K (a triad group from Hong Kong). However, it was not clear how these organized crime groups were connected to the movement of women from China to Thailand. A jockey we interviewed in Taiwan also told us that he once worked for an escort agency owner who was a mid-level leader of the United Bamboo. However, the jockey also stressed that the gang leader was running the escort service operation with his girlfriend and a group of non-gang people and the operation was not part of his gang’s business. Our key informants in Singapore also told us that the local gangs were active in some of the red-light districts in Singapore by either running the sex venues or providing protection to the girls walking the streets. Thus, there is no denying that, in certain sites, members of certain organized crime groups were involved in the sex trade as individuals, but they were not the key players.

Government officials we talked to also agreed with most of the facilitators when it came to the connection between the sex trade and organized crime. An official with the Ministry of Home Affairs of Singapore bluntly commented: “The men who are offering

protection to the women in the red-light district are just a bunch of petty criminals, and I wouldn't call them members of a crime syndicate. To do so would be giving them too much credit." A high-ranking police officer with the Royal Malaysia Police, likewise argued that this business is certainly organized, but it is not being controlled by organized crime. Indonesian National Police officials who we interviewed in Jakarta said that "syndicates" recruit Chinese women and bring them to Indonesia, but by syndicates they seemed to mean just a few individuals working with others in China. In fact, these officials said they had no indication that traditional organized crime was involved. Organized crime in Indonesia, they said, was into drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal logging, and terrorism – not human trafficking. However, it is also important to point out that one of the police officers in Hong Kong told us that a former 14K leader was active in the transportation of women from China to Hong Kong and that was the main reason for the implementation of Operation Fire Lily in 2002, a major police operation targeted at PRC *xiaojies* in Hong Kong.

In New York City, we asked members of the Human Trafficking Task Force of the New York Police Department whether any of the people who were bringing mainland Chinese women into the U.S. were members of organized crime groups or had anything to do with organized crime, and their answer was no. This was the same answer that we got from two female attorneys from the New York Eastern District office who are charged with investigating and prosecuting human trafficking cases. They both said that sex trafficking is organized, with a "small o," but not organized crime, as with a "big O!"

In the end, it may be that our female subjects might be in the best position to tell us whether there seems to be a connection between organized crime groups and the

transnational sex trade. They were the ones who could tell us a lot about the very people who had facilitated their movement and recruitment (coerced or otherwise) into prostitution. The experiences they described, however, were with chickenheads, agents, brothel owners, escort agency owners, jockeys, etc. and almost none of them mentioned the words “gangs” or “organized crime” in their descriptions of these facilitators and operators.

Consequently, we think it is safe to conclude that even if some of these various operators/facilitators might have been members of a gang or of an organized crime group, that does not matter much, because this membership is irrelevant in this particular context. By that we mean that they are operating in this specific instance as individual criminal entrepreneurs, and not on behalf of any criminal gang. The recruitment, transportation, and marketing of these Chinese women obviously require a level of organization. But what our data suggest is more akin to this being a crime that is organized rather than organized crime.

### **Roles and Functions in Transnational Prostitution**

From the above discussion, it is clear that when a Chinese woman goes overseas to engage in commercial sex, she may need one or more of the following five types of assistance, depending on how easy or difficult it is to travel to the destination country and how the sex industry in the destination country is structured:

Financing the trip: If the trip is costly (\$4,000 or more), she might need someone to finance her trip. In Taiwan, an agent usually fronts the money, and in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, it is the employer. Even though it costs the most to travel to the

United States, the trips to the U.S. are usually not financed by either an agent or an employer.

Obtaining travel documents: To go to Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, or the United States, a Chinese woman needs someone to help her obtain the necessary travel documents. She might be able to procure the documents herself only if she is traveling to Hong Kong, Macau, or Thailand.

Transportation: Most women can travel to most of the destinations on their own without being accompanied; the exception being Taiwan. Most Chinese women arrive in Taiwan through a fake marriage, so a fake husband must accompany the woman when she arrives in Taiwan, so that the couple can be interviewed by the Taiwan immigration authorities at the airport.

Job referral: After a woman arrives in the destination country, she might need help in finding a place to work. In Taiwan, her agent will help her hook up with an escort agency. In Indonesia, her agent will arrange for her to work in a venue that is most suitable for her.

Client referral: After a woman finds a place to work, she also might need someone to help her locate clients. In Taiwan, an “auntie” will serve as the client locator, and in Hong Kong, a street mommy might be able to seek clients for her. If a woman works in an indoor sex venue, she also needs the help of the mommy on the premises to introduce clients to her.

Some women can travel overseas and engage in paid sex without anyone offering any of the above assistance, or with just a minimum of help from a returned *xiaojie*. These women are most likely to be destined for Hong Kong, Macau, or Thailand. In an exception to this, we found that some women in Macau are being assisted by chickenheads. Some women need all or nearly all of the various forms of assistance, and these women are most likely to be found in Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Women in the United States are unique in the sense that they need help mainly in procuring travel documents but not much else. Here we should keep in mind that the Chinese women with whom we spoke in the U.S. had not entered the country with the intention of entering into prostitution.

Table 11 lists the many actors in the transnational Chinese sex trade, the sites where they are more active, their functions, and their approximate monthly income. These actors are the key players in providing all kinds of assistance to (or engaging in exploitation of) women from China. These different roles emerged in their particular geo-cultural environment to help sustain the sex trade that employs a large number of Chinese women and in response to market constraints and risk management. These actors or facilitators managed sex rings of various sizes, and seemed to thrive in their uniquely carved out market niches, providing services to customers from diverse backgrounds and to the women who sell sex. These actors constitute a powerful informal enterprise that drives much of the underground economy for a large number of Chinese women.

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Table 11 about here

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Our female subjects in Hong Kong or Macau did complain considerably about the chickenheads they encountered in the two research sites, and some of the women we interviewed in Indonesia were not very happy with their employers (the companies). The reasons for their complaints varied, but the women were upset mainly because the chickenheads took away most of their money (and sometimes could be violent) and the companies took away their travel documents. Our female subjects, on the other hand, rarely complained about the rest of the actors, if in fact they did interact with any of the rest of the actors. We think it is important for law enforcement authorities to understand that, at least within the Chinese context, women who sell sex are more likely to view only two types of actors (the chickenheads in Hong Kong and Macau and the companies in Indonesia) as victimizers or exploiters and not all the individuals associated with them.

### **Official and NGO: Responders and Responses**

Under pressure from the United States government, authorities in Asia have begun to pay attention to the existence of large numbers of foreign women within their jurisdictions' sex sectors. Most countries reacted to U.S. pressure by passing anti-trafficking laws, prosecuting traffickers, and cracking down on street prostitution, in hopes that their rankings in the U.S State Department TIP reports would move up.

#### **Hong Kong**

According to the TIP reports, Hong Kong does not have specific anti-trafficking laws, but the reports conclude that its immigration ordinance, crimes ordinance, and other relevant laws adequately prohibit trafficking offenses. An officer with the Organized Crime and Triad Bureau (OCTB), Hong Kong Police, explained: "We've got four ordinances that

deal with prostitution. If someone brings a woman into Hong Kong for the purpose of commercial sex, even if the woman comes knowingly and voluntarily, the person who brings her here could be sentenced to up to 10 years.” There are three more sex-related crimes for which an indictment could lead to a maximum of 10 to 14 years, such as living off a woman who engages in commercial sex, facilitating commercial sex, etc.

In response to the large congregation of Chinese women on the streets of Hong Kong, the authorities there have conducted numerous crackdowns. An example of one of the major law enforcement responses is Operation Fire Lily. According to another officer with the Organized Crime and Triad Bureau (OCTB), Hong Kong Police:

We conducted that major operation – Operation Fire Lily – in 2002 because we received intelligence that a huge syndicate was bringing in hundreds of mainland Chinese women into Hong Kong to work in the sex industry. The syndicate was headed by a former 14K member and his wife and the group had about 12 core members. Most of the core members were originally from China. When we arrested the group members, we also nabbed about 80 mainland women. The syndicate was buying real estate properties in Mongkok and opened up massage parlors and hidden brothels. The massage parlors catered to new customers and old customers were sent to the hidden brothels. This was one way to prevent us from penetrating into their operations. In the year 2004, we arrested about 10,000 mainland women for prostitution. In 2005, it dropped to about 8,000, and last year it was about 5,000. We believe there are fewer and fewer mainland women coming here for sex work because they know that there is a good chance of being arrested and sent back to China.

According to several high-ranking officers with the Immigration Department, one of the reasons for the decline mentioned above has to do with Hong Kong’s tough policy against PRC (mainland) women working in the sex businesses of Hong Kong:



Prostitution is not illegal here, but PRC ladies are visitors and they are not allowed to work here. If we arrest a PRC lady in the process, she will be imprisoned for at least three months before being deported. If we do not have hard evidence but we suspect them to be involved in prostitution, we ask them to leave and we will stamp their travel documents indicating that they are being deported and we will not allow them to return to Hong Kong for two to five years.

None of the officials we talked to in Hong Kong considered mainland Chinese women who were selling sex in Hong Kong to be trafficking victims. Instead, they said these women came to Hong Kong voluntarily and willingly entered prostitution. Nevertheless, according to their estimates, only one or two percent of the PRC women in Hong Kong's sex industry might fit the definition of being trafficked victims.

Action for REACH OUT and Zi Teng are the two major organizations providing help to prostitutes in Hong Kong. According to an administrator with Action for REACH OUT:

This organization is funded mainly by the Hong Kong horse racing club. They provide almost half of the funds. Since we consider sex work as work, it is not possible for us to receive any money from the U.S. Department of State or USAID....We do a lot of outreach. We will send our people to various sex venues, mostly KTV/nightclubs and the streets to distribute pamphlets on safe sex and human rights.

According to the website of Zi Teng, it is "a non-governmental organization formed by people of different working experiences. They are social workers, labor activists, researchers specializing in women's studies and church workers, etc. who care and are concerned about the interests and basic rights of women. We believe that all women, regardless of their profession, social class, religion, or race, have the same basic human rights, that they are equal and entitled to fair and equal treatment in the legal and

judicial system, that nobody should be oppressed against, that all people should live with dignity.” When we interviewed workers from Zi Teng, it was obvious that their number one priority is to fight for the rights of women who engage in paid sex, and they are very critical of the way the police in Hong Kong are treating local and foreign prostitutes. They are also skeptical of the true benevolence of the US/TVPA anti-trafficking paradigm, and believe that rescuers and advocates under that particular banner of anti-trafficking are actually doing more harm than good in helping trafficking victims. This view is reflective of the sort of ideological differences existing with respect to sex trafficking policy and practices.

### **Macau**

Because Macau relies heavily on revenue from the casino industry to keep its economy afloat, it should not be surprising if the authorities in Macau were not very aggressive in stopping women from China and other countries from selling sex there. There are many nightclubs and sauna establishments in Macau where men can buy sex, and women can sell their bodies without much interference from the authorities. The Macau authorities are, however, concerned about the congregation of Chinese, Eastern European, and Russian women in front of the Hotel Lisboa and the Holiday Inn, two hotels that are right in the heart of Macau, and where many visitors gather. As a result, when we were in Macau collecting data, we witnessed police officers in uniform and detectives in plain clothes arresting a number of young white women (believed to be from the former Soviet Union) who were loitering around a cafeteria near the Holiday Inn.

According to the U.S. Consulate General's Office in Hong Kong and Macau, U.S. authorities are more concerned with human trafficking in Macau than in Hong Kong. It is estimated that 80 to 85 percent of all the prostitutes in Macau are from mainland China, and that 10 to 15 percent of these PRC women could be trafficked victims. In a recent case, the U.S. government was not happy when the Macau authorities deported three underage masseuses (working in a spa) back to China without offering them any help or treatment.

### **Taiwan**

In 2003, after several Chinese women were killed in the process of being clandestinely transported into Taiwan by boat (the so-called Miaoli Incident), the authorities in Taiwan began to pay more attention to the penetration of women from China into the Taiwanese commercial sex industry. When the GTIP Office downgraded Taiwan from Tier 1 to Tier 2 and then later to the Tier 2 Watch List, Taiwanese officials responded by not only making it very difficult for boat captains to smuggle Chinese women into Taiwan, but they also began to monitor marriages between Taiwanese citizens and PRC nationals to prevent *xiaojies* from entering Taiwan by means of fake marriages. One mechanism employed was to interview the newly arrived Chinese brides at the international airports in Taipei and Kaohsiung. According to two immigration officials we interviewed at the Taipei airport:

Conducting interviews with Chinese brides at the airports to screen out fake marriages began only after the Miaoli Incident. A Chinese bride can stay in Taiwan for six months; we give them one month when we issue them the visa, and then an extra 5 months after they have passed the interviews here. After six months, they can ask for an extension for another six months; they can apply for

an extension up to three times. This means they can stay in Taiwan for a total of two years. After two years, they can apply for a family reunion and then continue to stay in Taiwan and need not go back to China.

We interview the bride and the bridegroom separately and an interview could last from a few minutes to a few hours. We normally ask them the following questions: how did the two of you get to know one another, was there a dinner party after the wedding in China, did the bridegroom's parents travel to China for the wedding, how much did the wedding cost, where's the money from, etc. Some fake husbands are discovered by us after they cannot answer questions such as: through which travel agency did you buy your air ticket to China, how much did the air ticket cost, where did the money come from, etc.

Regardless, we reject very few cases, so it is fair to say that most of the fake marriage cases do pass through. It is also fair to say that the interview system did deter people from engaging in fake marriages. Sometimes, people who are arranging these fake marriages will ask a politician to call us before the bride gets here. Even if the politician himself does not call us, they can always have the politician's assistant give us a call. When that happens, we normally won't bother to ask the couple many questions and will let them go through. If we reject someone, we will ask her to fly back to China promptly; either the same day or the following day. Because all of them arrive here with a roundtrip ticket, it is not that difficult to arrange for their return.

## **Thailand**

Thailand was on Tier 2 of the State Department rankings between 2001 and 2009, with the exception that in 2004 the country fell to the Tier 2 Watch List because Thai authorities deported many Cambodians without checking to verify if they were trafficking victims. Thailand's anti-trafficking law went into effect in June 2008.

American officials we talked to in Bangkok were mostly unaware of and unconcerned about mainland Chinese women engaging in commercial sex in Thailand. According to the country attaché of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok: "The ICE office in Thailand is responsible for five countries: Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. For us, when it comes to PRC nationals, we are more concerned with the smuggling of them into the U.S. via Thailand and not much

about the presence of PRC women in the sex industry in Thailand. We never dealt with PRC women in Thailand. We think the Chinese are significantly less likely to be trafficked than women and girls from, say, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.”

Many NGOs maintain a strong presence in Thailand and many have their regional offices set up in Bangkok. Employees at the International Organization for Migration office in Bangkok said they did not have much experience dealing with trafficking victims from mainland China. According to someone from the Human Trafficking Division of IOM in Bangkok:

Here in Thailand, the three countries with the most trafficked victims are Laos (mostly prostituted women), Myanmar (mostly factory workers but a substantial number of them are forced into prostitution), and Cambodia (mostly beggars). There are not many prostitutes or migrant workers from Indonesia in Thailand. We also have some prostitutes from Vietnam and the former Soviet Union. We do not deal with domestic human trafficking, but we are involved in helping Thai sex trafficking victims return home. Thai police and immigration officers are becoming more and more aware of the problem of human trafficking. In the past, they were very ignorant, but recently, they try to determine if an arrested foreign woman who engaged in prostitution is a victim of human trafficking.

Besides the IOM and the International Labor Organization, the Asia Foundation in Bangkok is also concerned with human trafficking. According to a program coordinator: “We are running a human trafficking project and it is mainly concerned with the trafficking of Burmese and hill tribe women from Yunnan, China. We focus on prosecution instead of prevention and protection. We have also established a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) that consists of social workers, police officers, NGOs, medical doctors, and prosecutors to work collectively as a team. We receive our human trafficking-related funding from USAID. Thai police officers are more concerned with illegal migrant workers rather than trafficked sex victims. But one of the main reasons for

this is because the police officers are receiving bribes from sex ring operators to turn a blind eye on commercial sex.”

## **Malaysia**

Of the eight special regions or countries in Asia in our study, Malaysia, along with Indonesia, are the only two that have ever been ranked on Tier 3 in the TIP reports. Malaysia was assessed as Tier 3 in the first TIP Report in 2001, moved up to Tier 2 in the following four years between 2002 and 2005, but got downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List in 2006 and then to Tier 3 in 2007. The country bounced back to Tier 2 Watch List in 2008, but then again fell back to Tier 3 in 2009. According to the 2009 TIP Report (Office to Combat and Monitor Trafficking in Persons 2009: 197):

Malaysia is a destination and, to a lesser extent, a source and transit country for women and children trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, and for men, women, and children trafficked for the purpose of forced labor. Malaysia is mainly a destination country for men, women, and children who migrate willingly from Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Philippines, Burma, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Vietnam for work – usually legal, contractual labor – and are subsequently subjected to conditions of involuntary servitude in the domestic, agricultural, food service, construction, plantation, industrial, and fisheries sectors. Some foreign women and girls are also victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

According to a political officer with the U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, the human trafficking problem in Malaysia is essentially a labor trafficking issue, especially with the exploitation of Indonesian migrant workers by ethnic Malay, Chinese Malay, and Indian Malay employers. According to U.S. officials in Malaysia, even though the Malay government and the Malay people were quite upset when they learned that the TIP report had listed their country on Tier 3, the authorities there were simply not doing what

they should be doing, nor did they admit they had a problem. Malay officials we talked to were indeed not happy with the way their country was rated in the TIP reports. A high-ranking official with the Royal Malaysia Police had this to say:

We don't think it is fair for the U.S. State Department to put us on Tier 3 in their TIP report because we are doing our very best to fight human trafficking. We think we are doing much better than other countries that are on the Tier 2 Watch List or higher. I also do not see the exploitation and control of Indonesian migrant workers as a trafficking issue. Most of them are smuggled into Malaysia of their own will or are self-smuggled, and they are later exploited by their agents and their employers in Malaysia. I can't see this as human trafficking.

The official thought that most Chinese women were in Malaysia of their own will, and that they knew what they would be doing in Malaysia before they left China. He pointed out that, even though the number of arrests involving PRC women is the highest among all nationalities, the number of rescued PRC women is lower than for Indonesians because PRC women are highly unlikely to have been trafficked.

In Malaysia, we interviewed workers from two NGOs: the PT Foundation and Tenaganita (meaning women's force). The PT Foundation is a community-based organization providing information, education and care services relating to HIV/AIDS and sexuality. It was first founded in 1987 under the name of Pink Triangle, to provide telephone counseling about HIV/AIDS and sexuality. Today, the PT Foundation works with people living with HIV/AIDS, drug users, sex workers, transsexual, and homosexual men and women. According to a worker at the foundation, "most sex workers in Malaysia are ethnic Malay, Indians, and Chinese Malay. There are also many Indonesians, and they are probably the second largest group after the ethnic Malay. Most sex workers here are not young; the young ones normally go overseas to make more

money. Our main activities involve the operation of a drop-in center and doing outreach. We do not deal with foreigners, only domestic people. We also do not deal with trafficked victims, regardless of their nationalities. If we encounter foreigners, we refer them to Tenaganita.”

According to a worker with Tenaganita, “Our main mandate is to protect workers’ rights, including the rights of migrant and domestic workers. A year ago we started a shelter for trafficked victims. Last year, we had about 25 victims and now 13. Most of them are Indonesians, and the majority of them are abused workers. We have one or two trafficked victims from Vietnam and Cambodia who are sex workers. We never had any Chinese sex workers in our shelter, or ever had any referred to us. When the police here come into contact with Chinese sex workers in police raids, the women will say they don’t want to be rescued, they want to go back to work. The police point of view is, as far as Chinese sex workers are concerned, they are not trafficked victims but willing participants in sex work.” She went on to explain how uncertain funding was for the shelter: “For our shelter, we receive the money from the U.S. government via IOM [the International Organization for Migration]. IOM said we will continue to receive support after the first year, but they are now saying there is no money. The U.S. embassy is now supporting us on a short-term basis until we get the money from IOM. Because we are a domestic organization, we could not receive money directly from the U.S. government, only through an international NGO like the IOM or the ILO [the International Labor Organization].”



## **Singapore**

For the nine years between 2001 and 2009, the TIP reports placed Singapore on Tier 2, with the exception that it was moved up to Tier 1 in 2006. We found it quite interesting that the officials with whom we spoke at the U.S. Embassy sharply disagreed with the TIP assessment of the human trafficking situation in Singapore. These individuals said that human trafficking in general is not a problem in Singapore. Most women (including those from the PRC) come to Singapore on social or work passes. The former passes are good for up to 90 days, and the length of the latter is determined by the nature of the work contract. These officials said that prostitution is legal in Singapore, and government control is exercised through medical exams and so on. They strongly disagreed with the TIPs' definition of cases, examples, and situations that have been used to illustrate alleged instances of trafficking. Further, these officials said the TIPs office has preconceived notions and assumptions that distort its objectivity, among other things. But they also said that the government of Singapore generally downplays its crime problems to protect the city's image. With respect to commercial sex, these U.S. officials said that child sex tourism and child pornography were indeed big problems in the region.

Representatives of the Singapore National Police and the Ministry of Home Affairs with whom we spoke likewise told us that the trafficking of PRC women for sex work was not an issue of concern in Singapore. They admitted that some women indeed come to Singapore to work as prostitutes (using the social passes referred to above). Prostitution, they said, is not legal, but is also not criminalized. This means that soliciting

prostitution in public places is a crime, but sex among consenting adults – even if involving payment – is not.

Because of pressure from the U.S. government, Singapore authorities had recently conducted numerous crackdowns in some of the red-light districts there. When arrests are made, it is usually pimps and handlers who are arrested – the prostitutes are not charged. These pimps, the police said, are usually low-level operatives who are generally not associated with traditional organized crime.

Local law enforcement officials indicated that there had been only a handful (fewer than five) criminal cases in the previous three years (2004-2006) involving the sexual exploitation of women, and that none of those involved women from China. It is their view that women who migrate to engage in commercial sex are not being forced, coerced or deceived into doing so, but instead come freely with their approved passes. They did say that known prostitutes in the PRC would not be approved for such a social visit pass.

## **Indonesia**

When the TIP Report first came out in 2001, Indonesia was placed in Tier 3 status, and remained so the following year, before being moved up to Tier 2 in 2003. Since then it has fluctuated between Tier 2 and Tier 2 Watch. Indonesian officials we talked to were not happy with the way their government was handling the arrival of Chinese women in Indonesia. For example, a high-ranking officer with the Directorate General of Immigration (DGIM) bluntly asserted that: “We passed the anti-trafficking law because we were forced to by the Americans. Now, with this law, we are basically further

victimizing these PRC women because we arrest them, deport them, make their lives here miserable, and deprive them of the opportunity to make a living.”

U.S. officials in the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, like other American officials in other sites, said they were not very familiar with the problem of PRC women engaging in prostitution in their host country. Some complained that since they have to work on at least four reports every year (TIP, human rights, religious freedom, and child labor), there is often a blurring of the material in these reports.

A representative who works with an affiliate of the AFL/CIO in Jakarta said the new Indonesian anti-trafficking law is stronger than the UN protocol requirements in some respects, but would benefit from the addition of provisions for assisting cooperating witnesses, and providing alternatives to the deportation of victims. She said that although prostitution is not illegal, pimping is, and the prostitution is largely contained to certain areas where there are karaoke bars, massage parlors, and brothels. The police, she said, occasionally conduct show raids to pickup prostitutes and transport them to rehabilitation centers where they are held for three months for vocational training and moral re-education.

This representative indicated that there are overseas women working in the commercial sex business, including some from China; but the database is so weak that there are no real accurate numbers. The most pressing aspect of human trafficking in Indonesia, according to her, is that involving Indonesian nationals in domestic work, overseas jobs, etc.

Finally, on the political front, this same representative said that her agency receives funding from the U.S. State Department, and thus has to “officially” accept U.S.

policy with respect to prostitution and sex work. She said the Indonesian president claims that human trafficking is a major priority, but that the primary cabinet level agencies dealing with it are not the “power” agencies. In particular, the immigration department she characterized as “clueless.”

We then spoke with three members (including the head) of the 20-person unit of the Indonesian National Police which has been designated to handle human trafficking nationwide. They told us that indeed Chinese women come to Indonesia to work in karaoke lounges, massage parlors, etc., but that they make up only a very small portion of the sex business in Indonesia. There had been no criminal cases involving Chinese women at the time of our interview.

According to the police, when women are picked up for prostitution, they are divided into two categories, either misdemeanants or victims, depending upon whether they appear to be freelancing on their own, or are being exploited by someone else. The misdemeanant types are sentenced. The victims are sent to rehabilitation if they are local, and deported if they are not. The biggest complaint of these officials was that they are vastly under resourced, given that they have only 20 people to cover the entire country.

### **New York Metropolitan Region**

Just for the sake of comparison, we can look at the U.S. domestic situation, for example in New York and northern New Jersey. We in the U.S. are not, of course, subject to the same assessments and tier ratings as other countries are. It is, however, interesting to speculate what the results might be if we were?

We interviewed three members of the New York City Human Trafficking Task Force – the coordinator, and an NYPD lieutenant and a sergeant. This 35-person unit has responsibility for training, providing information, and generally increasing awareness in the NYPD of the human trafficking problem. They told us that there were indeed women from overseas working in the sex businesses in NYC; as far as Asian women are concerned, most are from Korea, but there are some from China as well. As of 2007, the task force had handled eight cases involving Chinese women in the little over two years of its existence. In general, most of the women are smuggled (not trafficked) into the U.S., and according to these officials, they come to engage in commercial sex and in order to make the most money they can. The Chinese women work mostly in massage parlors.

When we asked the task force members explicitly if the women from China come with the intention or knowledge that they are going to be involved in prostitution, they said yes. They said that none of the women are initially being forced, coerced or deceived into commercial sex; however, some may later have their documents held, be threatened, or be subject to debt bondage. They believe the women are being exploited in at least some cases, but see them as being both victims and willing accomplices.

Asked to characterize the smugglers and traffickers, these officials said they are not members of organized crime, and do not really have anything to do with organized crime. The task force representatives said their current strategies for arresting and prosecuting smugglers and traffickers were not working very well, in part because the different boroughs of NYC have different policies. Because there is no secure facility for the housing and detention of trafficking victims, they said victims often disappear,

making it impossible to prosecute the traffickers. This, they said, leads to a great deal of frustration among law enforcement. They also said that language barriers are a serious problem, as well as the fact that victims do not trust law enforcement.

We also interviewed two assistant United States attorneys from the Eastern District of New York (Brooklyn). They described the Chinese women coming to New York as being mostly from rural villages and as young, uneducated, and unsophisticated. Although they did not think that human trafficking was being controlled by organized crime or having anything to do with organized crime, they did see the same individuals in the business – beginning with the local recruiters – working together over a period of time – indications of a crime that is organized.

Asked about what the women know before coming to the U.S., they said that some women know that they will be doing commercial sex, but in some of these cases the women get more than they bargained for – meaning less money, more demands, harsher conditions, etc. As to the motives of the women, the attorneys described a case in which Asian prostitutes were recorded discussing the amounts of money made, and how and where in the city to make the most money. But in other cases, they said, women are indeed deceived or misled.

We asked the two female prosecutors generally about the use of force, fraud, and/or coercion in the situations with which they were familiar. They said that yes women from mainland China were being exploited in some cases, but not all. They likewise said some of the women were being controlled in some instances, and that violence and physical abuse were used to control them. Asked about coercion, they said it operates in very subtle ways. The women do not speak English; they do not trust law

enforcement authorities; and, they believe that the smugglers and traffickers are in cahoots with law enforcement. These are all reasons keeping possible victims from seeking help from authorities.

We interviewed three representatives of NGOs in the NYC area: the director of an agency providing human trafficking information and a referral hotline, the director of the human rights program for Vital Voices Global Partnership, and a director of refugee resettlement and human trafficking in Newark, NJ. Although they had only limited experience with the smuggling or trafficking of Chinese women, they did offer some relevant observations from that experience. For example, the director from Vital Voices (herself a Chinese woman) said: “I met some smuggled Chinese. When I talked to them, I was shocked because what they thought is sex work is a good (meaning fast) way of ‘making money,’ and this is true even for minors.” Similarly, the Newark director said that she was surprised that some victims who they help go back to prostitution after being granted T-visas, even though they may have been initially forced into prostitution. They do so, she said, because they can make a lot of money in prostitution. Those women were not necessarily prostitutes in their countries of origin.

The picture we see here is not all that different from the Asian cities. Chinese women are involved in commercial sex, and some of those women may be victims, but certainly not all, nor even a majority. The driving force is clearly money, but the people running the operations are not seen to be members of or involved with organized crime.

Most government officials and police officers we interviewed told us frankly that prostitution is not a top priority for their governments or departments. Most also do not believe that Chinese women working in their jurisdictions are trafficking victims.

Because of the pressure from the United States government, the United Nations, and the European Union, however, many Asian countries have been compelled to follow the examples of the United States by passing anti-trafficking laws, going after human traffickers and sex venue owners, and treating foreign women who engage in commercial sex as victims rather than as prostitutes or illegal migrants. The main purpose of such efforts is to receive a good ranking (Tier 1 or Tier 2) in the U.S. government's annual TIP report; but there is not much actual concern about eliminating prostitution or dismantling sex ring networks. As a result, over the past decade, prostitution in Asia has gone more underground; out of sight but certainly not out of existence.

#### **IV. Discussion**

##### **Rethinking Sex Trafficking**

One of the goals of our research project was to examine whether the transnational movement of Chinese women for the purpose of prostitution was linked to sex trafficking as characterized by the U.S. government and the United Nations. For many years, the discussions on sex trafficking have been dominated by government officials, faith-based groups, feminists, and NGOs. Numerous assumptions about the phenomenon took hold and have been taken for granted by the media, the public, academics, and policymakers. Recently, some scholars have begun to question some of the core assumptions and beliefs that have provided the underpinning for anti-trafficking policy (Thorbeck 2002; Brennan 2004; Jahic and Finckenauer 2005; Kelly 2005; Kempadoo 2005; Bernstein 2007; Weitzer 2007; Agustin 2008; Sanders 2008; Segrave et al. 2009). Our research is a further effort along this path.



Within the current trafficking paradigm, the stages of international sex trafficking have generally been divided into the *recruitment* of potential victims by recruiters, the *transportation* of victims by traffickers, the *selling* of victims to brothel owners by stakeholders, be they recruiters, traffickers, or human traders who pay for the traveling expenses of victims or buy victims from traffickers, the *control* of, and subsequent *victimization* of, victims by sex ring operators. Let us examine what our subjects had to say about these processes, based on their own experiences and observations. Keep in mind that we are addressing only *transnational* sex trafficking, and not *domestic* sex trafficking. As previously indicated, about 10 percent of our female subjects had been trafficked domestically in China. We are not, however, focusing on their domestic experiences, but rather their overseas experiences.

### **Recruitment**

As suggested by Kathleen Barry (1995), traffickers allegedly recruit girls and women mainly through three methods: purchase, deception, or abduction (including force and coercion).

#### Purchase

None of our female subjects said they had been sold into prostitution, nor did they know anyone who entered prostitution because they had been purchased by someone. In fact, none of them had even heard that women could be purchased for the purpose of putting them to work in commercial sex. In China, girls and women are traded for the purpose of adoption or marriage, but not for the sex trade.

### Deception

In much of the discourse on trafficking, the most often-mentioned recruiting method is deception. A recruiter is said to approach a woman who is interested in going overseas to engage in legitimate work, and tells her that she can work as a nanny, a waitress, or a model in a foreign country. The potential pay is painted as being very attractive.

Alternatively, a woman is promised that she can marry a man when she arrives in the destination country. Selling sex is not mentioned at all, and thus it is the last thing in the mind of the woman who is being recruited. Only after the woman has arrived in the destination country does the recruiter tell the woman that she must work in a sex venue to repay the debt she owes because of the cost of her travel documents, airplane ticket, and other expenditures.

We asked our female subjects in three separate questions whether they were forced, deceived, or coerced into selling sex overseas; only one of them answered yes to any one of these three questions, even though some of them (about 10% as indicated) said they had been lured into prostitution back in China. We also asked them whether they had ever met a Chinese woman who said she was forced, deceived, or coerced into prostitution abroad, and only three out of 148 (2 percent) said they had.

### Abduction, Force, or Coercion

According to anti-trafficking advocates, abduction, force, or coercion are often adopted by traffickers to pressure children or young women to engage in paid sex. These advocates assume that prostitution is not a profession that women willingly enter, so drastic measures must have been used by traffickers to ensure victims' cooperation. But

literally, none of the women we interviewed said they had been subjected to abduction, force, or coercion in the process of entering the commercial sex business overseas. Thus, with two exceptions, none of the other cases met the accepted definitional criteria for being considered transnational trafficking victims.

### **Transportation**

According to the official view of human trafficking and the U.S. and UN definitions of trafficking, after a girl or a woman is recruited in a source country through force, fraud, or coercion, she is usually transported abroad by one or more traffickers. After paying the recruiter a certain sum of money, the trafficker obtains travel documents (usually a passport and a visa) for the victim, and personally brings the victim to a destination country, sometimes through one or more transit countries. In this process, the trafficker may bribe government officials in the sending, transit, and receiving countries if necessary. Once the victim arrives in the destination country, the trafficker then sells her to a brothel owner for a substantial amount of money.

Of the 149 women we interviewed in overseas locations, almost all of them had arrived with genuine documents; only one said she was smuggled into the United States via Mexico, and four said they flew to their destination countries using fake documents. Further, unlike what has been depicted in the trafficking literature, none of our subjects were transported overseas by a “trafficker.” When we asked who brought them abroad, many said they traveled alone (31%), or were accompanied by a returned *xiaojie* (25%), or were with other females who, like them, were going to the same destination country for the first time (15%). Other subjects mentioned that they had gone overseas as

members of a business or official delegation (8%, and mostly to the United States), or as wives of fake husbands through fraudulent marriages (4%, mostly to Taiwan), or were accompanied by their husbands/boyfriends/chickenheads (5%, mostly to Hong Kong or Macau). It is clear that the “trafficker” (or transporter) so prominently mentioned in the human trafficking discussion, and so often put forward by authorities as the prime target in the war against human trafficking, does not come up as a key figure in our subjects’ cross-border movements.

### **Sale**

Of all the activities alleged to be associated with sex trafficking – recruitment, transportation, sale, debt bondage, control, violence, exploitation – the sale of a human being as a commodity is probably the most sinister and horrifying, and it is this aspect that has particularly caught the public imagination and view of human trafficking. Again, according to most of the literature on sex trafficking (King 2004; Skinner 2008), not only can a girl or a woman be sold once she arrives in a destination country, the buyer can resell her again after exploiting her for a certain period of time, normally when the victim is about to clear the debt she owes to the buyer. After she leaves the first buyer without a penny for herself, the victim is then said to have to start all over again with the second buyer. That is why, according to this view, victims are characterized as commodities that can be used and re-used again and again by numerous buyers. When the victims are too old or too sick to be sold again, they are killed or discarded.

With one exception, none of our subjects said they had been traded by their helpers in China or their employers in the destination countries. Xiao Xiao, a 32-year-old

escort in Taiwan, said her agent sold her to another agent after he was convinced that she might try to escape without repaying him the road fee of \$6,250. Xiao Xiao had been to Taiwan many times and the agent who sold her thought that she was too experienced and too familiar with Taiwan to remain working for him. Otherwise, agents in Taiwan did not import women for the purpose of trading them, but rather to place them in an escort agency to make money. After a woman repaid her debt, she continued to work for her agent and made money for both herself and the agent. The agents thus prefer to keep their women because they can continue to take a cut of their earnings. The same is true with subjects in the other eight sites (excluding China); they might go overseas under debt to someone in the destination country, but with the exception of one unique case, none were sold or resold.

### **Control**

After a sex trafficking victim has been recruited, transported, and sold, according to the popular view, a brothel or an escort agency owner who buys her maintains complete control to prevent her from escaping. This view promulgates the following scenario as being typical: the brothel owner takes away her travel documents, locks her up in a room, and watches her closely all the time. She works and sleeps in her room, and is never allowed to leave. For those who are not cooperative, there is even the further possibility that they are chained when they are not seeing clients. Those who attempt to escape are beaten or even killed, often in front of other girls so as to set an example.

From our discussion above, it is clear that the vast majority of our subjects were not under this sort of control when we interviewed them. We explicitly asked them whether they were being controlled by their employers or debtors. Of the 149 subjects

(excluding the 15 subjects in China), 127 (85%) said they were free, and 22 (15%) said they were not free. Looking at this situation in the context of other factors we have considered suggests the following. First, the level of control varies by research sites. Seventy two percent of the women in Indonesia said they were not free, while none of the women in Singapore, Los Angeles, and New York said they were being controlled. Second, whether a subject was controlled or not was related to whether she still owed a debt. Only 12 percent of those who did not owe money said they were controlled, whereas 43 percent of those in debt said they were not free. Third, 97 percent of the independent and 97 percent of the partnership *xiaojies* said they were free to move around as compared to 75 percent of the employed *xiaojies*. Finally, women working in saunas and spas were most likely to say that their movements were restricted, followed by escort agencies (26%) and nightclubs/KTVs (22%). Women working along with mommies and chickenheads were as free as those working independently. In sum, the majority of the women who said they did not feel free were in Indonesia, and the main reason for them to say this was because they were required to turn in their travel documents to their employers. The opportunity to work independently in Indonesia was, unlike in the other research sites, very limited. Those who worked in saunas and spas in Jakarta were monitored closely by their employers, and they were required to stay in the dormitories located within the compound of their work places. As a result, their movements were limited.

## **Violence**

In the course of discussing the transnational movement of women for the purpose of commercial sex, some anti-trafficking advocates, NGOs and researchers have argued that

many innocent victims go through a relatively similar experience: they are procured or recruited, transported or trafficked, seasoned or violently coerced, prostituted or pimped, exploited or victimized, resold or re-trafficked, and finally discarded or killed.

In dramatic contrast to this picture, our interviews with *xioajies* and sex entrepreneurs disclosed just one violent incident, and that was between an agent in Taiwan and a Chinese woman. The agent said he hit her and her jockey (driver) when he found out that the two were having a romantic relationship, and that the jockey was trying to persuade her to leave the agent before repaying her travel fee:

I was never arrested after being an agent for many years, and that's because it was very safe to be an agent. As long as I do not stick my neck out, even if a girl is arrested, I won't be implicated. This is my first arrest after so many years. That's because a girl of mine got mixed up with a jockey and she moved into the jockey's house. This is something I am very much against. Besides, the jockey was taking her out for fun all day long and she did not pay much attention to her work anymore. Worse, sometimes the two of them worked together to take a "case" (seeing clients) without my knowledge, like I did not even exist. After I found out about that, I beat them up with a stick. They called the police, and that's how I got in here.

Because all the women we interviewed said they were not being forced into prostitution, the need to use violence to coerce them becomes moot. However, as the above incident demonstrates, the question might arise over whether there is a conflict or an argument between a subject and her employer or handler? Would they then be subjected to violence under such circumstances? According to the respondents, with the exception of some chickenheads, conflicts between them and their facilitators were rare. Even when a dispute between a woman and a facilitator developed, the woman, not the facilitator, often got the upper hand.

Besides the issue of physical violence, there is also the matter of sexual violence. If an employer or a facilitator is a male, how likely is it that these males are going to take advantage of the women who work for them? In our interviews and conversations with the women and the sex ring operators, some women said they did have sex with their agents, escort agency owners, jockeys, fake husbands, or chickenheads, but it was not common. The majority of such sexual relationships were the result of mutual consent rather than being forced or coerced.

### **Debt Bondage**

Again contrary to the common perception, the majority of our subjects (68%) did not owe money to someone in the trafficking or sex business for their overseas trips. Instead, they used their savings or borrowed money from their friends or relatives to finance their travel. Among the 32 percent who had owed money to someone who was not a friend or relative, only one in three said they were still in debt at the time of the interviews. This means the other two-thirds had cleared their debts within a relatively short period of time. The fact that so many of them were able to clear their debts within a few weeks or months tells us that (1) the amount of money our subjects owed for their trips was not as high as generally believed; (2) the women did not have to pay interest on their debts; and (3) the people who fronted the money for the women to travel did not arbitrarily increase the amount of the debt after the women had arrived overseas.

### **Exploitation**

Financial exploitation is another assumed characteristic of sex trafficking. When women are transported across international borders to engage in prostitution, they are believed to



be heavily exploited by their handlers or facilitators. It is claimed that traffickers charge exorbitant fees for travel documents, and that the women receive only a very small portion of the money their clients give them, or maybe even nothing at all. Sex establishment owners also are said to charge these women outrageous sums of money for food, lodging, cosmetics, dresses, fines, and for a variety of other reasons. Consequently, or so the story goes, after all these expenses are deducted from their meager share, there is almost nothing left for the women to keep.

We discussed previously how much money clients paid our subjects per session, how much the subjects received, and approximately how much they made in a month. Our data suggest that the women we interviewed were receiving on average about three-fourths of the money the clients paid; it would thus seem difficult to label this as exploitation.

### **Lack of Fit**

Table 12 clearly shows the lack of fit between the generally accepted anti-trafficking paradigm's characterization of sex trafficking and the actual experiences of our subjects. It seems apparent that the transnational movement of Chinese women for the sex trade does not have the characteristics of sex trafficking as defined by the U.S. government, the United Nations, and other bodies. Our subjects did not view themselves as trafficking victims who were being forced, deceived, or coerced.

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Table 12 about here

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### **The Issue of Definition**

At the beginning of this report, we made it clear that our operational definition of sex trafficking would be the more restrictive definition, namely that referring to “severe forms of trafficking in persons,” in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion. This is the legal definition in the United States, where a person can be legally considered a traffic victim only if he or she meets the criteria defining “severe forms of trafficking,” and is thus eligible to apply for a T-visa and other benefits offered to trafficked victims.

In adopting this most restrictive definition, we recognize that many officials, experts, documents, reports and so on (and this even includes a further stipulation in the U.S. TVPA) also define sex trafficking less restrictively as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. This is obviously a much looser and more encompassing definition. And then at the very least restrictive end of the definition spectrum, are those who consider all prostitution to be a form of sex trafficking.

We think that one of weaknesses in the global effort to deal with the transnational movement of women for commercial sex, and one of the reasons for confusion and controversy, is the fact that there is no consensus on just what sex trafficking is and is not; and more importantly, different groups use different definitions to suit their own interests and agendas. Depending on how strictly or loosely sex trafficking is defined, estimates of the numbers of trafficking victims are obviously going to be significantly different. As shown below, the number of sex trafficking victims among our female subjects varies widely depending upon the definition one chooses to use.

Table 13 shows the proportions of our subjects who could be considered transnational trafficking victims depending on how that victimization is defined. Another way of viewing these proportions is to see them as indicators of the possible degree of linkage between commercial sex and sex trafficking. At one extreme, if the definition of a sex trafficking victim is simply a person who is engaged in commercial sex (in our case overseas), then all our female subjects are victims, and there is complete overlap between prostitution and sex trafficking. But as one begins to refine and narrow the definition, the proportion of subjects who would be considered victims declines.

Lest one think that this is just some sort of sleight of hand, we would argue that all definitions of this kind are to some degree arbitrary. This is true even of legal definitions. Someone or some body decides what the definitional criteria ought to be and then applies them. This is why, for example, criminal laws often define crimes with varying degrees depending upon certain criteria. In the case of sex trafficking, the definition agreed upon determines the nature and magnitude of the problem, sets out the parameters for policies and practices to combat the problem, and sets the benchmark for resources required to do the job. It is therefore obviously an issue of significant practical and political importance.

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Table 13 about here

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According to Table 13, a very large proportion (about 93%) of our subjects could be defined as trafficking victims if the definition of a victim is simply any person who arrives in a foreign country with the assistance of another person, regardless of whether the subject pays that other person or not. All the women we interviewed in Taiwan,

Thailand, Singapore, and New York said they were helped to go overseas. Being helped is not equivalent to being recruited however, and even though recruitment is often emphasized in the trafficking literature as an important first step in human trafficking, we did not find that this happened with most of our female subjects. Instead, most of our subjects took the initiative in their initial encounters with the person who helped them to go abroad.

If we move from being helped (regardless of whether the helper was paid or not) to paying a fee for being helped, then the proportion of so-defined trafficking victims in our sample would decrease from 93% to 70%. Since paying someone for help to go overseas is an important criterion in the definition of human *smuggling*, 70% of our subjects could be categorized as having been smuggled. Here then we see a possible link with human smuggling. If we use this definition, we also find that the percentage of trafficking victims varies considerably among the various sites. Only 20% of the subjects in Hong Kong and 24% in Macau would be viewed as trafficking victims if we use this form of payment as a criterion, whereas all the subjects in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia would be victims under this same definition.

If we use the transportation criterion, according to which a person is a trafficking victim if they are transported (or accompanied) by someone when the person travels abroad, then 74% of our subjects fit that definition. Here, the fluctuation in the percentage of victims among the various sites is not as significant as with the payment criterion. Nevertheless, only about half of the subjects in Hong Kong and New York would be labeled as trafficking victims as opposed to all the women in Taiwan.

As we move from the help, payment, and transportation criteria to a more narrow definition, the proportion of our subjects who could be considered victims drops dramatically. If we define a trafficking victim as a person who goes overseas under debt to the very person for whom she is going to work (excluding those who borrow money from friends and relatives to pay for their overseas trips), then 23% of our female subjects could be viewed as trafficking victims. Under the debt criterion, none of our subjects in Hong Kong, Los Angeles, and New York are trafficking victims, but about 44% in Indonesia and about 94% in Taiwan could be so viewed.

If we define a sex trafficking victim as a person who is financially exploited, then there is first the problem of determining whether such exploitation has in fact occurred. For our purposes, we used 50 percent as the arbitrary cutting point, which means that if a woman receives only half or less of what a client pays, then she is being financially exploited. The other half would have gone to the house, a mommy, or to whomever the subject is working for or with. We found that any tips always belong to the women, and therefore we do not take tips into consideration in our calculations. Under this criterion, 26% of our subjects would be considered trafficking victims. Applying this financial exploitation criterion, none of our subjects in Thailand, Singapore, Los Angeles, or New York would be victims, whereas 93% of the subjects in Taiwan and 90% of the women in Indonesia would be victims.

We want to point out that, even though only 6% of the subjects in Macau could be considered victims under the financial exploitation criterion, many of them were turning almost all their money over to their romantic or business chickenheads. If we were to

bring the chickenhead factor into our calculation, then the percentage of victims in Macau would increase to 50%.

If we define a sex trafficking victim as a woman who is not free to move around or quit sex work because her travel documents are being withheld by her employer or debtor, then 15% of our subjects could be considered trafficking victims. Under the freedom of movement definition, the percentage of trafficked victims is highest for Indonesia (about 83%), but lowest (zero percent) for subjects in Macau, Los Angeles, and New York. Again, we do not think the eight subjects in Macau who were associated with chickenheads were free to quit commercial sex if they wanted to, and this must be kept in mind when we calculate the number of victims in Macau using this particular definition.

From our study, it is clear that the seriousness and the nature of human trafficking could well be very much country-specific. Of all the destination regions or countries for PRC women in our study, Hong Kong and Macau are unique, in the sense that women from China can travel to these two special regions with relative ease. However, the women there are also most vulnerable to the chickenheads – the men who probably best fit the notorious characteristics of the “human trafficker” as depicted in the human trafficking literature. Taiwan scores high in almost all the definitions we use in Table 13 to define sex trafficking, but none of the women in Taiwan can be considered to be trafficking victims under the U.S. TVPA definition of “severe forms of trafficking in persons.” Even so, the fact that most of the PRC subjects in Taiwan arrived under debt, are “owned” by an agent, are always engaged in highly organized commercial sex involving many parties (e.g., escort agency owner, jockey, mommy, motel or store

owner), and are often financially exploited, means we should not downplay the plight of Chinese *xiaojies* in Taiwan.

Chinese women in the Thai sex sector are most likely to be brought overseas by their relatives or neighbors who are returned *xiaojies*, as opposed to agents, brokers, or companies. Thailand scores low on the human trafficking prevalence rate in terms of almost all the definitions we adopted in Table 13, and Chinese women there are least likely to be victimized by a sex ring operator. Because of the limited opportunity to make money, however, Thailand is also the least popular destination for Chinese *xiaojies* who are thinking about going overseas.

Malaysia, as a destination country, is somewhat unique in the sense that Chinese women there are equally engaged in both highly organized as well as unorganized commercial sex. Singapore likewise has a variety of sex venues available to Chinese women, but because it is a Chinese society and more developed than Malaysia, most Chinese women prefer to go Singapore rather than Malaysia. The two countries are very similar with respect to the prevalence of sex trafficking, irrespective of the definition used.

Indonesia, like Taiwan, ranks high on most of the sex trafficking prevalence rates shown in Table 13. What is different about Indonesia is that while most women there are, just as in Taiwan, engaged in highly organized commercial sex, unlike in Taiwan, the women in Indonesia must turn in their travel documents to their employers (the companies) when they are hired, regardless of whether they owe road fees to their employers or not. This agent-as-labor broker system in Indonesia (as opposed to the

agent-as-owner system in Taiwan) is unique. It restricts the free movement of the women and increases their vulnerability to financial exploitation.

Even though the United States is the world leader in the global war against prostitution and human trafficking – and perhaps because of that -- the problem of sex trafficking involving Chinese women here is less grave in comparison with the Asian research sites. The majority of our U.S. subjects had to pay someone to help them to come here, but none of them were underage, under debt to a sex ring operator, financially exploited, denied freedom of movement, or forced, coerced, or deceived into commercial sex. The United States actually ranks very low on almost all the prevalence rates of sex trafficking based on the definitions outlined. There were no chickenheads, agents-as-owners, agents-as-brokers, escort agency owners, jockeys, mommies, or document-withholding companies uncovered in our research in the United States. The two main types of employers – massage parlor owners or “house” owners – are usually small time entrepreneurs who are themselves former or current *xiaojies*. They are not all that different from the women the U.S. government is trying to rescue.

Let us consider the percentage of trafficked victims among our subjects under the most strict definition, which is also the definition that creates the most problems for those who are concerned about sex trafficking. According to this narrow definition, a transnational trafficking victim is a person who is forced, or deceived, or coerced to go overseas for commercial sex. This definition includes persons who gave their consent, but were underage. Accordingly, only 1 percent of our sample of commercial sex providers could be considered to be trafficking victims. One subject (Jiao Jiao) in Singapore fits the definition because she was only 17, and another subject (Dong Dong) was deceived.



Dong said her aunt (a real one) who brought her to Thailand told her back in China that she would be working as a hostess in Bangkok, and would not have to sleep with men.

If we take into consideration the chickenhead factor, then the percentage of trafficking victims would increase somewhat. Let us assume the female subjects we interviewed in Hong Kong and Macau who were under the control of their chickenheads, and were being financially exploited by having all or most of their earnings taken away -- regardless of the fact that these women were not forced, coerced, or deceived into commercial sex -- should be considered to be trafficking victims. Under that assumption, 27% of our subjects in Hong Kong and 44% in Macau would be trafficking victims. In that case, the overall proportion of trafficking victims for the whole sample would increase to 9 percent. This latter percentage for transnational sex trafficking is strikingly similar to our estimated percentage for domestic sex trafficking inside China, which is 10 percent. Because of the geographical proximity of Hong Kong and Macau to China, however, and because these places are now special administrative regions of China where Chinese citizens can travel with relative ease, some could argue that our female subjects in Hong Kong and Macau should more appropriately be categorized as domestic, rather than transnational trafficking victims.

When asked, and indeed questioned in various ways, only one of our subjects (as previously described) indicated that she had been deceived into becoming a prostitute. None claimed to have been forced or coerced. Of the three possible elements of severe sex trafficking -- force, fraud or coercion -- let us assume that coercion is perhaps the most subtle and difficult to establish, since it depends a great deal on individual perceptions of potential risk and harm, and on how fearful a person may be. Focusing just on coercion,

the aforementioned factors of debt bondage, the withholding of documents and the restricted freedom described by some of the women might be construed as being coercive. The legal definition of coercion in the TVPA is, however, quite limiting: “Coercion means (a) threats of serious harm to or physical restraint against any person; (b) any scheme, plan or pattern intended to cause a person to believe that failure to perform an act would result in serious harm to or physical restraint against any person; or, (c) the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process.” Granting the previous point about what our individual subjects might have believed in this respect, it is difficult to see the circumstances as the women described them to us, as meeting this legal definition. That said, Table 14 shows the breakdown of these factors (debt, withheld documents, and financial exploitation) by site, and the proportion of subjects (35%) who experienced one or more of them.

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Table 14 about here

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Only a very broadly encompassing definition of sex trafficking would include these roughly one-third of our subjects as victims. We have described the situations in Taiwan and Indonesia that are largely driving these figures, and we believe that any such conclusion to include all these women as victims would be unfounded. Again, as we have repeatedly pointed out, our findings are only relevant to Chinese women. We are not saying that these findings are applicable to women of other nationalities who may be engaged in commercial sex in the destination countries we studied. For example, there

are many women from Mexico and Korea active in the U.S. sex market, but their experiences may be very different from the Chinese *xiaojies*.

We think it would be a great advance in our approaches to understanding and combating sex trafficking to have a common definition upon which all involved could agree. Some might argue that we already have such definition as spelled out in the TVPA (or perhaps in the UN protocol on human trafficking), but as we have explained these definitions are viewed by some (many) as being too limiting in really allowing us to address the full scope of the issue. Short of a common definition, perhaps the next best thing is to limit the definitions, and to make explicit exactly how sex trafficking victims are being defined in any discussions of the scope and magnitude of the problem and of any anti-trafficking policies.

To do otherwise means we will continue to talk past each other, and that we will come up with very different estimates of the magnitude of the problem since we will be using very different criteria. We also think that it is time for us to understand who the “traffickers” actually are, and figure out who, among these “traffickers,” are the real enemies. This would be helpful not only for people who are engaged in the war against sex trafficking, but also for the very women who we consider its victims.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Reexamine the Current Trafficking Paradigm**

In an article titled *The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking*, Ronald Weitzer (2007: 450) pointed out that “moral crusades often make grand and unverifiable claims about the

nature and prevalence of a particular ‘social evil,’ and identified the following as the moral crusades’ core claims regarding prostitution and sex trafficking”:

1. Prostitution is evil by definition.
2. Violence is omnipresent in prostitution and sex trafficking.
3. Customers and traffickers are the personification of evil.
4. Sex workers lack agency.
5. Prostitution and sex trafficking are inextricably linked.
6. The magnitude of both prostitution and sex trafficking is high and has greatly increased in recent years.
7. Legalization would make the situation far worse than it is at present.

Our research on the transnational movement of Chinese women for commercial sex suggests that the first six claims of this moral crusade are indeed open to debate. First, most of the people we interviewed did not view prostitution as inherently evil. Many *xiaojies* we interviewed in fact saw prostitution as an opportunity for them to make the kind of money they could never make through any other means. They also did not think that people who were helping them to enter this profession or the people who were buying sex from them were evil. Even though they may not like what they are doing, for them, prostitution is a fair exchange between a woman who sells sex and a man who buys sex, and thus the sex trade is not much different from any other commercial exchange.

The second claim that violence is omnipresent in prostitution and sex trafficking is also not supported by our findings. Client violence was rare, and on the few occasions when it did occur, weapons were not involved. Our data also show that the people who

were helping women to sell sex – agents, sex venue owners, jockeys, fake husbands – did not use violence as a means to control or exploit the women. The only exception was in the case of some women who were brought to Macau by their chickenheads, and who may have been subject to physical assaults if the chickenheads thought that their women were not working hard enough.

The third claim – customers and traffickers are the personification of evil – is also questionable because our female subjects certainly did not see their customers or handlers as being evil. Some of the women we interviewed actually developed intimate relationships with their customers and maintained stable relationships for months, if not years. As suggested by Teela Sanders (2007: 6) in her book *Paying for Pleasure*: “intimacy is not exempt from the commercial sexual experience, but for some an essential part of the criteria and satisfaction of commercial liaisons.” As far as “traffickers” are concerned, we did not find “evil” traffickers involved in the transnational movement of Chinese women. Many people helped these women to go overseas – returned women, document procurers, agents, fake husbands, chickenheads and so on. We did not find the professional or full-time “traffickers” (or transporters) usually depicted in the trafficking literature. Some of our subjects were indeed unhappy with a particular type of facilitator – the chickenhead – but the percentage of women who complained was very small and their complaints were not about an evil being perpetrated on them.

“Seasoning,” a term very often mentioned in the trafficking literature (Brown 2000; Sage and Kasten 2006) to underscore the extreme inhumanity of the traffickers, was unspoken during our conversations with hundreds of subjects over a two-year period.

There were no instances of repeated rapes of women by numerous men until their will to resist had been broken.

The fourth claim is about the lack of agency among women who engage in commercial sex. Prostitutes in general, and foreign prostitutes in particular, are portrayed in sex trafficking discussions as being helpless, child-like, and passive individuals who must be guided, protected, and instructed about their best interests. Our findings, to the contrary, clearly show that many, if not most of the women we interviewed considered themselves (in their words) “ferocious dragons,” or part of a *Red Detachment Army* who were going overseas to conquer the world. In fact, they were usually the ones who actively initiated the process of going overseas by aggressively looking for an opportunity to go abroad, regardless of whether they had already engaged in paid sex in China or not. No doubt these women can be vulnerable when they were working illegally in a foreign country, but they were also very clear about what they wanted and how to get it. We observed many interactions between these women and their clients or handlers, and we conclude that these women could not be pushed around easily.

We believe the vast majority of the women we interviewed were exercising choice in the sense of the bounded rationality we have described. They relied upon the information available to them; they considered that information in the context of what they might be doing if they went overseas versus what they might be doing if they stayed at home; and, they weighed the alternatives as they knew of them. In the end, they “satisfied.” In other words, they made a choice that seemed good enough for them under the circumstances. This is a difficult possibility for some who are ideologues on

the victimization issue to believe, because it means that all these women are not victims in the sense that some want to paint them.

The claim that prostitution and sex trafficking are inextricably linked is not substantiated by our research. Weitzer (2007: 455) pointed out that “there is no evidence that ‘most’ or even the majority of prostitutes have been trafficked,” and our study shows exactly that. There is no question that women from China are selling sex overseas, but it is hard to view them as trafficking victims. We should, however, reiterate that some of the women we interviewed had been domestically trafficked in China – that is taken, usually under false pretenses, from rural areas to urban centers for commercial sex – but the proportion of such women (about 10 percent) is significantly lower than what is suggested in the trafficking literature. Even in the cases of these women, however, the how and why they ultimately ended up in paid sex overseas did not meet the criteria of sex trafficking.

The argument cited earlier about the magnitude and trends of prostitution and sex trafficking also does not reflect the reality of our findings. The media in our research sites had often reported that women from China were dominating and overwhelming the local sex businesses, but our research suggests that the actual numbers are substantially lower than what is reported. The same is true with the trends – all the women we talked to believe that the trafficking of women might have existed in the past, but not anymore. They all suggested that, if indeed sex trafficking had ever occurred, it is decreasing, not increasing.

With respect to the impact of the legalization of prostitution on the cross-border movement of women for commercial sex, we can only point out that the crackdowns on

prostitution in China have had a displacement effect, in that some women decided to go overseas to avoid being arrested for working in the sex trade in China.

It is not our intent to gratuitously criticize the efforts of so many benevolent individuals and organizations who are working to help mistreated and powerless women who were and are being victimized and exploited in a foreign country. We do, however, firmly believe that it is not good practice to build policy on a foundation of unsubstantiated claims, false beliefs and myths.

One example is the unwillingness of antitrafficking advocates to address the reality that even in cases of true trafficking, sometimes the victims have played an active role in the process by placing themselves in a vulnerable position. They have chosen, even sought out the opportunity to go overseas. They have further agreed to engage in commercial sex overseas. The advocates refuse to address this reality because doing so might reduce empathy for the victims. But as a consequence of this refusal, the focus of policy and practice is on helping victims and not on looking to create economic opportunities and alternatives for young women. Admittedly the latter is not easy to do, but it does help move from being simply reactive to being more proactive in coping with the problem.

If we can get beyond the shrill special interests and the smoke and mirrors, we might find that there are many advantages in reexamining the current trafficking paradigm and the many assumptions upon which the paradigm is based. If we had a better and more realistic definition of trafficking victims, we would be better able to reconcile the huge gap between the number of estimated and actual rescued victims. Secondly, we would be able to develop a more efficient strategy in our efforts to investigate and



prosecute the people who are assisting women in selling sex because we would have arrived at a better understanding of the relationships between the women and the people around them.

Lastly, the various interest groups and government agencies around the world would have a shared focus on the major issues when they come together to discuss transnational commercial sex. Under the current trafficking paradigm, it appears that there is little or no common ground among the various governmental and non-governmental organizations, and this absence greatly impedes our efforts to engage in a true dialogue. It also impedes the ability to develop and implement a coherent and effective human trafficking policy.

### **More and Better Information**

One of the problems with our (U.S.) efforts in combating sex trafficking is that we have very little reliable information about the phenomenon. The public and public officials learn about sex trafficking from watching movies and TV news, reading newspapers and weekly magazines, and more rarely, digesting government or NGO reports (Piper 2005). Few of us ever encounter an actual woman who is engaged in commercial sex, not to mention a woman who is a sex trafficking victim. This means we learn about the problem from intermediaries, as pointed out by Elzbieta Gozdzik and Elizabeth Collett (2005: 116) from their review of the research literature on human trafficking in North America:

Most researchers drew information from newspaper reports and media investigations to compile a picture of trafficking in North America or base their studies on interviews with intermediaries: social service providers, counselors, law enforcement, victim advocates, pro bono attorneys, and others working with

trafficking victims. . . . Other research has assessed information from prosecuted cases, often high-profile ones.

If we researchers do talk to women who are engaged in paid sex, it is usually the case that the interviews are conducted in a police station, a jail, or a shelter, where the women have very good reasons to present themselves as being trafficking victims. Having been informed – some might say “brainwashed” – by the media, Hollywood, and various official reports, investigators tend to believe these women’s stories when they say that they were not willing participants. Liz Kelly (2005: 236) made the following point after she critically reviewed the literature on trafficking in persons in Europe:

While the engagement in research and documentation of international bodies, including at least five United Nations (UN) agencies, is welcome, it does not necessarily ensure a deepening of the knowledge base. Publications may primarily reflect a claims-making process, vying for influence over how the issue is understood and where it is located intellectually, symbolically, and materially.

We believed at the outset of this research that it was time for us to talk to the very women we were studying – the women who engage in commercial sex themselves – to best understand prostitution and sex trafficking and the possible linkage. Of course, as we pointed out earlier, this also raises an issue about the credibility of the information received. Maybe the women lied to us? Maybe – although we very much doubt it.

People usually lie when they have something to gain by doing so, or they have something to fear from telling the truth. Neither of those conditions existed in our interviews. We interviewed the women in their own natural settings and without the presence of a third party. We promised them nothing except anonymity. We were good listeners who gave them every opportunity to tell us their stories. We did not judge them.

We did not threaten them. We did not even try to persuade them if they were reluctant to speak with us. We have told this story in large part through the words of these women. And as the saying goes about the distinction between truth and fiction – you can't make this stuff up!

We likewise believed that it was time to interview the very people who are helping women go overseas to engage in commercial sex. Recruiters and document procurers in source countries, and agents, mommies (or their equivalents), and the owners of sex establishments in destination countries also obviously know a great deal about the business of commercial sex. They were valuable to us, and they too should be a source of information in future studies.

Although we disagree on some (many) points, we do agree with the argument made by many of those combating sex trafficking that we need to pay much more attention to the demand side – the people who are buying sex. Among the questions to think about are whether supply is simply a response to demand? Or, is demand actually created or enhanced by sex ring operators through manipulating prices? Or, does it depend upon the sex service providers themselves who simply show up in a destination country and make themselves available to potential buyers?

Interestingly, we have not been the only ones who believe in the value of ethnographic research in this area. A handful of ethnographers have recently studied sex trafficking by talking to potential victims in source countries, and (like us) to women who were already engaging in paid sex in destination countries. These interviews too were conducted in natural settings. For example, Frederick (2005) studied the movement of Nepali girls to India; Sobieszcyk (2002) examined how Thai women arrived in Japan to

engage in local sex businesses there; Busza et al (2004) looked at the problem of Vietnamese women in the sex industry of Cambodia; and Ahmad (2005) explored the situation of Bangladeshi women in India's sex sector. Each of these studies also questioned the many assumptions associated with the current trafficking paradigm. Busza et al (2004: 1371) made an argument for more such participatory research as follows:

We do not dispute that in both settings migrants have suffered hardship and abuse, but current "anti-trafficking" approaches do not help their problems. The agendas need to be redrawn so that they reflect the needs of the populations they aim to serve, rather than emotive reactions to sensationalized media coverage. This requires deeper investigation at both local and regional levels, including participatory research to inform interventions from the experiences of the migrants and their communities.

We also recommend the study of women from other major sending countries to see whether their experiences are comparable to those of Chinese women. We think that, for example, the experiences of Nepali women in India, Burmese (Myanmar) women in Thailand, Vietnamese women in Cambodia, Thai women in Japan, Moldovan women in Turkey, and Korean and Mexican women in the United States should be examined. We further recommend that female interviewers interview these women, again in their natural settings and without the presence of a third party, so as to avoid any actual or perceived gender bias.

The world of prostitution and of sex trafficking is not a black and white world. There are here all the ambiguities and moral dilemmas that characterize so much of the human condition. A failure to recognize the distinctions and nuances that actually characterize the commercial sex business, whether because of ignorance or politicized moral positions or both, obviously does nothing to help the women who are purportedly

the major concern. It also does nothing for the development of coherent and effective practices and policies to combat human trafficking. In the end, continuing to use sex trafficking as a moral battleground is unlikely to result in effective policies and practices at any level.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I. Questionnaire for Female Subjects in the Sex Sector

#### I. Background Information

**READ: First, I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself and your family.**

1. Where were you born?

City \_\_\_\_\_

Province \_\_\_\_\_

2. Where would you consider to be your ancestral hometown (*juji*)?

City \_\_\_\_\_

Province \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where were you living in China before you came to this place?

City \_\_\_\_\_

Province \_\_\_\_\_

4. How old are you now?

5. What's your marital status?

6. Do you have children?

Yes (How many? \_\_\_\_\_)

No

7. What is your education level?

8. What are your parents' occupations? (If retired, please tell me what were their occupations before retirement)

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Life in China

**Read: Now I would like to ask you a few questions about your life in China and the reasons for coming here.**

9. What year were you born?

19 \_\_\_\_\_

10. What did you do for a living in China? (Please tell me all the jobs or businesses you were involved in, including the entertainment industry, if any. Please tell me the nature and the location of these jobs or businesses and income)

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11. Have you been to other countries besides this country?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If yes, which countries and what were you doing there?

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12. When did you arrive in this country?

\_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_ month

13. What is your current nonimmigration/immigration status in this country?

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14. What prompted you to come to this country? (PROBE: To look for a better job, to go to school, to make money, to look for a companion, just happened to know someone who can bring me here)

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### III. Leaving China

**Read: Now, I would like to ask you some questions about the arrangements you had to make before leaving China.**

15. Did you come to this country on your own? (PROBE: Your own means you did not rely on anyone to come here). If yes, please tell me how you managed to come to this country on your own?

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16. If no, how did you get into contact with the people who helped you to come to this country? (PROBE: Did you find them or they recruited you, under what circumstances, did someone bring the two of you together)

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17. What can you tell me about all those people who assisted you in China? (PROBE: How many of them and what role did they play in the process? What did they do for a living? Were any of them government officials? Were they local people or overseas Chinese? Were they well-known in the community? Were they gang members or criminals?)

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18. During the first few meetings between you and these people, what did you discuss? (PROBE: Did you discuss what you will be doing in this country, how much money it will cost you, how to pay the fees, the routes to take, the risk associated with the trip, the length of time it takes to get to this country)

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19. Did you and the people who helped you to leave China discuss your working for them or the people they know after you arrived here? If yes, did they tell you what you would be doing in this place and how much money you would be making?

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20. How long did it take these people to arrange for your departure?

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21. How did you leave China? (PROBE: Did you fly out of China and what types of passport and visa did you possess? If by land, what border did you cross? If by sea, how did you get to the ship?) Did someone else accompany you out of China? If yes, how many people and who were they?

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#### **IV. Entering this Country**

**READ: Now I'd like to ask you about how you entered this country and what happened soon after your arrival.**

22. How did you enter this country? (PROBE: Did you enter this country by boat, car, airplane, or on foot? Did you possess any travel documents and what kinds of documents? Through which city did you enter this country? Who else was with you? How many organizers were there?)

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23. When you arrived in this country, did anybody here greet you at the port of entry? If yes, who were they? How many? (PROBE: Were they Chinese? Which dialects did they speak? How did they treat you? How were they related to the people in China who helped you to leave China?)

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24. In general, how would characterize the trip? (PROBE: very challenging, very risky, etc.) (Were you fearful? Of what? Were you abused? How? Did you feel exploited? How?)

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25. Tell me what happened during the first few days after you arrived here. (PROBE: Were you sent to work right away? Were you sold to another party? Were you locked up? Were you trained to fit into a new environment? Did you look for a job yourself? Did you enroll in a school?)

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## V. Smuggling Fee

**Read: In this section, I'd like to ask you how you've repaid your travel fees. I would like to ask you a series of questions about how much money you have to spend to get to this country. (If subject came to this country on her own, skip to Question 31.**

26. How much did the people who helped you charge you for the trip? \_\_\_\_\_

27. When and how did you pay them the fee? Where was the money from?

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28. Do you still owe money to people who helped you to get here? If yes, how much? If no, how long did it take to pay off?

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**VI: Work**

29. At what point did you know that you will be involved in this line of work?

- 1 In China
- 2 In transit point
- 3 Right after arrival
- 4 Not long after arrival
- 5 Long after arrival

How long have you been in this line of work in this country? \_\_\_\_\_

30. Has anyone used physical force (hit or threatened to hit you, slapped you, punched or kicked you, held you against your will, or made other physical threats, etc.) to get you to do this work? If yes, how?

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31. Has anyone deceived you (told you would be doing some other kind of work, said it would only be for a short time, said you would receive more money than you are, etc.) to get you to do this work? If yes, how?

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32. Has anyone coerced you (threatened to report you to the police or authorities, threatened your family, said you are a criminal, kept your money, etc.) into this line of work in this country? If yes, how?

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33. If no to any of the above, what prompted you to enter this line of work in this country?

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34. Please describe the process of entering this line of work. (PROBE: How was it arranged? Did they train you? How did you find this job? What did it take to be in this line of work? Any difference between what you do now and at the beginning?)

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35. Tell me how your business is run. (PROBE: What type of establishment? How is the business organized and operated? How open is the business? What do you do?)

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36. How many people are helping to make it possible for you to be involved in this line of work? What roles do these people play and how are they related? (PROBE: boss, driver, agent, pimp, guard, telephone operator)

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37. Approximately how much money does a customer pay to see you? How is this money distributed among you and the people who are involved in it? Do you think this type of arrangement is fair to you? Why do you say this?

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38. Approximately how much money are you making a month? What did you do with this money? (PROBE: sent back to China, deposited in a local bank, spent it all)

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39. Describe your daily schedule. (PROBE: What time you get up, what do you do after that, when do you go to work, when you are not with a customer, what do you do, what time do you get out of work, what do you do after that?)

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40. On average, how many customers do you have in a typical day? Tell me who your customers mostly are. How would you characterize them? (PROBE: they are local people or foreigners, are they professionals or blue-collar workers, what's their age, how would you characterize the customers' attitudes towards you? Are you forced to do things you are uncomfortable with?)

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41. Has there been any violence inflicted on you by the customers?

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42. What are your major concerns in this line of work?

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43. Have you ever been arrested in this country? If yes, how did that happen and why were you released?

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44. Are you free to move about as you please now? (PROBE: Do you think you are being watched closely? Do you think you are being restricted? )

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45. If you arrived here with travel documents, have you had access to your travel documents at all time? If no, who held them? Why?

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46. Describe how you have dealt with working in the sex industry. Have you ever used drugs or alcohol or taken medication. If yes, please explain.

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**VII. Crime and Victimization**

47. Have you ever been a victim of a crime? How about here in this country? If yes, what happened?

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48. In this country, have you met anyone who you think is being forced, coerced, or deceived into this line of work? If yes, tell me when and where did you meet them?

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49. In this country, have you heard about anyone who is being forced or deceived or coerced into this line of work? If yes, tell me what you heard.

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50. What are your future plans? (PROBE: Do you plan to go back to China or stay here, or do you plan to travel back and forth between China and here, why do you want to do so?)

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51. Do you have any final thoughts about your coming to this country and being involved in what you are doing now? Assuming you were talking to someone in your country who is thinking about coming to this country and doing what you are doing now, what would you tell them?

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**READ: We have completed the interview. Thank you for your assistance.**

**VIII. INTERVIEWER'S REPORT**

Overall, in your opinion, how honest were respondent's answers to the questions?

- 1 . . . . Very honest
- 2 . . . . Honest
- 3 . . . . Somewhat honest
- 4 . . . . Not very honest
- 5 . . . . Not honest at all
- 8 . . . . Not sure



## Appendix II. Questionnaire for Sex Ring Operators

INTERVIEWER: Please follow the protection of human subject procedures, as provided in the training session.

### I. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

**READ: First, I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself and your family.**

1. How old are you?  
\_\_\_\_\_ years-old
2. What's your marital status?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you have children?  
1 . . . . Yes (If yes, number of children \_\_\_\_\_)  
2 . . . . No
4. What is your education level? (PROBE: none, elementary school, middle school, high school, professional school, college, graduate school)  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What do your parents' do for a living? (If retired, please tell us what they did before retirement)  
Father: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mother: \_\_\_\_\_
6. How much education did your parents receive? (PROBE: none, elementary school, middle school, high school, professional school, college, graduate school)  
Father: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mother: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Where were you born?  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
Province: \_\_\_\_\_  
Country: \_\_\_\_\_
8. If not born in this country, how long have you been in this country?  
\_\_\_\_\_ months and years
9. Where would you consider yourself to be from?  
\_\_\_\_\_



10. How did you arrive here? (PROBE: As a student, as a tourist, being smuggled, married to a local person)

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11. What is your current immigration status in this country?

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**II. THE BUSINESS**

12. What prompted you to get involved in this business in this country? Why?

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13. When did you begin to get involved in it?  
\_\_\_\_\_ year

14. Can you tell me how you began to get involved in this business? How?

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15. What is your role in this business and specifically what do you do?

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16. How is the business organized? Do you have any partners? How many people are involved and what do they do?

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17. Do you have other businesses or an occupation? If so, please tell me about your other businesses or occupation.

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18. Does your business need security for protection? If yes, who provides this security? What about local gangs? On what terms is security provided? How were these terms agreed upon?

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19. In this business, what are your major concerns?

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### **III. The Women or the Sex Workers**

20. Can you tell me about the backgrounds of the women that you are dealing with?

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20a. Are any of these women from mainland China? If yes, about how many? What proportion of the sex workers are from mainland China?

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21. How did you find these women?

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22. Do you rank or categorize these women, say in terms of looks, or earnings? If so, how?

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23. How do you manage these women?

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24. Do you provide meals, lodging, or transportation to the women?

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25. Are there women who are extremely difficult to manage or work with? What kinds of difficulties do they present?

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26. Do you think any of these women are being forced, coerced, or deceived into working in this business? Why do you say so?

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27. Do you think any of these women are being exploited by the people who are running the business? Why?

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#### **IV. The Men or the Customers**

28. How do you find your customers?

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29. How would you characterize your customers?

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30. Do you screen your customers? If so, how?

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31. What are the main purposes of screening your customers?

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32. What kinds of problems do the customers create for you?

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33. How do you generally handle problematic customers?

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34. Were you ever arrested for your role in this business?

1 . . . . Yes (If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_)

2 . . . . No

If yes, tell me about the last incident. How and why it happened?

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What was the punishment/fine?

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35. What do you normally do to avoid being arrested?

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36. To do what you are doing now, what qualifications should one possess?

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## **V. Income and Expenses**

37. How much money did you invest in this business?

\_\_\_\_\_ (in local currency)

What were the main expenses for and how much were they?

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38. What is your net profit per month from this business?

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39. Can you tell me roughly what your revenues and expenses are? (PROBE: daily, weekly, or monthly)

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## **VI. The Police**

40. Do you have to be worried about the police? Why or why not?

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41. If you have to be concerned about police crackdowns, what do you do to avoid these?

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42. Does your business need to be protected by the local authorities? If so, on what terms? If not, why not?

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## **VII. Your Perception**

43. What is your view of the sex industry in general in this country? (PROBE: How well-established it is, what proportion of the women here are from overseas, how many of them are trafficking victims, what are the unique characteristics of the local sex industry?)

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44. How do you see your role in the sex industry? (PROBE: Do you see it as a way to make money, as a part-time job, feel bad about it and will leave as soon as possible, or like doing it a lot? Do you tell people around you – friends and relatives -- that you are doing this? If not, why not?)

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45. What do you think of the women who are involved in commercial sex? (PROBE: they are just normal people, they are like other working people, they are lazy and greedy, they are victims, they use drugs and they gamble, they are career prostitutes?)

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46. What should the government do about the sex industry here?

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### **Appendix III. Guidelines for Interview with Law Enforcement Officials**

#### **I. Your Organization and Your Work**

1. Please tell me about your organization. (PROBE: what is its jurisdiction, the major functions, the size, etc.)
2. Please tell me about your work. (PROBE: job title, responsibilities, how many people under your supervision, how long have you worked in this assignment, etc.)

#### **II. The Sex Industry**

3. As you know, many cities have commercial sex establishments. What can you tell me about the sex industry in this city and the surrounding area?
4. How many sex establishments are there and of what types?
5. Who controls these sex establishments? Is there a concern about the sex industry being involved with organized crime? If yes, what is the nature of that involvement? Would you say that commercial sex in this city is controlled by organized crime?
6. Where are these sex establishments located in the city?
7. Do these sex establishments cater to certain groups of people? Who are they?
8. What method of advertising is used by the sex industry? Print media, Internet, Brokers, Travel industry, Clubs/bars, Other.

#### **III. The Women**

9. Are women from overseas working in the sex industry here? If yes, what indicators do you have of that?
10. Are any of them from mainland China? If so, approximately what proportion?
11. How serious would you say is the problem of overseas women working in the sex industry here? Why?
12. Where are the women from? What are the major sending countries?
13. How do women from mainland China arrive here?



14. How would you characterize the women from China who are in working in the sex industry here?

15. Do women from China come here with the intention or knowledge that they are going to work in the sex industry or do they enter the profession only after they arrive here and are forced by their circumstances?

16. How many of them would you say are being forced, coerced, or deceived into sex work here? Why would you say that? What is the evidence of force, fraud or coercion?

17. Have you worked on cases involving sex workers from mainland China? If yes, tell me about the cases you've had.

#### **IV. Smugglers/Traffickers and Other Participants**

18. Please characterize the people who bring mainland Chinese women into this country. Are any of them members of organized crime groups? Do they have anything to do with organized crime? If yes, what is the connection?

19. How are these smugglers/traffickers related to the sex establishment owners?

20. Besides the smuggler/traffickers and sex establishment owners, who else participates in the commercial sex operations involving mainland Chinese women?

21. Please explain how these people from diverse backgrounds work together to bring women from China here and arrange for them to work in the sex industry.

22. What are the different forms of commercial sex operations involving mainland Chinese women? How are these different?

#### **V. Victimization**

23. Do you think women from mainland China are being exploited by the people in the sex industry? Why or why not?

24. Do you think women from mainland China are being controlled by the people in the sex industry? Why?

25. How willing are smugglers/traffickers and sex ring operators to use violence against sex workers from China? What is the form of that violence?

26. How willing are sex buyers (johns) to use violence against sex workers from China? What is the form of that violence?

27. Do you see these women as victims or as willing accomplices? Why?

## **VI. Government Policy**

28. How does your government define human trafficking? How serious is the problem of human trafficking in this country?

29. Is the fight against human trafficking a high priority here? What about relative to other priorities?

30. Have there been any arrests of human traffickers in the past 3 years? Prosecutions? Convictions? Approximately how many?

31. How effective has law enforcement been in preventing the arrival of mainland Chinese sex workers? Have any law enforcement techniques been particularly effective?

32. Do you have a human trafficking law? If so, tell me about the law and how useful you think it is?

33. Describe current law enforcement strategies for arresting and prosecuting smugglers and traffickers. How well have these strategies worked? If not very well, why not?

34. Is the public aware and concerned about foreign women working in the sex industry here?

35. What is the role of the media and other non-governmental entities in raising public awareness about human trafficking and the plight of foreign sex workers?

36. Is there interest here in working closely or more closely with the U.S. in combating human trafficking?

37. What do you think of the U.S. Department of State's TIP Office and its annual report on human trafficking?

38. Any collaborative efforts with the People's Republic of China? How have these collaborative efforts worked out?

39. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the sex industry and smuggled or trafficked women? What about especially Chinese women?



## **Appendix IV. Guidelines for Interview with NGOs and Social Service Providers**

### **I. Your Organization and Your Work**

1. Please tell me about your organization. (PROBE: the history and development of your organization, the major functions of your organization, the structure and size of your organization, etc.)
2. Please tell me about your work. (PROBE: job title, responsibilities, how many people under your supervision, how long have you worked in this assignment, etc.)

### **II. The Sex Industry**

3. As you know, there is a variety of forms of sexual entertainment that operate in many cities. What can you tell me about that entertainment and the sex business in general in this city?
4. Are there commercial sex establishments here? If so, how many are there and in what forms?
5. Who controls these sex establishments?
6. Where are these sex establishments located in the city?
7. Do these establishments cater to certain groups of people? Who are they?
8. What methods of advertising are used by the sex industry? Print media, Internet, Brokers, Travel industry, Clubs/bars, Other.

### **III. The Women**

9. Are women from overseas working in the sex industry here? If yes, what indicators do you have of that?
10. Is the matter of overseas women working in the sex industry here an issue of concern? Why?
11. Where are these women from? What are the major sending countries?
12. Are there women from mainland China? If so, how do women from mainland China arrive here?

13. How would you characterize the women from China who are in working in the sex industry here? (age, were sex workers before, forced to do sex work, deceived or coerced, etc.?)

14. Do women from China come here with the intention or knowledge that they are going to work in the sex industry or do they enter the profession only after they arrive here and are forced by the circumstances?

15. How many of them would you say are being forced, coerced, or deceived into sex work here? Why do you say so? How do you know that?

16. Have you worked on cases involving sex workers from mainland China? If yes, tell me about the cases you've had.

#### **IV. Smugglers/Traffickers and Other Participants**

17. Please characterize the people who bring mainland Chinese women into this country. Do you think they are members of organized crime groups?

18. How are these smugglers/traffickers related to the sex establishment owners?

19. Besides the smuggler/traffickers and sex establishment owners, who else participates in the commercial sex operations involving mainland Chinese women?

20. Please explain how these people from diverse backgrounds work together to bring women from China here and arrange for them to work in the sex industry.

21. Describe the many forms of commercial sex operations involving mainland Chinese women.

#### **V. Victimization**

22. Do you think women from mainland China are being exploited by people in the sex industry? Why do you say so?

23. Do you think women from mainland China are being controlled by people in the sex industry? Why do you say so? To what extent do you think the sex industry is controlled by organized crime? Any evidence of this?

24. How willing are smugglers/traffickers and sex ring operators to use violence against sex workers from China? What is the form of that violence?

24. How willing are sex buyers to use violence against sex workers from China? What is the form of that violence?

25. Do you see these women as victims or as willing accomplices? Why?

## **VI. Services**

26. What kinds of services does your organization provide to these women?

27. Please characterize the women your organization is currently helping (young, seriously victimized, afraid, wanting to stay/go home, etc.)

28. Who provides financial support to your organization?

29. Do you think the government is supportive of your organization's efforts to aid these women? Why do you say so?

30. What kinds of problems do you encounter the most when you are trying to help foreign women such as Chinese women?

31. What changes do you think are needed so that your organization would be better positioned to help foreign women?

## **VII. Government Policy**

32. What is the government's policy on human trafficking? How does it define human trafficking? How serious is the problem of trafficking in persons in this country?

33. Is the fight against human trafficking a high priority? What about relative to other priorities?

34. Have there been any arrests of human traffickers in the past 3 years? Prosecutions? Convictions? Approximately how many?

35. How effective has law enforcement been in preventing the arrival of mainland Chinese sex workers? Have any law enforcement techniques been particularly effective?

36. Do you have a human trafficking law? If so, tell me about the law and how useful you think it is?

37. Describe current strategies on the arrest and prosecution of smugglers or traffickers. How well have these strategies worked? Why?

38. Is the public aware and concerned about foreign women working in the sex industry here?
39. What is the role of the media and other non-governmental entities in raising public awareness of human trafficking and the plight of foreign sex workers?
40. Is there interest in working closely or more closely with the U.S. in combating human trafficking?
41. What do you think of the U.S. Department of State's TIP Office and its annual report on human trafficking?
42. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the sex industry and smuggled or trafficked women? Especially mainland Chinese women?





## Tables and Figures

Table 1: Sample (N=350)

Research Sites	Prostitutes	Sex Ring Operators	Law Enforcers	NGOs & Other Key Informants	Total
China	15	9	24	4	52
Hong Kong	15	2	9	3	29
Macau	18	9	1	3	31
Taiwan	16	14	13	5	48
Thailand	17	5	5	2	29
Malaysia	18	7	3	4	32
Singapore	15	6	7	2	30
Indonesia	18	9	7	4	38
Los Angeles	16	6	2	4	28
New York	16	9	5	3	33
Total	164	76	76	34	350

Table 2: Methods in locating female subjects outside of China (N=149)

Site	Street	Sex Venues	Referral	Total
Hong Kong	1	6	8	15
Macau	1	17	0	18
Taiwan	0	1	15	16
Thailand	0	4	13	17
Malaysia	6	1	11	18
Singapore	9	5	1	15
Indonesia	0	8	10	18
Los Angeles	0	6	10	16
New York	0	14	2	16
Total	17	62	70	149

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the *xiaojie* subjects (N=149)

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age</b>		
20 and younger	8	5
21 to 30	66	45
31 to 40	58	39
41 and older	16	11
<b>Education</b>		
Elementary	17	11
Middle School	56	38
High School	50	34
College	25	17
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	75	50
Married	35	24
Divorced	39	26
<b>Occupation</b>		
Prostitution	59	41
Ordinary Worker	24	17
Professional	19	13
Unemployed	16	11
Private Business	13	9
Entertainment	9	6
Government Job	4	3

Table 4: At what point did you know you will engage in prostitution overseas? (N=149)

Site	In China (%)	Right After Arriving Overseas (%)	Not Long After Arriving Overseas (%)	Long After Arriving Overseas (%)	N
Hong Kong	80	0	7	13	15
Macau	94	0	6	0	18
Taiwan	88	6	0	6	16
Thailand	82	0	18	0	17
Malaysia	94	6	0	0	18
Singapore	93	0	7	0	15
Indonesia	94	0	6	0	18
Los Angeles	0	13	50	37	16
New York	6	0	44	50	16
Total	71	3	15	11	149

Table 5: Intermediaries by research sites (N=149)

Site	None (%)	A returned <i>xiaojie</i> (%)	A company (%)	A chickenhead (%)	Husband or boyfriend (%)	Others (%)	N
Hong Kong	40	47	0	13	0	0	15
Macau	6	50	0	33	11	0	18
Taiwan	0	87	0	0	13	0	15
Thailand	0	88	0	12	0	0	16
Malaysia	5	83	6	6	0	0	18
Singapore	0	66	27	7	0	0	15
Indonesia	6	55	33	6	0	0	18
Los Angeles	7	7	36	0	29	21	14
New York	0	0	75	0	12	13	16
Total	7	54	19	9	7	3	145*

\* 4 missing

Table 6: A comparison of subject characteristics by research sites (N=149)

Research Site	Age	Years of Education	Single (%)	Sell Sex in China (%)	Helped by a returned <i>xiaojie</i> (%)	Mode of Entry
Hong Kong	31	9	60	85	78	Tourist
Macau	25	9	78	56	53	In Transit
Taiwan	26	10	94	50	87	Fake Marriage
Thailand	33	8	24	13	88	Tourist
Malaysia	30	8	50	56	88	Tourist
Singapore	27	11	47	33	67	Tourist
Indonesia	27	10	72	50	59	Business
Los Angeles	38	14	19	6	8	Business
New York	39	12	6	6	0	Business
Total	31	10	50	39	59	Tourist

Table 7 Road fee by research site (N=149)

Site	N	Number of subjects who paid	Missing	Percent paid	Average amount (US\$)
Hong Kong	15	3	0	20	903
Macau	18	4	1	24	9,750
Taiwan	16	14	1	94	6,405
Thailand	17	11	0	65	1,315
Malaysia	18	16	2	100	1,074
Singapore	15	14	1	100	3,138
Indonesia	18	16	2	100	1,680
LA	16	8	1	53	26,640
New York	16	13	0	81	19,346
Total	149	99	8	70	7,055

Table 8. Road fee payment by research site (N=106)

Site	Own money	Borrowed money	Debt to a sex ring operator	Total
Hong Kong	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	3
Macau	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	3 (75%)	4
Taiwan	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)	15
Thailand	10 (59%)	6 (35%)	1 (6%)	16
Malaysia	8 (53%)	3 (20%)	4 (27%)	15
Singapore	9 (60%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	15
Indonesia	8 (47%)	1 (6%)	8 (47%)	17
Los Angeles	3 (37%)	5 (63%)	0 (0%)	8
New York	6 (50%)	6 (50%)	0 (0%)	12
Total	47 (44%)	25 (24%)	34 (32%)	106

Table 9: Charges, earnings, and percent retained by research site (N=149)

Site	Per Session (Sexual transaction)			Per Table (Hostessing)		
	Customer Pays (Charges in US\$)	Subject Gets (Earnings in US\$)	Percent Retained	Customer Pays (Charges in US\$)	Subject Gets (Earnings in US\$)	Percent Retained
Hong Kong	77	54	63	50	35	70
Macau	30	27	97	N/A	N/A	N/A
Taiwan	135	57	43	N/A	N/A	N/A
Thailand	130	93	75	12	8	66
Malaysia	43	39	78	34	28	82
Singapore	82	72	92	Missing	42	N/A
Indonesia	145	75	55	65	45	69
LA	116	86	74	N/A	N/A	N/A
New York	129	102	80	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	96	66	74	38	27	71

Table 10: Income by research site (N=149)

Research Site	Daily Earnings (in US\$)	Monthly Earnings (in US\$)
Hong Kong	130	2,856
Macau	142	3,145
Taiwan	367	7,218
Thailand	53	1,110
Malaysia	120	2,537
Singapore	207	4,588
Indonesia	112	2,233
Los Angeles	345	7,827
New York	285	5,987
Total	188	4,026

Table 11: Actors in the transnational Chinese sex trade

Actors	Gender	Active in	Functions	Approximate Monthly Income (\$)
Chickenhead	Male	Hong Kong and Macau	Transport, protect, and manage the girls	Not sure
Agent (as “owner”)	Both	Taiwan	Invest money and orchestrate the movement of women	\$5,000 per woman
Agent (as labor broker)	Both	Indonesia	Act as labor agent	\$2,000 to \$4,000
Mommy	Female	Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia	Function as an intermediary between the women and the clients	As high as \$5,000
Brothel Keeper (or house or massage parlor owner)	Both	Hong Kong, Los Angeles, New York	Operate a brothel (or a house or a massage parlor)	From a few thousands to \$25,000
Jockey	Male	Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia	Deliver the girls to the customers	\$80 a day
Fake Husband	Male	Taiwan	Travel to China, engage in fake marriage, and bring a woman overseas	\$1,000
Auntie	Both	Taiwan	Refer customers to various sex venues	\$30 to \$45 per referral
Manager	Male	Hong Kong, Macau, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia	Manage a nightclub or KTV and be responsible for recruiting customers	Not sure

Table 12: Comparing our female subjects' experiences with the anti-trafficking paradigm's characterization of sex trafficking (N=149)

	<u>Anti-trafficking paradigm's characterization of the situation</u>	<u>Subjects' depictions of their experiences</u>
<b>Recruitment</b>		
Recruiter	Stranger or trafficked victim	Most could not be even considered being recruited; some were helped by a returned <i>xiaojie</i> or a document vendor
Methods		
Purchase	Very prevalent	Not even heard about it
Deception	The most popular method	Almost no deception
Abduction	Some	None
<b>Transportation</b>	Transported by traffickers, many being smuggled	31% traveled on their own 25% with a returned sex worker 15% with other women Only a few were smuggled
<b>Sale</b>	Traffickers sell victims to brothel owners; victims may be traded again later	No buying and selling, except one
<b>Control</b>	All the victims are tightly controlled Victims' travel documents are seized by their victimizers	Only 15% said they were not free Only women in Indonesia said their employers were in possession of their documents
<b>Victimization</b>		
Violence	It's the norm	Almost none
Unsafe sex	Victims have no say	Clients were always required to wear condoms
Number of clients	Too many	Too few
Client selection	None	Most of them did, not an issue
<b>Debt Bondage</b>	Almost all victims are under debt bondage and the debt is not easy to repay	Only 32% were under debt when they left; average road fee was \$6,680 and it took most subjects not more than 20 days to clear
<b>Exploitation</b>	Victims receive very little or no money	Received about 74% of what their clients paid



Table 13: Definition of sex trafficking and its prevalence (in percent, N=149)

A sex trafficking victim is a person . . . .

Site	being helped to go overseas to sell sex	who is accompanied overseas to be involved in paid sex	paying someone to be helped to go abroad to sell sex	who is selling sex overseas with the help of sex ring operator(s)	who is under debt to go overseas to engage in paid sex	who is financially exploited while selling sex overseas	whose travel documents are withheld	who is forced, coerced, or deceived into paid sex or is underage
HK	60	53	20	100	0	29	7	0
Macau	94	72	24	61	17	6	0	0
Taiwan	100	100	94	100	94	93	19	0
Thailand	100	88	65	47	6	0	6	6
Malaysia	95	78	100	56	22	40	6	0
Singapore	100	67	100	80	20	0	7	7
Indonesia	94	72	100	94	44	90	83	0
LA	93	75	53	81	0	0	0	0
NY	100	56	81	69	0	0	0	0
Total	93	74	70	76	23	26	15	1

Table 14: Possible “coercive” factors experienced by research site

Site	None	One	Two	Three	N
Hong Kong	67%	33%	0%	0%	15
Macau	78	22	0	0	18
Taiwan	6	0	81	13	16
Thailand	88	12	0	0	17
Malaysia	67	11	17	5	18
Singapore	73	27	0	0	15
Indonesia	6	33	39	22	18
Los Angeles	100	0	0	0	16
New York	100	0	0	0	16
Total	65%	15%	15%	5%	149

Figure 1: Pathways to prostitution in China

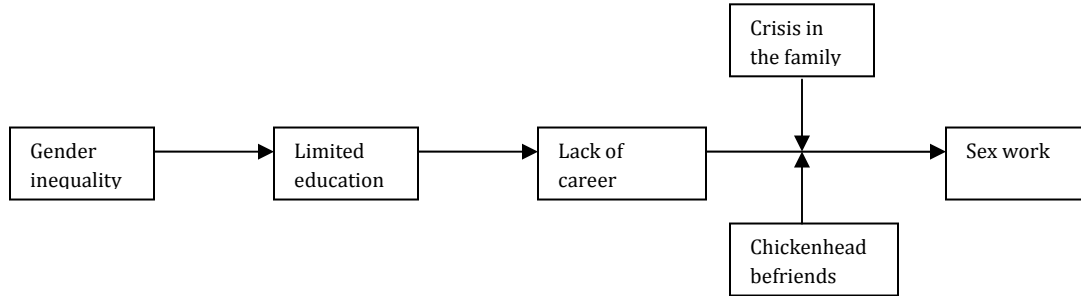
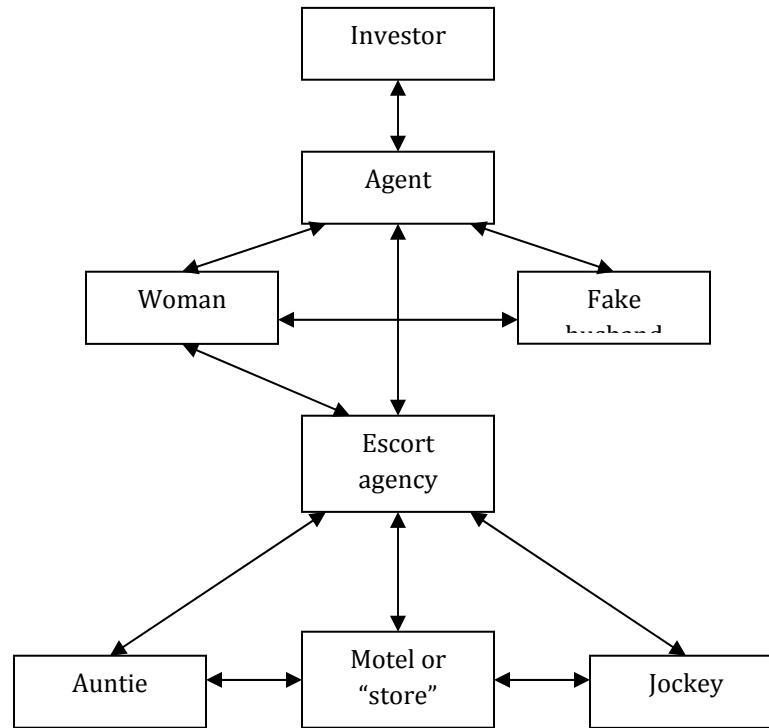


Figure 2: Social organization of transnational commercial sex in Taiwan





Map of Southeast Asia



Map of China