

# The Role of Social Organizations in the Rescue of Abducted Women in China

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## ABSTRACT

Gradual enhancement of the law system and modernization do not prevent human trafficking crime away from Chinese people's lives. The considerably large buyer's market due to the imbalance of economic and cultural development, the difficulty of cross-regional criminal investigation, and the deficiencies of legislation related to human trafficking incentivize criminals to take risks for economic benefits. When discussing the ways to "activate" each link on the chain of the social system that eventually results in crimes, the role of social organizations, especially the Women's Federation is often neglected. This paper will first focus on the empowerment of social organizations in the process of settling down victims and offering mental therapy and re-employment training. This part will also examine the challenges of empowerment and the potential solutions. The Women's Federation is at the front line of contact with women victims of abduction and has abundant information at its disposal; therefore, legal improvement and aid assistance are also what social organizations can provide. Then the paper will emphasize the approaches for social organizations to utilize their resources and connections to assist local governments, law institutions, and police officers in facilitating the work of preventing human trafficking. After investigating the specific functions social organizations can execute after rescuing the victims, the paper will highlight how they play a role in preventing crimes from taking place by educating the most vulnerable group of people. A combination of precaution and remediation measures is necessary and complementary in keeping people safe from human trafficking.

## Introduction

During the Beijing Winter Olympics of February 2022, two Chinese women in very different circumstances became the Internet's focal points - Gu Ailing, an American-born freestyle skier representing China, and "Xiaohuamei." The conditions of the two women are on opposite spectrums, one winning global attention on the skiing track with dazzling skills and youthful looks. At the same time, the other appeared chained, disheveled, and full of rotten teeth in the report. There may be only one Gu Ailing, but there is far more than one "Xiaohuamei" in China. The experience of "Xiaohuamei" revealed the sinister crime of female abduction and trafficking in society and brought the issue of crime prevention back into the spotlight, especially the activation of social organizations.

## Cultural Background

Since the reform of the 1980s, the Chinese economy has developed rapidly, and the legal system has gradually improved. Still, the domestic crime of human trafficking continues to occur despite repeated prohibitions. In China, according to 'White Paper on China's Lost Population 2020', the number of lost people in 2020 reached 1 million, of which at least 10,000 to 20,000 were trafficked (1). Criminals choose to take desperate risks for economic interests against legal punishment based on the vast buyer's market caused by the unbalanced development of the

economy and culture, the increasingly difficult criminal investigation due to cross-regional and even transnational crimes, and the legislative deficiencies related to human trafficking,

Women and children make up the majority of trafficked persons. The aggravation of gender imbalance and the cultural practice of “having a son to carry on the family line” created the relatively backward areas in economy and culture (7). One of them is the countryside, the leading destination where trafficked women and children are taken towards. Since the 1980s, the gender ratio of men to women in China has continued to rise, from 108 men to 100 women in 1981 to 119 in 2005 and even more than 130 in some provinces (8). This gender imbalance in society has led to subsequent series of problems with marriage and labor markets. Because of the economic development, unimpeded flow of information, and convenient transportation in the southeastern coastal areas, women in the rural areas of the central and western regions tend to choose to go out to work instead of engaging in agriculture at home. Thus, the gender imbalance in the backward areas is exacerbated, which makes single men in rural areas with weak legal awareness prone to “buy” women to meet their family’s reproductive needs and continue the tradition of “carrying on the family line” (8). The cross-regional nature of human trafficking has also increased the difficulty of detecting cases. In addition to the deficiencies of relevant laws and regulations, the collusion of specific interest groups, and omissions at the policy level, human trafficking cases have occurred frequently.

## **The All China Women’s Federation**

The overwhelming report of “Xiaohuamei” aroused the media’s attention to the crime of human trafficking. Many netizens also aimed their criticism at local public security organs and law enforcement agencies that used power for personal gain and did nothing. In the fight against abduction and trafficking, the significance of the social organizations seems to be ignored, whether before the abduction or after being rescued. One of the most important social organizations to deal with the subsequent series of social problems in the rescue of abducted women is the All-China Women’s Federation, or “Women’s Federation” for short.

### **Primary Function in the Recovery for Abducted Women**

The Women’s Federation undertakes the critical responsibility of “representing and safeguarding women’s rights and interests, promoting gender equality and women’s all-around development as its basic functions.” The Women’s Federation has always played an irreplaceable role in the resettlement, psychotherapy, and employment skills training of abducted women after being rescued and has been making continuous efforts.

#### *Resettlement*

First, the resettlement work of the rescued women and children - allowing the victims to return to society is the initial step for the victims. Under the guarantee of this primary function, it is also crucial to ensure that the place plays the role of “shelter” and adheres to the “people-oriented” concept. However, it should be noted that arranging all kinds of interviews and observations without the consent of the resettled persons is contrary to the “protection” function, and it does no good to the female involved in the “Xiaohuamei” incident when she was repeatedly disturbed by the media after being rescued.

#### *Medical Attention*

Second, the beatings and sexual assaults suffered by women during their abduction and trafficking make it difficult for them to regain their life and psychological state even if rescued. One of the most obvious consequences is severely damaging their physical and mental health. For example, after a girl named Cao Xiaojin in Sichuan was trafficked by human traffickers, she was beaten, sexually assaulted, and even drugged (2). By the time she was rescued, she had suffered severe mental illness and brain damage for seventeen years. Although her physical condition has

dramatically improved after the warm companionship of the family and the active treatment in the hospital, her life has been entirely uncontrollable, and the mental disorder has been carried out all year round. She locked herself in a hut with no contact with outsiders for years (2). After being abducted and trafficked, many women have suffered the misfortune of not having the right to control their own bodies, such as being forced to engage in pornography or giving birth multiple times in a short period. For women who have suffered such misfortune, it is almost inevitable that they will fall into intermittent panic, persistent confusion, and even depression after being rescued. After 17 years of suffering, Cao Xiaoqin was rescued fortunately and was able to receive treatment in the hospital, but still, she could not fully recover, leaving a lifelong regret. However, many more abducted women and children cannot receive related follow-up treatment services after being rescued for various reasons. Their physical disease can only continue or worsen, and the mental pain cannot be relieved, leaving permanent damage. In this case, the social organization headed by the Women's Federation can act as a bridge between the client and medical institutions and psychological counseling institutions: properly arrange for the clients to go to local medical institutions and psychological counseling institutions for post-rescue recovery work; use professional talents to provide clients with psychological counseling and treatment; better help abducted women and children recover quickly from both physical and mental health levels, rebuild trust and confidence; and use scientific counseling methods to help them get back on the right track of life. In this way, they can continue to integrate into society as soon as possible. However, it cannot be ignored that one of the challenges faced by social organizations in providing psychological and physical therapy is limited human and financial resources, and the costs involved in the recovery work mentioned above will be considerable. Moreover, the docking and resettlement work with the affiliated institutions also requires enormous manpower and material resources to support, and these challenges still need better solutions and social coordination.

### *Career Support*

In addition to the resettlement mentioned above, work, and physical and mental treatment, another essential function of the Women's Federation is skills training and employment support, providing necessary skills and support for the reintegration of trafficked women and children into society. If the victim cannot have the corresponding ability to create social value, it will be difficult to find his place in society after being solved. Unfortunately, these women and children lived a life of isolation during being abducted and trafficked. Even if they engaged in particular labor, they were all begging for life or taking hard work. These experiences led them to live in the most primitive living environment for a long time. The "survival" ability that should be possessed is quite lacking. After being rescued, life seems to have spanned centuries overnight for such groups. In the face of a "new" society, if there is no buffer and preparation, integrating into today's society will become a considerable return to common obstacles to life. Based on this situation, special skills training is necessary. No matter the group, method, cycle of skills training, or the post-training positions victims take, it must be a set of distinctive systems. Suppose such victim groups do not receive appropriate skills training, even after being rescued. In that case, they will not be able to leave their homes to integrate into society and create value. If things go on like this, it will be long-term pain for the family harmony in the later period and the personal life of the person involved. Just imagine that if an average person stays at home for a long time and does not integrate into society, conflicts will arise over time, not to mention these victims? Social organizations should give full play to their leading role in this link: introducing professional service organizations, actively using the available social welfare, and encouraging relevant social organizations, enterprises, institutions, and individuals to provide financial and technical, and post-employment support for those rescued victims of trafficking. Similarly, employment training also requires enormous human, material, and financial resources. Social and commercial organizations engaged in employment training must closely coordinate resources and work together to maximize the value of limited resources.

## Expanding WF's Role with Legal Assistance

In the decades since its establishment, the Women's Federation has made continuous progress on the social issue of human trafficking, breaking through many obstacles and challenges. The colonial power endowed by the resources and scale of the Women's Federation today is more potent than a few decades ago, and the responsibilities it should undertake are also greater. In addition to those mentioned above, three significant resettlement issues, physical and mental treatment, and employment skills training, according to Article 4 in Chapter 1 of the "All-China Women's Federation Constitution" (hereinafter referred to as the "Constitution")<sup>1</sup>, the Women's Federation should continue to shine in two other aspects: providing legal aid and assisting the government, legal institutions, and public security departments in fighting crime (3).

The Women's Federation is on the front line of contact with the victims of abducted women, holding a lot of information. Therefore, in addition to the most direct help such as health care, psychological counseling, skills training, and employment support, legal improvement and legal aid assistance are also provided by social organizations. Its purpose is to combine the current criminal situation of human trafficking and actual work needs, adhere to the basic principles of anti-trafficking under the rule of law, assist in the research, formulation, and revision of relevant laws, regulations, and policies, and provide legal, regulatory and policy support for deepening anti-trafficking work. Specific work implementations start from the following aspects.

First, social organizations can organize "offline" and "online" training and education activities to enhance trafficked victims' legal awareness and awareness of rights protection so that legal aid agencies can provide legal assistance to eligible victims of trafficking. Efforts to improve education awareness include the All China Women's Federation conducting training in Central China's Hunan Province to educate more Chinese women "to spot and prevent trafficking and abductions" (7). Second, through first-hand contact with victims of trafficking, social organizations can get first-hand information on the trafficking process and timely feedback to relevant government departments so that they can revise relevant laws and regulations according to the latest modus operandi and rescue cases. This will further improve the anti-trafficking legal system, perfecting applicable laws and regulations for rescued victims of trafficking and effectively protecting their legitimate rights and interests. Third, since most cases of trafficking occur in women and children, to prevent problems before they occur, social organizations should actively cooperate with government departments to formulate and improve family education laws, clarify the guardianship responsibility of minors' parents, raise the safety awareness of minor children against abduction and sexual assault, and give play to the positive role of family education in the safe growth of children. Finally, the children's guardianship system must also be improved and promoted. Many parents or other guardians do not understand guardianship responsibilities well enough to perform this responsibility effectively. In this case, it is essential to strengthening legal publicity, guardianship supervision, and guidance to minors' parents or other guardians so that it can maximize the supervision and urge them to fulfill their guardianship responsibilities to provide a healthy family environment for the growth of minors.

## Recommendations for WF's Cooperation with State Security

Finally, we should implement the responsibility of the state's guardianship, improve the procedures for revoking the guardian's qualifications, and avoid causing irreparable harm to minor due to the guardian's neglect of the

<sup>1</sup> Article 4: Safeguarding the legality of women and children rights, listen to women's opinions, reflect women's demands, make relevant suggestions to state organs at all levels, assist relevant departments or units in investigating and dealing with violations of women's and children's rights, and provide assistance to women and children who have been violated.

custody, the performance of guardianship duties, or the loss of guardianship ability or the guardian's infringement. The strategy should be to "cut the grass" to "remove the roots." Preventing the tragedy of abduction and trafficking from happening at the source is also where the Women's Federation can exert its strength. Given the social phenomenon of women and children being abducted and trafficked, it is not difficult to find that most cases occur in areas and families with backward educational levels. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen publicity, education, and training (3).

### Innovative use of publicity

In this regard, the Women's Federation should combine the current situation of different regions and groups of people, conduct in-depth investigation and research, and formulate targeted and innovative publicity and education methods. The Women's Federation should vigorously carry out anti-trafficking safety education and legal propaganda, effectively enhance the people's anti-trafficking safety awareness and legal concept, improve self-protection ability, achieve the effect of warning criminals, and create "no abduction" and "dare not abduct" for all people to fight against trafficking social atmosphere. It should use as many methods and methods as possible to strengthen the implementation of anti-trafficking safety education and training and the practicality of theoretical research to improve the workability and level of anti-trafficking. In today's Internet age, there is no doubt that the Women's Federation can make full use of the Internet and new innovative forms of publicity and carry out multi-channel, multi-form, and full-coverage publicity and education methods. Especially in some areas where the crime of abduction and trafficking of women and children is rampant, it is essential to carry out publicity and education work, which can not only enhance the safety awareness and self-protection ability of the local people but also shock the mountain and give the criminals a warning and deterrence. Secondly, traditional news media are still the dominant media in relatively backward border areas and remote areas, and these backward areas are likely to be high crime areas. Women's Federation must cooperate with relevant departments to produce anti-trafficking and sexual assault prevention radio and television programs and Public service advertisements, increase the frequency of anti-trafficking programs and prioritize them to be broadcast in prime time, and continuously improve the dissemination and influence of anti-trafficking and sexual assault prevention publicity and education. At the same time, it should carry out publicity activities and advertising slogans in densely populated places, such as various transportation hubs, entertainment venues, hotels, and restaurants.

### Training in Legal Knowledge

In addition to publicity, education, and training for the relative population is also necessary. The first groups of people who need training are the parents, guardians, left-behind children, disabled people, etc. All groups need to receive education and training directly to improve their safety awareness, legal concept, and awareness of anti-trafficking and sexual assault prevention and child protection ability. Another more critical group of trainees is the staff of the Women's Federation at all levels. According to chapter 7, Article 37 of the Articles of Association <sup>2</sup>, Women's federations at all levels should become an essential base for training and transporting female cadre (3). In this way, it is possible to improve the rescue ability and level of staff by strengthening the education and training of rescue workers for victims of trafficking. At the same time, the staff of the Women's Federation should also strengthen their study of laws and policies, science and culture, and women's work, constantly improve their overall quality and practical workability, and enhance their ability to work with the masses, which will also be a crucial work content in the future.

<sup>2</sup> Article 37: Women's federations at all levels should become an essential base for training and transporting female cadres. The training of cadres should be strengthened, the training work should be emphasized, and the construction of training bases should be strengthened.

## International Cooperation for Large Scale Trafficking

As the times change, the crime's severity increases daily, and so is human trafficking. Today, human trafficking is no longer confined to the country. Therefore, to effectively prevent and crack down on transnational and cross-border human trafficking crimes, strengthening the international cooperation with other countries and regions, joining social organizations, and taking an active part in international discussions on combating trafficking are of paramount importance to Article 9 of Chapter 1 of the Constitution<sup>3</sup> (3). For example, social organizations can actively cooperate with and participate in various international anti-trafficking cooperation mechanisms such as the Mekong Sub-regional Cooperation Anti-Trafficking Process and promote the establishment of an international anti-trafficking cooperation mechanism under the "Belt and Road" framework. At the same time, Chinese social organizations can jointly carry out anti-trafficking education, training, and publicity with various international organizations to grasp the development trend and countermeasures of international human trafficking crimes and demonstrate the effectiveness of my country's anti-trafficking work.

## Recommendations for Government Intervention

The above-mentioned social organizations headed by the Women's Federation still have a long way to go in rescuing and preventing human trafficking. While the social organizations are doing their best, the guarantee measures that the state needs to provide are also indispensable. In short, the government needs to provide guarantees from the following three aspects: efficient organization and coordination, safe allocation of funds, and a sound supervision system.

### Organization of State Departments

First, eradicating human trafficking is by no means an undertaking that can be accomplished independently by a single department or institution. It is a process that requires the cooperation of all relevant departments. The appropriate state departments must organize, lead and coordinate to formulate sound policies and policies. Measures and carry out phased and final assessments. At the same time, starting from the local government, a coordination mechanism should be established step by step to organize, coordinate, supervise and inspect the on-site implementation of anti-trafficking work. Coordination between social organizations and these sectors also needs to be strongly supported. Second, the proper arrangement and safe distribution of relevant funds require the full support of relevant departments in various regions.

### Expanding Funding Channels

At the same time, to reduce the pressure on funds in the different areas, local government leaders are also required to broaden the scope of anti-trafficking funds. Raising channels actively encourage enterprises, institutions, charities, and individuals to donate, and even in some extreme areas, strive for international aid channels to support the development of anti-trafficking public welfare projects. According to Article 41 of Chapter 8 of the "Articles of

<sup>3</sup> Article 9: Actively develop friendly exchanges with women and women's organizations from all over the world to deepen understanding, enhance friendship, promote cooperation, and actively participate in the "Belt to Road" construction.



Association”<sup>4</sup> (3). The Women’s Federation also has significant responsibilities that cannot be shielded away from operating funds and property.

## Strengthened Supervision System

Finally, to ensure the most effective and best results, a strict assessment and supervision system is essential. All regions, especially those with severe human trafficking, must incorporate anti-trafficking work into the regular routine examination (12). The relevant departments and institutions need to be included in the target management and assessment system of the departments and institutions, and the assessment results also need to be included. Regular feedback to the competent department is essential for the comprehensive assessment and evaluation of relevant leadership teams and leading cadres. Departments and regions with effective anti-trafficking measures, innovative work, remarkable results, and groups and individuals with advanced anti-trafficking work will be commended and rewarded by relevant state regulations (13). On the contrary, for areas with severe crimes of human trafficking and ineffective prevention and control, and departments that fail to perform relevant responsibilities, they must report criticism, investigate the duties of appropriate personnel by the law and discipline, and implement the principle of accountability.

Combating the crime of abduction and trafficking of women and children to the greatest extent requires the joint efforts of the relevant state enforcement departments and social organizations headed by the Women’s Federation. Cutting off the source of the crime of human trafficking, providing the rescued population with necessary services, and supporting their reintegration into society will be the goal of the efforts of all sectors of society. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve this goal. Aside from the lack of proper implementation of the responsibilities of relevant government functional departments, social organizations also have many problems in fulfilling their obligations. The article “Research on Role” shows that the relevant social organizations still have issues such as the need to improve management services, publicity and education, solid administration, lack of social supervision and management, and generally low social participation (3). For social organizations, speeding up the promulgation and implementation of the Basic Law of Social Assistance, implementing laws and regulations to regulate responsibilities, and promoting cooperation between the government and social organizations can positively solve the above problems.

## Model Trafficking Plans in Action

Fortunately, since the public release of China’s Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2030) (hereinafter referred to as the Action Plan), some key provinces and cities have formulated targeted and detailed implementations in the region (5). Among them, Yunnan Province, as a severe area of human trafficking, bears the brunt of promulgating the “Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Yunnan Province’s Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2021-2030)” (hereinafter referred to as “Detailed Rules-Yunnan”) (6).

In “Detailed Rules-Yunnan,” the responsibilities and obligations that social organizations should undertake in Yunnan Province are formulated in detail from the aspects of the organization, crime prevention, combat and rescue work, rescue and resettlement and rehabilitation work, publicity, education and training, and foreign cooperation so that anti-trafficking work in Yunnan Province can be carried out in detail and can achieve timely landing effect (6).

In another severe area - Gansu Province, the government also issued the “Guidelines for the Implementation of the Action Plan for Anti-Trafficking in Persons in Gansu Province” (hereinafter referred to as “Detailed Rules - Gansu”) (7). “Detailed Rules - Gansu” clearly expounds on the responsibilities and contents of the women’s federation system. First, as the Women’s Federation, it is necessary to formulate an implementation plan for the department and the unit to implement the “Action Plan” promptly; secondly, the Women’s Federation must identify a liaison officer

<sup>4</sup> Article 41: Women’s federations at all levels may accept donations of funds and other items from domestic and foreign persons and organizations who are enthusiastic about the cause of women and children by the law, and manage them by the law

as a joint meeting member of the office who is also in charge of human trafficking in Gansu Province. Third, the Women's Federation should be responsible for creating a social atmosphere that respects women and protects girls, adheres to the fundamental national policy of equality between men and women, eliminates the backward concept of valuing sons over women and men are superior to women and improves girls' education level. Fourth, the Women's Federation should focus on caring for left-behind women and Children, strengthen care services for particular groups such as left-behind women and children and children in distress, and effectively leverage the advantageous roles of organizations or personnel such as child supervisors, child directors, women's federation executive committee members, volunteer women, youth rights protection posts, vice-principals for the rule of law, and the "Five Elders" to improve the service platforms of "Children's Home" and "Children's Heart Harbor." Finally, the Women's Federation must vigorously and actively carry out anti-trafficking safety education and legal propaganda, effectively enhance the people's anti-trafficking safety awareness and legal concept and improve self-protection capabilities. At the same time, it must strengthen the education, training, and theoretical research of anti-trafficking personnel and enhance the implementation capacity of the Action Plan. It can be seen from this that since the state announced the "Action Plan," all regions of the country, especially some regions with severe human trafficking, have actively responded to the call of the state and formulated effective implementation measures with local characteristics according to the features of the area, to ensure the final implementation of the Action Plan (7).

## Summary

Indeed, Rome is not built in one day. Anti-trafficking work is a complex and colossal task involving three aspects of efforts: judicial, financial, and educational efforts. It requires long-term and persistent efforts to completely eradicate it. In the "Xiaohuamei" incident, we see that more of the government's late-stage punitive measures from a judicial perspective can bring immediate results, but such acts are just palliatives. The root cause is the combination of wealth inequality and poor education. In China's vast territory, the uneven wealth of the regions has led to the outflow of high-quality women. The men left behind in the backward areas undoubtedly have the problem of marriage and inheritance. This is one of the causes; the second is that the education in the backward regions is relatively backward or lacks education. Then, facing the most fundamental problems of human nature, such as marriage and inheritance, it is very likely that the sense of crisis will make the men in this area not aware that it is illegal to solve the problem through human trafficking! Solving the above two issues requires long-term persistence and step-by-step advancement of relevant departments. Only in this way can we achieve the final victory. In terms of education and publicity, the role and importance of social organizations appear particularly important!

Life is beautiful, and we hope every woman can bravely pursue the life she wants and no longer worry about basic personal safety. Even if there is a long way to go, from the country to the masses, it is still necessary to pay close attention to and crack down on human trafficking and work together at all levels to achieve one goal - no abduction in the world, so that every citizen is protected by law and enjoys freedom and equal rights!

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