

# *The Influences of Three Obediences on Trafficked Women's Unwillingness to Return to Their Original Families*

Ziyin Luo<sup>1,a,\*</sup>, Liangchan Lin<sup>2,b</sup>, Yingzi Fan<sup>3,c</sup>, and Yilang Wang<sup>4,d</sup>

<sup>1</sup>IB department, Shanghai Qibao Dwight High School, Shanghai, 201101, China

<sup>2</sup>IB department, Shanghai Pinghe School, Shanghai, 201206, China

<sup>3</sup>IB department, Shanghai Weiyu School, Shanghai, 2000231, China

<sup>4</sup>Gaokao Department, No.1 Middle School Affiliated to Central China Normal University, Wuhan, 430223, China

a.lisa1292006815@outlook.com, b.katrinallc@126.com, c.florafan0724@yeah.net,  
d.Wangyilang32405@gmail.com

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** This essay investigates how Three Obediences have influenced trafficked women and forced them to stay at their husband's homes after being abducted. It cites interview records and shows that Women who did not want to return were trapped in the Three Obedience mindset, which fundamentally cut off their idea of returning.

**Keywords:** Woman, Culture, Patriarchy

## 1. Introduction

From the perspective of Sociology and Feminism in China, as the steady-growing economy pushes the development in education, the improvement in the gender inequality problem has elevated women's rights in a stubborn power framework. Both dominant representation and recessive influences of gender inequality are still the inheritance of patriarchal culture. In the status where the rural-urban disparity continues to grow, many trafficked women were surprisingly unwilling to return to their original families. We believe that one of the dregs of the Chinese traditional culture—the three obediences, played an important role.

The concept of "three obediences" originally appeared in the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial and the Rites of Zhou, which codified the protocol for an elegant and refined culture of Chinese civilization [1,2]. The protocol was initially meant to define the various parts of a harmonious society and was not intended as a rule book. Nevertheless, they are the theoretical form of the ancient Chinese ritual and music culture. It has the most authoritative record and interpretation of ritual law and propriety and has the most profound influence on the ritual system in the past dynasties.

The three obediences mean that a woman is obligated not to act on her initiatives and must submissively obey or follow her father at home before getting married, her husband after getting married, and her sons after her husband's death. These unreasonable but stick-to-convention hidden rules have led Chinese women to be materialized as production machines or servants for their husbands. Consequently, baby girls were being relentlessly killed or abandoned, which made the man-to-women ratio even more imbalanced and further exacerbated the trafficking of leftover women. As the continuity of the clan was truly important for the Chinese families, more women were engaged

in this war of robbing, and some of them, unfortunately, got trafficked to strange men's homes. Women forced to marry strangers must obey their husbands submissively according to the three obediences. Once they reluctantly got used to the new life, especially when they had a baby boy as their child, these thoughts, which act like robust vines, would cling more tightly to their minds. Meanwhile, the idea of returning home for themselves had long been forgotten.

Psychological analysis of trafficked women and the report that In China, buying trafficked women and children gets less jail time than buying illegal plants or animals explained why trafficked women refused to be helped and escaped from their husbands [2]. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, those trafficked women who are rejected to be helped are probably influenced by the oppression of violence, holding fluky psychology and fantasy for future living, or out of sympathy for buyers. Furthermore, Guo Rui, a South China Morning Post reporter, points out that Chinese law's indulgence of perpetrators and lack of support for victims may also play a role in trafficked women's refusal to seek help [3].

## 2. Literature Review

Psychological compromise under violence is possible. However, to achieve complete control over the victims, criminals often resort to coercion and violence, beating, maltreating, and threatening women. This is how some women succumb to being pushed to be obedient.

The psychological compromise of ignorance and fantasy is reflected in the fact that some women are aware of being fooled along the way and even have evident knowledge of being trafficked. However, they think that "a good horse will not turn back" since they come out; they will go to the end. Some refused to believe that they were heading for disaster, still thought stiffly that the future might be lucky, and clung to a small amount of hope that did not exist.

The numbness of unbalanced mutual reward: Some women developed a kind of sympathy and rewarded the buyer with their bodies when they learned that the "buyer" had paid money to buy themselves. It is another numbness on the victim's part that she does not want to recognize that marriage is based on love and should not be a buyer-seller relationship.

Psychological analysis of trafficked women claimed three aspects of the possible psychological activity of those abducted and sold women willing to Accompany the buyers and accept them as their husbands.

Penalties for buyers should be examined, and it was essential to strengthen law enforcement, educate and raise awareness, and support victims and their children, Feng said. -----From Risk factors for mental disorders in women survivors of human trafficking: a historical cohort study.

## 3. Methodology

The collection of interviews named The Oral History of the Trafficked Women to Marriage is used as the primary source, published by Social Sciences Academic Press [4]. Twenty-two women accepted one-on-one interviews, who were either trafficked by others or cheated by their relatives and friends to get married in the places where they were taken. Skilful interviewers from the press record the interviews, and the questions are well-designed. Thus, the answers collected are more accurate. Also, the interviewers can have emotional connections with the interviewees, which means that the interviewees will be more likely to express their fundamental ideas. Furthermore, the interviewees' expressions and tones are recorded through the interviews, which can also be used as evidence for the research.

Moreover, using interviews can get more information than questionnaires because questionnaires usually only include a few short questions or multiple choices. However, during the interviews, interviewers have long conversations with interviewees, and the interviewers can choose not to stop

until they get helpful answers. Consequently, the data collectors can get enough information they want through interviews.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Submission to Father

Submission to their father causes women to have a weak sense of protecting autonomous rights as they obey all the directions given by the elderly in their families. So, they would not feel violated when being trafficked to a place, and thus they would be willing to stay. Submission to the father also teaches women that they must automatically sacrifice for men in their families. Long being affected by such a mindset, married trafficked women become willing to stay, thinking they need to sacrifice for their husbands.

Submission to the father requires daughters to listen to all the orders given by their parents, especially their fathers. Neixun, women's education asks women to "listen to parents at home, and if there is no parental order, one should not do anything else. Accept your parents' orders and dare not to disobey them" [5]. Experience of pure obedience trains women to be introverted, timid and used to depend on others. They grow up as "adaptive objects" which can quickly receive directions given by others by changing themselves rather than fighting back or developing their own opinions [5]. Nowadays, village girls can decide more on minor affairs, but the parents still control the significant affairs that affect the girls' destinies, like schooling and marriages.

### 4.2. Shown in the Interview with FGY:

"Q: Can you tell me what your education level is?

A: Only up to junior high school.

Q: Graduated from junior high school?

A: Only until the second grade.

Q: Why didn't you continue to read it, then?

A: When I was studying, it was just my mom and dad doing work, and my younger sister was also studying, so there was no one to do it.

Q: So, they let you do the work?

A: Yes. My older sisters were married, too."

Following her parents' direction, FGY left school without any rejections though she had not even graduated from junior high. Submission to the father works smoothly because rejecting orders from the elderlies and generating contradicting independent thoughts are viewed as shameful for a woman in rural area since ancient times. Neixun, women's education says, "once go against parents' instructions, hardly could virtue of chastity and quietness be cultivated," and it is also "unfilial to your parents" [5]. To avoid extreme titles like this and being criticized by all, submission is the only choice. So, growing up, women never understood that they could have the right to make decisions and determine their destinies. Lacking the basic sense of human rights and autonomous rights turns women into "inferior people" who can be easily manipulated by men. Village women in poor areas are heavily affected by submission to father; this eventually cause them to feel not being violated when trafficked or tricked.

### 4.3. Shown in the Interview with DSH:

"Q: Did you feel cheated by them at the time?

A: .....

Q: They said it so well; after seeing it for yourself, did you think it is not the same thing? Did you ever think about going back?

A: I thought I already came out and would not go back.

Q: So, you also wanted to go back?

A: Not used to it (the new place)."

The silence of DSH after the interviewer asks whether she feels cheated reveals she is directly avoiding this question and does feel cheated before. However, she still stays because she does not think cheating to determine her destiny violates her right. So, she believed there was no problem for her to stay. This proves that the lack of autonomous rights caused by submission to the father leads to the unwillingness of trafficked women to return home.

Also, submission to the father requires daughters to take care and sacrifice for their fathers and automatically build up their minds to sacrifice for men in the family. Throughout history, women who make sacrifices for men have been praised and used as role models to inspire others to do the same. For example, in Shi Ji, Bian Que Cang Gong collected biographies (historical records), a widely known story about how Ying Su sacrificed herself to save her lawbreaking father was used to teach girls for centuries [6]. Although her father was cursed that daughters were useless and could not help him in pivotal times like this, Ying Su still risked her life and submitted a statement saying she could be enslaved to offset her father's mistake toward the emperor [5]. Historical stories like this have been used to teach girls since they were young. Poor village girls lack proper education at school and believe that giving up their chances and resources for men in their families is a must, not a choice.

#### 4.4. Shown in the Interview with LDL:

"Q: You have two brothers. Do they go to school?

A: Yes, up to grade five or six. The conditions in the mountains are not good, and the middle school is too far away from us. It was tough to go back and forth, so they stopped attending school.

Q: What about the three sisters?

A: Most miniature sister study up to the third grade, and the other two sisters have not been to school. We asked them to go to school, but they did not want to. So what else could we do?

Q: You did not go to school either?

A: I wanted to go to school, but my father is working outside; I have to take care of the little brother and little sister and cook at home; I am the biggest child, it is also hectic in the field, my parents asked me not to go to school anymore; there is much work at home, so I did not go to school anymore. I know there are advantages to going to school and no disadvantages. Thinking about it, the elderly at home also did not tell me to go to school. Even if they told me to, I could not bear to see the elderly having a rough time."

LDL's two brothers chose not to go to school anymore simply because it was too far away. Comparatively, her other two little sisters chose not to go to school for no direct reasons mentioned in the interview. The most direct factor behind this would be that they believed they needed to save resources for their family and better choose not to go to school, which is hidden in the interview by saying the adults asked them to go to school, but they did not want to. Noticing the importance of studying, they would not choose to give up schooling alone without the family education about sacrificing for men and their families. The rhetorical question for clearing the suspicions and avoiding telling the reasons point out the cruel fact behind it.

Daughters also learned from their mothers that women are always responsible for the housework and are told to sacrifice their own time to take care of the families in submission to the father. LDL is a clear example of this; the biggest sister like her is always asked to hold up the responsibilities for domestic work and look after the more minor children. In other scenarios, older brothers would still go to school with the younger sisters left behind to do housework for them and the family. Submission

to father tells daughters to sacrifice for men and the family, which makes them believe doing housework is their responsibility. LDL tells her interview that she "could not bear to see the elderlies having a rough time". She feels guilty. After all, she takes them doing hard work because she ignores the work, which shows that daughters believe sacrificing their resources and time to take care of the family is their responsibility. This shows the long-lasting impacts of submission on fathers on village girls. After being trafficked, they would still be willing to stay, thinking they must sacrifice for their families after marrying.

#### 4.5. Submission to Husband

The idea of submission to the husband also influences the mindsets and behaviours of the trafficked women. The women with submission to husbands in their minds unconditionally listen to their husbands and their husbands' families, obey their orders, and endure oppression from them, which consequently makes the trafficked women give up the idea of running away or even not have the consciousness of leaving.

First, according to Neixun, women education, women are required to "Growing up and getting married, you should observe the ancient etiquette. The parents have the order not to go against your husband", which is a transformation from submission to father to submission to husband [5]. Before marriage, women must listen to their father's orders. After marriage, fathers would ask their daughters to obey the orders of their husbands' families, which matches with so-called "ancient etiquette" in China, and that is how submission to the trafficked women's husbands begins during the marriage. Thus, just as they did in their original families, they receive and adapt the instructions and requirements from their husbands and husbands' families. For example, giving birth to children for her husband and taking care of and teaching children are included in those requirements:

Q: Other people in the village say that people in your village usually have two or three children. Why didn't you have more children?

A: We do not want to care for too many children, so one is enough.

Q: Is it challenging for you to take on too many children?

A: It is pretty hard.

Q: Because the family's economic conditions are not so good, raising a child is expensive?

A: They did not let me have more children because we already had a boy.

Q: Is this the case throughout the village?

A: If you have a girl, they will let you have more children.

Through the dialogue picked from the interview collection, the woman does not express her wishes, such as whether she wants more than one child or only one child. She only told the interviewer what "they" wanted and required. From this point, it is clear how what has been proposed in Nyu Xiao Er Yu's works. Nyu Xiao Er Yu requires women "No matter how big the matter is, you should not act on your own. You should ask for your parents-in-law's instructions and discuss them with your husband. They are the god for you. You should not deceive your god. How do you settle down if the god is gone?" [7]. Hence, instead of having the independent consciousness to make her own decisions, she did whatever her husband's family told her to do: she stopped giving birth to one more child after her husband's family told her to stop and take care of her child only by herself. With this kind of obedience consciousness in mind, the trafficked women obey the rules and orders set by the husband's family, including their requirements of staying, even though she feels homesick:

Q: Do you already feel like you fit in? Do you still feel like a stranger? Do you have the feeling of being a stranger?

A: Yes. I have this feeling.

Q: Is it strong?

A: Strong, also not strong. My husband treats me well, but I am still homesick. I told them that I was homesick. They said, "What are you thinking about? Your mom and dad are dead." I am not used to going home. I am not used to having a lovely family. I can only stay in this family whether life is good or not.

Secondly, Neixun, women's education, asks women to "After drinking the nuptial cup during the wedding; you have made a life-long promise. You should always be respectful and careful, keeping loyal to your husband forever" [5]. The women are taught to be loyal to their husbands until their death, which means that they can only marry one man throughout their lives, as is proposed in Nyu Fan Jie Lu, the section on dying to preserve one's chastity, "Loyal ministers only serve one country, and the paragon of chastity only marries one man. Thus, once women get married, they should not change all their lives. Men can remarry, but women cannot" [6,7]. Behind this is the women's bondage due to the Chastity view. The patriarchal society of China uses the chastity view to control women's minds: they deify virginity and belittle sex, making women feel ashamed about having sex. It is beneficial for the husbands to maintain dignity and authority in the future family because if their wives are virgins before marriage and lack sex experience, they will not be despised by their wives for their poor sexual capacity. Also, the chastity view makes the women feel that they cannot remarry because they believe they lose all values after losing their chastity, and that is why the trafficked women stay where they were taken.

"A: I have never seen him before. Later, the person who introduced him to me (said) that it was fine. The person said he was not that old but only three or four years older. I think it is okay to be three or four years older. However, later I found out he is much older than me.

Q: Exactly how much older?

A: Eight or nine years older. (According to the later introduction of the village women cadres, he is 13 years older than her)

Q: So, no one told you?

A: No one. I did not see his ID card until it fell out of his pocket after we married. I said, "Why are you so much older than me and lying to me?"

He said, "what should I do? Then why don't you go back." I said, "how is that possible? I have married you, so how can I go back!"

As shown in the interview above, even though the interviewee's husband is not what she thought before, she still stays because she thinks she has married him, so "how can she go back". The chastity view, included in the submission to her husband, binds her thoughts and makes her give up the idea of going back.

#### 4.6. Submission to Son

Even if the idea of obeying the father fades out of a woman's life with her marriage and her husband dies, the woman still needs to follow the rule of obeying the man, which is "obeying the son after the death of the husband". Even if a woman loses her husband without a son or if her son has already passed away, she is still required to submit to the other male throughout the family. According to Wen Shi Mu Xun, "Widow who has no children is appropriate to follow the law formulated by her nephew.[8]" From father to husband to son, the precepts that women need to submit to men are preserved, step by step, deepening patriarchal rule and manacles. Regardless of their qualifications and contributions to the patriarchal system, women remain of being outsiders and will exist as subordinate to men.

The original direct translation of this sentence meant that women were required to obey their sons after the death of their husbands. In practice, this commandment is often less critical because it is influenced by the idea that the younger should show filial respect to the elder. However, major decisions in a family are still handed over to the son rather than the mother. At the same time, this

commandment imposed on women also prescribes the accusation that women should raise offspring in society, thus equating the value of women with enslaved people. For example, in the mother way of the Commandments for women, there are six qualities that women should have as mothers: good behaviour, kindness, justice, integrity, strictness, and knowing how to distinguish between right and wrong. The mother, if she had these qualities, was not celebrated as an individual of good virtue but was promoted for the benefit she could bring to her son.

Until modern times, maternity was still regarded as one of a woman's most important duties, and it greatly affected women who lacked modern education, which suggested removing gender stereotypes.

Q: Does your son think you are from Yunnan and feel unhappy?

A: Yes, why not, but he will not say it.

Q: Would your child feel embarrassed to think his mother is from Yunnan?

A: Yes, absolutely.

This is a dialogue between one of the abducted women and her son. Her son not only refused to express pity for her mother's life or realize that what her mother went through was injustice but claimed to be humiliated and embarrassed. On the other hand, his mother was accustomed to such reactions, or she consented to the idea that her own identity should be shameful for her son.

Q: Why don't they let you take care of the children?

A: They are afraid I will not return after leaving.

Q: So, do you want to leave here forever?

A: I think of it once in a while at first.

Q: Why?

A: At first, I thought my husband was too old.

Q: Don't you want to leave now?

A: After I returned, I figured I could not leave my child. My child also needs me. Now I must settle down and live a life. "

Q: Do you ever regret coming to Shandong?

A: I think I do not regret it. However, I do regret it in the first two years. Now that I think of the children, how can I regret it? The children are all already seventeen and eighteen!

Q: How long did you stay at home this time?

A: Seven to eight months.

Q: Did he urge you to come back?

A: He picked me up.

Q: Did you not want to come back?

A: I do not want to come back. I will not return if he does not come to pick me up. At that time, the child was eight months old. He told me to go back when he stayed at home for half a month. Then he brought the child back since I did not return.

Q: Are you staying alone at your mother's house?

A: Well, after eight months. I did not want to return then.

Q: Why?

A: I cannot bear to part with my hometown. Who does not praise their hometown, and who does not feel connected to their hometown? Honestly speaking, I grew up here. No matter how bad it is, I still feel that this place is good.

Q: What will you do if he does not come to pick you up? Do you want to find another man?

A: I did not expect to get married. If I do not come back, I will live here like this.

Q: Have you been living with your parents?

A: I have been living at home like this. I planned to stay home long enough this time as I returned to my mother's house. After half a month, he was afraid that I would not come back, so he asked me

to come back and complained about how eating made me so fat and took my child home. In fact, in my view, I did not eat well. In this way, he also asked me to leave, told me to go home several times, and said I would go in a while again and again. He insisted that I should leave. I rely on you; if you want to go, you should go. I will have enough time here. I cannot leave until having enough time. So, he took the child with him. After leaving for a day or two, he returned to Chengdu, Sichuan, and told me that after taking the child away, the child yarned for his mother and thought of his mother every day, so I should come home. I said you go. I will come back whenever I want. I will come back. Children cannot live without their parents. He told me to leave, but I did not. So, he took the child away again. I think I will come back after I have had enough at home and will not leave after I have had enough. Later, I thought that the child had no grandmother and no grandfather. What would happen if he did not care about the child? What will happen when the child grows up, understands what mum is, and learns he does not have one? What will happen if the child is not spoiled? I think I had better come back. Besides, seeing another child reminds me of my child when he sees someone else's child. All day long, the child was rent-free in my mind. As I cannot stop thinking about my kid, I send a telegram to ask him to come and pick me up.

Q: So, if you do not have a child or do not care about your child, you will not come back?

A: I think I will not.

All these women made great sacrifices for their children. Although they were dissatisfied with their current lives, they all decided to settle for life because of the birth of their children. Trafficked women are willing to stay around in their buyer's family, which is a place of torment for their child, even if they understand that their child has been used by her husband to keep her and that they once had a chance to flee from him. They decided that the child had become one of her responsibilities and that they needed to serve their kids.

Influenced by the concept that "women should maintain their obedience to their son", women seem to lose their self-consciousness after giving birth to children and shift their focus to children's growth. Moreover, such thoughts about trafficked women's bodies are dangerous, especially for their life and their children on the binding, and children also became in-laws to threats and forced her to leave.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research investigates how three obediences have influenced the mindsets and behaviours of trafficked women and pushed them to stay after being abducted. First, trafficked women from poor village areas have deeply rooted mindsets of submission to father, husband, and son, which automatically causes them to sacrifice for men, unconditionally listen to men, etc. All these thoughts trapped the women, so they gave up their chances or were unwilling to run away.

This research provides a new perspective on helping trafficked women. Once one more reason why those women do not have the idea of leaving (three obediences in mind) is known, the researchers may find solutions to this aspect and save more trafficked women from the dilemma.

However, the research limitation might be the relatively small sample size. There are only 22 interviewees accepting interviews in the source. In addition, the result might not be that representative because millions of women are abducted in China annually. Thus, in the future, the research will be done with greater sample size.

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