Bride Trafficking from Vietnam to China: The Critique of Socialist Feminism

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Bride trafficking is a phenomenon where women are sold for forced marriage. This phenomenon occurs in many Vietnamese women brought to China without their consent to marry. It has been claimed that there are 'supply and demand' factors in encouraging the development of bride trafficking from Vietnam to China, such as an imbalanced sex ratio in China and a lack of education. This research analyses the occurrence of bride trafficking from Vietnam to China through the lens of gender and politics. Using the narrative analysis method and literature study through the perspective of socialist feminism, this research found that bride trafficking from Vietnam to China embodies double oppression towards Vietnamese women. It results from the intersection between two oppressive structures: patriarchy and capitalism. Consequently, a practice of sexual economy is developed in the form of bride trafficking. This research also found that globalization significantly affects bride trafficking from Vietnam to China. Globalization paves the way for this phenomenon to happen. Thus, this article offers a perspective favouring women in analyzing transnational phenomena in international relations.

Keywords: *bride trafficking; globalization; patriarchy; capitalism; sexual objectification*

Introduction

This article discusses how bride trafficking from Vietnam to China develops in the social, economic structure and cultural structures that oppress women together at a time. The case from Vietnam to China is chosen, given its massive occurrence. Media reported that so many trafficked Vietnamese brides inhabit some villages in China that those villages are called "Vietnamese Bride Village" (Liu et al., 2021). Vietnam's Department of General Police recorded 2,700 cases involving 6000 victims from 2011-2017 (Duong, 2018). Wang (2015), as cited in Liu et al. (2021), mentioned that at least 100,000 Vietnamese women are trafficked as brides in China. However, the number of victims and cases can be higher, given its clandestine nature.

I shall clarify first the term of bride trafficking discussed here. The term refers to buying and selling women to be made as wives without the women's consent. What distinguishes bride trafficking from other types of women trafficking is that, in this case, victims are specifically trafficked to be married, that is, for the production of human sexual needs fulfilment. Moreover, bride trafficking from Vietnam to China is highly related to the demographic situation in China, which will be discussed later in this section. This differs from the cases where

Vietnamese women voluntarily migrate to China to look for a husband or get better economic conditions (Liu et al., 2021). Although these women come to China to get married, they can still be the victim of bride trafficking when forced to marry a man they do not want, to make money for someone else. The term used here also differs from the cultural practice of wife-pulling from the H'mong ethnicity in Vietnam (CNA, 2019).

Bride trafficking is an act of commodifying women's bodies and sexuality under capitalism. The capitalist structure encourages efforts to accumulate profit and wealth through any means, including making women's bodies and sexuality parts of the exchange system. Furthermore, women are not only an object of an economic system but also become the very object of gender-based oppression and inequality in power relations. Women, in this respect, experience oppression from two intertwined structures at a time, namely capitalism and patriarchy. The phenomenon of bride trafficking, or any women trafficking in general, is often seen as a matter of economic inequality and low level of education in rural areas. This way of understanding does not side with women and puts women's experience of oppression as the central issue. It ignores the voice and position of women. Therefore, it is important to analyze this phenomenon through the lens of feminism as a political theory.

Human trafficking from Vietnam to China increased in the late 1970s after China implemented its Reform and Opening Up policy (Stöckl et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Specifically, bride trafficking from Vietnam to China started in the 1990s (Duong et al., 2007). Women who worked in carrying and transporting items from Vietnam to markets in China, as the result of the formation of markets along the countries' border, later on, became the victims of human trafficking, mostly as brides (Duong et al., 2007).

Vietnamese society expects women to marry, live with their husbands, and contribute financially to their parents (Duong et al., 2007). This expectation often led to parents 'selling' their daughter to be married to another man. On the other hand, China has an unbalanced ratio between males and females in their demography, which resulted in a 'deficit' of women and 'inflation in the market' of Chinese brides (Duong et al., 2007; Lhomme et al., 2021). This condition made 'buying' brides from Vietnam a cheaper option. In addition, economic development in China has made women in rural areas migrate to urban areas (Liu et al., 2021). Thus, rural parents often resort to paid matchmaking services where these brokers sell Vietnamese women without their consent (Liu et al., 2021). Besides that, poverty and limited economic opportunities have encouraged Vietnamese women to migrate to China for jobs. Unfortunately, they were deceived and became victims of bride trafficking (Liu et al., 20221).

Xia et al. (2020) and Liu et al. (2021) conducted research using cases recorded in the Chinese judicial system, respectively, with a time frame of 2014-2016. They found 120 and 536 victims, respectively, of Vietnamese women trafficked as brides. Liu et al. (2021, p. 324) also identify the tricks used to deceive

these victims.

The consequences of bride trafficking borne by the survivors are not simple. Stöckl et al. (2017) found that 43 of 51 survivors, as young as 14, experienced high levels of sexual violence. Many survivors suffer from mental disturbance after being trafficked, with 27 survivors possibly suffering from depression, anxiety, and PTSD, and 2 survivors have attempted suicide (Stöckl et al., 2017). 10 survivors said they became pregnant after being trafficked, and another 7 survivors were pregnant during the interview (Stöckl et al., 2017).

This article fills in the gap by analyzing bride trafficking from Vietnam to China as a feature of the capitalist patriarchy structure. Furthermore, this research contributes to the study of International Relations, especially Global South, by analyzing how the intertwining between capitalism and patriarchy works crossing state borders and impacts women in Global South countries.

Two questions are addressed here: (1) How is women's position in the social, economic, and cultural structure of Vietnamese society? (2) How do these two structures contribute to the development of bride trafficking from Vietnam to China? Two theoretical frameworks are used to answer the questions. First, socialist feminism argues that women's oppression is rooted in capitalist patriarchy—hence double oppression. Under this system, the class system and sexual hierarchy system work dependently and create a division of labour and society sexually, with women positioned as subordinate to men (Eisenstein, 1979). This social reality is formed through historical construction, the social practices of gender character acquisition—thus fluid and can change (Jaggar, 1983). Second, the feminization of survival refers to making a living, earning a profit, and securing government revenue that operates on the backs of women (Sassen, 2000). Sassen argues that this phenomenon is tightly related to economic globalization.

This research uses the method of narrative analysis, which is a method that uses narratives as the object of analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 2). Experiences told by the survivors in any form, such as investigation videos, interview videos, and journalism reports, are converted into transcripts. Then, these transcripts are coded using several categories relevant to the theoretical frameworks. The literature study method is also used in this research to contextualize the double oppression of Vietnamese women and the relationship between economic globalization with Vietnamese women.

Women's Position in Vietnamese Society

The patriarchal norm in Vietnamese society is sourced from Confucianism, which sees that woman, throughout her life, has to obey men (Frenier & Mancini, 1996; Pelzer, 1993; Werner, 2009; Rahm, 2019; Rydström, 2006; Wiegersma, 1998). Men are seen as kings in the family, and sons have been preferred over daughters (Khuat, 2016; Rahm, 2019). This preference shows male domination in society and becomes a burden for women as they are often blamed

for 'not being able to produce' sons (Khuat, 2016). Patriarchal norms are so firmed in Vietnamese society that Vietnam tradition regards women as inferior from birth (Frenier & Mancini, 1996).

Women's sexuality symbolized that their role is limited to their reproductive function, strictly defined as a mother carrying and rearing children (Rydström, 2006). Even when women are not regarded as 'birth machines,' they are seen as the care-taker of their husbands and the person beautiful to look at (B. T. K. Quy, 1996). Women are put as an object, as an actor without agency whose life is only destined to 'complement' men.

The French colonial government also held a role in the patriarchal system. The government schooled Vietnamese girls at school age to educate them about French nationality and cultural values (Lessard, 2002). The colonial government believed that the values of the French would be channelled to the next generation of Vietnam through their mother's nurturance (Lessard, 2002). This case also shows that patriarchy is an oppressive system that always benefits other oppressive systems—colonialism, in this case.

The Communist Revolution, an anti-colonialist movement in Vietnam, aimed to eradicate all forms of hierarchy in Vietnamese society, including gender hierarchy (Rahm, 2019). Women gained access to the public sphere, such as political institutions and important role in the anti-colonial struggle (Pelzer, 1993; Werner, 2009). However, such access did not automatically eliminate gender hierarchy in society, which will be discussed later.

The things mentioned above show that Vietnamese society is a patriarchal system. It is formed through political and ideological interpretations of biological differences between men and women (Eisenstein, 1979). Because women are seen as inferior, the social structure views women's natural roles as taboo and not supposed to be shown publicly. Rydström (2006) mentioned that in rural Vietnamese society, women's sexuality can only be practised in private or the family sphere. There is social control over every aspect of a woman—starting from her body, behaviour, and life choices.

Women's position in the Vietnamese culture created a political economy system that is inherently oppressive against women, as they can hardly access factors of production safely. At the family level, Confucianism teaches that women are not entitled to family inheritance and property (Rahm, 2019). This condition has at least two implications for women. It preserved the preference for sons in society and limited women's access to critical and needed resources to maintain their livelihood independently. At the societal level, women do not get the share of land distribution and the rights of control over land in the village (Wiegersma, 1998). After the end of the Chinese occupation, the regulation of property ownership still limited women's rights to property ownership (Wiegersma, 1998). Nowadays, the marginalization of Vietnamese women in the economic system still exists. The forms even changed, adjusting to the capitalist

industry structure today.

The end of the feudal family and society structure, followed by the introduction of the wage labour system under capitalism, granted women the opportunity to earn independent income (Wiegersma, 1998). Nevertheless, in the long term, capitalism and market liberalization in Vietnam do not improve women's position in the social structure. B. T. K. Quy (1996) even said that the so-called development put women at the bottom position of society and made women subject to layers of exploitation.

Under capitalism, women are exploited and bear double burdens from work at home and in society (Hong, 2016; Yarr, 1996). This is because women are still regarded to naturally belong in the private and domestic sphere (Hong, 2016; Werner, 2009). On the other hand, public workplaces are not sensitive to women's rights and needs because of the emphasis on productivity, even in those workplaces led by women (B. T. K. Quy, 1996; Yarr, 1996). Legislations that mandate women's rights do not consider significantly changing the condition. Some feminists view that those legislations, instead of protecting women in the workplace, isolate women further, put them in low-wage labour, and make companies regard employing women as too costly (Khuat, 2016; Yarr, 1996).

According to Barry (1996), the competitive climate of the economic system encourages companies not to hire women or to pay women low wages to preserve the companies' business. Newly industrialized countries that depend on exports generally pay women under the minimum wage to the extent that it is insufficient to meet life's ends (Barry, 1996). Meanwhile, in the informal sector, women do not receive social protection and security (Barry, 1996). However, B. T. K. Quy (1996) found that women are accounted for 51.7% of labour in rural areas, with almost all of those women working in hard jobs with low wages. Thus, in the formal and informal sectors, women face discrimination and oppression because of patriarchy. It can be understood that industrialization and economic development have gendered impacts (see Barry, 1996).

Women's low wages can also be attributed to their low level of education (Hong, 2016; Khuat, 2016; B. T. K. Quy, 1996). This can be caused by Confucianist teachings that allow only men to have formal education while women are sufficed to be educated at home with Four Virtues and Three Obediences (Wiegersma, 1998). Their double responsibilities can also cause women's limited access to education during the two Vietnam anti-colonial wars. Women were responsible for contributing to wars while fulfilling their responsibility in the production sphere of society (B. T. K. Quy, 1996).

In this respect, the state has been the point of inequality in power relations between women and men in Vietnam. MacKinnon (1983) states that the state regards sexuality as gendered and gender as sexualized. Interestingly, most of, if not all of them, the oppression by the government is done through channels that claim to promote gender equality. The important

factor here is the Women's Union, a part of the Communist Party of Vietnam that specifically works in the field of women empowerment. The Union can be credited with passing progressive legal instruments on the matter (Hoang, 2020). Nevertheless, the Women's Union, at the same time, also strengthens the patriarchal oppression in society.

The Women's Union gathered and mobilized all women in Vietnam to participate in the war against French colonialism and any nation-building efforts (Hoang, 2020). Their importance in achieving the state's independence is because women are believed to embody the finest traditions of the ethnic Vietnamese nation and are regarded as the symbol for awakening national consciousness and patriotism (Werner, 2009). Thus, women's responsibility expanded in the domestic sphere and the war against colonialism. According to Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Communist Party, gender equality is "not just an equal division of labour in the family, but included the right and responsibility of women to participate fully in national affairs" (Werner, 2009). This shows political institutions' control over women's roles.

After independence, the Women's Union still holds a significant position regulating Vietnamese women's role. It defines women's role and responsibility limited motherhood—taking care of the household, giving birth, and childrearing (Rydström, 2016). Motherhood responsibilities in Vietnam are seen as demands rather than life choices that women can make (Rydström, 2016). Thus, the state strengthens the gender role construction that inherently oppresses women and puts women as men's subordinate.

Marriage and Family Law 2000 states that the Women's Union is responsible for "educating and mobilizing… every citizen to build cultural families" (Rydström, 2016). The Union then campaigned for "women actively study, creatively work, and nurture happy families" as women's duty and roles, as well as other campaigns such as "Happy Family," "Cultured Family," and "Building Families of Five Withouts and Three Cleans" (Hoang, 2020; Rydström, 2016). It sends a message that policies encouraging family development are encouraged by an institution focused on women's empowerment. In addition, the Union also has an education program to support mothers with "breeding exemplary families" that do not suffer from poverty, law violation, and social evils (Rydström, 2016). Various pamphlets, billboards, courses, and recreational activities in Vietnam taught women about family planning, household management, and the emotional nurturance of husbands and children (Rydström, 2016). All of these campaigns and programs show how the Women's Union forms the understanding that in order to be good citizens, Vietnamese women have to fulfil the responsibility of housewives, no other than that.

In addition, the Women's Union had opposed policies that were aimed at protecting women, that is the idea of a shelter project for victims of domestic violence, because it is deemed to be inappropriate

for the Vietnamese society (Hardinghaus, 2009 in Pistor & L. T. Quy, 2014). This is ironic because the Union is supposed to be the one who can understand and side with women, especially the survivors of domestic violence. However, if we refer to the Marriage and Family Law mentioned above, the Union's duty only revolves around the matter of family development by women. In Vietnam, efforts to overcome and address discrimination against women are often regarded as "inappropriate" or "unsuitable" for Vietnamese society (Pistor & L. T. Quy, 2014). The state does not acknowledge that the sexualized construction of gender and the gendered perception of sexuality put women prone to violence.

The 1946 Constitution stated that "women enjoy full and equal rights with men under the Constitution in every respect," as stated in the next versions of the Constitution—1959, 1980, 1992, and 2013 (Hoang, 2020). However, discrimination against women can still be found in the legislation. The Gender Equality Law narrows the focus to social and family life. It puts other important issues, such as unequal wages, unequal economic opportunities, and equality in policy-making, as minors (Pistor & L. T. Quy, 2014). Lastly, the 1960 Labour Law stated that the retirement age for women is 55 while for men is 60, on the grounds that women need to take care of the household (Pistor & L. T. Quy, 2014). Indirectly, this means that women are allowed to work in public and at home only after domestic matters are handled. The Law indicates that women are not supposed to do work in public for too long, given their domestic responsibilities.

Vietnamese Women Under Capitalist Patriarchy

The discussion above indicates that Vietnamese women bear a double-oppression burden. This double oppression is sourced from patriarchal norms in Vietnamese culture and the capitalist economy system that is restrictive and exploitative against women. These two oppressive sources work in line and intertwine with each other, forming a power system that oppresses women in a specific way. This system is the capitalist patriarchy system (Eisenstein, 1979).

Socialist feminism underlines the importance of analyzing a power structure based on capital ownership status. For them, women are oppressed not only because of their gender identity but also because of their class status. In the context of Vietnam, we have seen how the society has a gender hierarchy. This social order then integrates with a new power structure, namely capitalism. Vietnamese women who possess low-class status thus face double oppression due to not having power in both structures. The oppression faced by Vietnamese women occurs in the hierarchical sexual relations AND exploitation of her labour (Eisenstein, 1979; emphasis added). This means that oppression against Vietnamese women is class-biased.

Some women benefit from capitalist patriarchy. In this case, women who hold high positions in the Union also benefit from the double oppression structure (Hoang,

2020). This is what socialist feminism calls the alienation of women: women, who are supposed to be connected under their gender identity, become alienated and opposed (Jaggar, 1983).

The state, thus, is a patriarchal actor—or, as MacKinnon (1983) said, "the state is male." The legislation and policy made by the Vietnam government are manifestations of the male perspective of women. As the only legitimate actor holding the highest power in the social order, the state using the male perspective in viewing and treating women indirectly legitimizes the perspective in society. The patriarchal perception of women then led to an illusion of women. This illusion lies in women's sexuality, representing women's identity as human beings. Women's sexuality defines women's identity, role, and standard behaviour.

This illusion can be called sexual objectification, defined as separating one's sexual part or sexual function from the person, then regarded as the only identity representing the person (Bartky, 1990). When a woman is sexually objectified, she is understood as a mere body that exists for others' pleasure (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). As Jaggar (1983) has said, human beings have three needs: food and shelter needs, sexual needs, and emotional nurturance. In this respect, the woman's body becomes the fulfilment instrument for sexual needs.

Capitalist Patriarchy in Bride Trafficking

Bride trafficking in Vietnam occurs because of another dimension of sexual objectification against women. The intersection of patriarchy and capitalism found in bride trafficking is as follows. This sexual objectification, as a feature of patriarchy, became the foundation of the political economy in Vietnam. Women's sexuality holds the illusion of goods that can be exchanged. Socialist feminism views that the social order created by patriarchy is needed for capitalism to work and that the division of labour created by capitalism is needed by patriarchy (Eisenstein, 1979; Jaggar, 1983). Thus, bride trafficking from Vietnam to China manifests sexual objectification against women that occurs on a massive scale and as a means to accumulate capital.

How does the political economy system work in bride trafficking? Jaggar (1983) wrote that as long as human needs are fulfilled by using the works of others, the system formed to fulfil the needs is a production system. Furthermore, if the fulfilling means are done through distribution and exchange, fulfilling the human needs system is an economic system (Jaggar, 1983). We can find these two features in bride trafficking. In addition, this practice is an economic practice because there is an act of commodification that always involves purchasing someone (Overall, 1992 in Connor, 2019).

More specifically, bride trafficking in Vietnam is a form of sexual economy, an economic practice that uses women's sexuality as a commodity. Only in the system of the sexual economy, a woman's body becomes a commodity that can be treated freely by the consumer (O'Connor, 2019).

This happens in bride trafficking, where the women survivor loses their control over their reproductive work. Davidson (1998) in O'Connor (2019) called this economic practice "an institution that allows the use of power over someone's body." In bride trafficking, women are exploited because another party controls and benefits from women's work (Jaggar, 1983), as commonly found in a capitalist economy.

Bride trafficking is systematic violence against women. In assessing the occurrence of violence in contracts in the sexual market, O'Connor (2019) asked, "Is the contract between the buyer and women in prostitution an exchange in a normal market, where the seller can maintain clear boundaries between their body and themselves?" In bride trafficking, the victims cannot maintain clear boundaries between their bodies and who they are. Their bodies, with feminine sexual parts, became the only judgement of who they are. An economic system—a system to maintain human survival—works using a sexuality model based on the subordination and degradation of women (O'Connor, 2019). Thus, we can conclude that bride trafficking is an oppressive social practice against women.

Bride Trafficking from Vietnam to China as Globalization Phenomenon

The Impact of Globalization on Women in Rural Vietnam

Under the reformation of Doi Moi in 1986, Vietnam began adopting a liberal economic system (Turley, 2019). Vietnam changed its economic system from a centralized one into "a socialist-oriented market economy" with the "emergence of private and market sector, decentralization of management, and expansion of economic relations with the non-socialist world" (Turley, 2019). Although this reform is argued to be successful in improving the Vietnamese people's condition, the said improvement does not happen to Vietnamese women. Social and economic changes brought about by globalization put women in rural Vietnam in the most disadvantaged condition (Fahey, 2002; Packard, 2006).

Economic globalization is a transferring process of "wealth, raw materials, commodities, and other assets" from new developing countries to developed and rich countries (Kara, 2017). In Vietnam, commodities produced in rural areas—such as rice and coffee—cannot compete in the domestic market due to imports of similar commodities at lower prices (Le et al., 2016). Big domestic companies also monopolized the market, which led the Vietnam agricultural farmers to difficulty obtaining profit and incentives (Le et al., 2016). Consequently, Vietnamese people in rural areas are hindered from undergoing economic improvement and growth.

The lack of development in rural Vietnam increases the burden already borne by women in rural areas (Fahey, 2002; Packard, 2006). Initially oppressed by patriarchy, they now experience another social injustice and burden because of poverty and lack of capital ownership. Globalization becomes the catalyst that worsen oppression against women in rural Vietnam.

Under poverty, it is natural for someone to look for a job. Unfortunately, women in rural Vietnam have limited job opportunities, in contrast to their urban counterparts, due to discrimination in the social rule that does not allow them to work in the public sphere (Fahey, 2002). It is still common to find gender inequality due to patriarchy and Confucianist culture in rural Vietnam. Women in rural Vietnam are assigned to motherhood and domestic roles, such as "maintaining the human race" and managing the household (Rydström, 2006). Furthermore, oppression and discrimination caused them to lack experience and education, thus obstructing them from accessing jobs and safe, productive spaces (Fahey, 2002; Tran, 2013).

There are two specific implications of economic globalization towards women in rural Vietnam. First, they are deceived using the promise of a job, only to be trafficked afterwards. Survivors of bride trafficking, with limited economic conditions and low status, are offered jobs with high wages in the city or China (Hodal, 2017; Vaughan & Tran, 2018; Liu et al., 2021). Given their lack of capital and the discrimination they frequently face in finding jobs, they view those offers as opportunities that cannot be missed. Second, poverty and economic crisis due to globalization also drive the people around women survivors to look for easy ways to earn income, including by being a broker or an intermediary for brokers in trafficking women (CNA, 2019). Liu et al. (2021) found that most brokers, who trafficked Vietnamese women for forced marriage in China, have low levels and no education. This means they have difficulty earning income and obeying the standard imposed by capitalist industry. Their limited economic condition also encouraged the intermediaries to deceive and traffic women through promises of luxury goods (Hodal, 2017).

Survivors' Experiences

Giang: [The narrator mentioned that the kidnapper is someone she just met at the market]. That day, I was still at school. He then called me and told me there was an event at the market. He invited me to go with him to the market, so we hung out. When we left the market to go home, they took me straight to China. When I realised what was going on, I was already in China. They probably drugged me the day we met. When I realised that I was sold to China, I felt scared and uneasy because I had been deceived by the kidnappers. It would be difficult for me to return home. At the time I thought I would never see my home again. When I was there, they threatened to dissect me for my organs if I had refused to get married. Many people asked me to marry them and I just cried in response. They probably took my crying as a refusal for me to get married. So they let me be, I cried everyday. One day I met a guy from Vietnam and he rescued me. I cried so much that he sympathized with me. So he sold his motorbike to pay for the ransom. The whole thing was over after five days, including the trip to China and back again. When I was close to the Vietnamese border, I called my parents and said I needed money. So my parents brought the money and I was able to return home. Now here (at Pacific Links Foundation's Compassion House), I met another girl who survived the same ordeal and we always confide in each other. [...]

Linh: [The narrator mentioned that the kidnapper was someone she knew, a family friend]. That friend lived in Muong Khuong while I was studying at Lao Cai City High School. I knew him through a family's acquaintance. I knew nothing when they sneaked me across the border. I knew nothing until I arrived in some district and saw Chinese letters. It was then, that I realized I was trafficked. [...] I was beaten there like the others. [...] When I was sold, the trafficking ring in China, bought me for a family. They kept moving me around, and I never really knew where I was. Until they moved me to a particular house, and I was sold to the family there. I became a wife there. They beat me up without any fear because I am not Chinese. I was beaten all the time because I couldn't speak Chinese. I had to be completely obedient when I was there. They told me that if I give birth to at least two children, they would return me to Vietnam. If you are trafficked, of course, you will be raped. Probably everyone was raped. [...] When I returned, many people believed that I wanted to go in the first place. But they should know that I was forced against my will. [...] I did not go to school for a year because of that. [...]

Source: CNA (2019)

Ly San May: I was born and grew up in a village in the northern mountainous area of Vietnam. I survived human trafficking. I was sold to China in 2010. I returned home in 2014. […] The day I was tricked and sold to China, my friend tan and I went to have dental treatment. It was at a place 60 km from my village. We met a woman. The woman was accompanied by a man. She complimented me for having nice clothes. She was a stranger but I had a sense of trust in her. […] She enticed me by saying we could learn how to grow pineapples to sell. Where I'm from, pineapples can't be grown. Pineapples sell for a lot of money. I wanted to follow her to learn how to grow pineapples. We first went by motorbike, then we talked. I remember having to wade across a stream, and then crossing a short bridge. […] We had to wade another stream before getting into a car. After that, I fell asleep and wasn't aware of anything. When I woke up, Tan told me, "sister, we have been tricked and sold to China." I was so worried and felt uncertain. […] It was already dark when we reached a village. When I got there, I saw a thin, old man, about 60 years old. The woman told me to marry that man. […] Eventually we were able to sneak out and not have to stay in that house anymore. When we escaped, we met a Vietnamese Woman, […] I cried and told her I was tricked to come here. […] I asked the woman, "can your husband help to take us back to Vietnam?" She said, "we can take you home." So, we followed her. But then we were sold again. […] When the car arrived at the village, they took us to a house, closed the door and didn't let us out. Tan and I stayed there and cried all night. […] I stayed with them for about one month. They took me to Guangxi and a man came to buy me. They said I must marry that Tay (north Vietnamese ethnic group) man. If I refused, they wouldn't let me live. It took three nights and three days to get to that man's house in Hunan. He kept all the money. He just gave me foot but no money. The Chinese husband didn't hit me. He just treated me normally. […] (The video shows that she found a way to call the police after three years). I asked for help as I was tricked and sold in China. I wanted to go back to Vietnam. "Can you save me?" I asked. They said, "yes" and after a while they arrived. I thought I would be sent back to Vietnam but I was not. They sent me to prison. […] They said that even though I was tricked and sold, I had to go to jail since I had no ID card. I ended up staying in prison for more than five months. […]

Source: VICE Asia (2022)

Neng: The first time I went to China, I went to Bac Ha market with my uncle's daughter. They asked me if I wanted something to eat. I said yes. After eating, I fell unconscious and didn't wake up until 7 AM the next morning. They said my cousin went back to Lao Cai already. They had found me a husband. I said that I didn't want to marry him. Then they said, "what would you prefer? To get married to him or to be a whore?" So I agreed to be the old man's wife. [...] My Chinese husband was a farmer. He was 29 years old. I didn't like him because he was old.

Source: Radio Free Asia (2013)

Kiab: My brother is no longer a human being in my eyes, because he sold me, his own sister, to China.

Lang: It's mostly women who live in mountainous and isolated areas who are being trafficked across the border. Because there is no information for us. That's why we … are sold across the border, to the next-door country.

Source: AFP News Agency (2014)

Tien: I gave her all of my money and my ID card. She told me, "we're going to find work. You said you wanted to leave that village so I'm taking you." [Her cousin had promised to take her to the big cities in the south, but instead they headed north, to the capital Hanoi. They switched vehicles in the capital and Tien fell asleep. When she woke, she was in China, where her cousin abandoned her after selling her to a trafficking broker. Tien soon learned the broker had already matched her with a husband. She put up a fight, refusing to leave the broker's house for four months, but eventually gave in, having met a fellow Vietnamese who told her the only way to escape the country would be to learn Chinese – and that the best way to do so would be to marry. So she let her broker find her a new match.] (Source: Duong, 2018)

*Sentences inside the brackets are written by the respective author

Source: Duong (2018)

Cẩm: […living in Sapa, an impoverished rural district in Vietnam's mountainous north-west… She met Long on Facebook after he messaged her one day, out of the blue. … Instead, she had a friend request and message from his younger brother Binh, asking if she was in Sapa. "I'm coming up there and don't really know my way around, are you free to meet up?" the message read. They'd never met before, but she arranged for him to come and pick her up. Long's brother bought a friend as well, and they stopped to collect Cẩm's best friend, too. The four sat down at a café and, as the boys orders beers for everyone,… All Cẩm remembers next is getting sandwiched between the two boys on to a motorbike, feeling so dizzy she could barely keep her eyes open. It was the bouncing that finally woke her up: they were hurtling down a lone dirt road in a thick forest. A street sign in Chinese character came into view, and the bike stopped. Panicking, she dug into her pockets for her mobile phone and started screaming as fast as she could to her sister that she'd been trafficked, she was somewhere on the border with China. An older man emerged from the trees and grabbed the phone. Then he put a knife to Cẩm's throat. "You're already in China – you can't go home now," he snarled. "I hope you're ready to get married, because that's what you're going to be." Cẩm was in the process of being sold to a H'mong couple at a hotel overlooking a river, when she realised the river was the Vietnamese border and the buildings the skyline of Lào Cai. Screaming that she demanded to go home, Cẩm was suddenly protected by a Chinese-Vietnamese couple, who gave her their mobile to phone home and helped Phượng arrange a boat to rescue her daughter the next morning.] The woman was so kind. She was H'mong, too, and had been sold herself to the Chinese man, so she understood my situation. […] And now I think my 'boyfriend' was just luring girls like me on Facebook into relationships, only for his brother to traffic over the border.

*Sentences inside the brackets are written by the respective author

Source: Hodal (2017)

Double Oppression in Bride Trafficking from Vietnam to China

Narrations told by survivors in the previous section have been coded based on six categories. These categories are aspects considered can describe survivors' experiences regarding the two theoretical frameworks of this research.

	Relations with abductor	Tricks used by abductor	Survivor's motive	Migration to China	Survivor's place of origin	Treatment and remarks to the survivor
Giang	New acquaintance	Going to an event	Coming to an event	-	-	Threats to marry
Linh	Family's acquaintance	-	-	-	Lao Cai	Physical violence; Emotional violence; Sexual violence
Neng	Cousin	Going to the market	-	-	Lao Cai	Threats to marry; Sexual violence
Ly San	New acquaintance	Teaching to do business; Promise of rescue	Earning income; Intention of going home	Road; river; bridge	Village in northern mountainous Vietnam	Threats to marry
Kiab	Sibling	-	-	-	-	-
Lang	-	-	Implicitly stated deception	-	Mountainous and isolated area	-
Tien	Cousin	Promise of job	Looking for a job	Road	-	Threats to marry
Cẩm	New acquaintance	Going to the cafe	Merely hanging out	Road	Sapa	Threats to marry

(1) *Relations with the abductor.* Four survivors said they were persuaded, abducted, and trafficked by someone they already knew. Three of them are trafficked by their family members. Although this data does not statistically represent the reality, this data shows that the perpetrator of bride trafficking can be anyone, including one's family member.

(2) *Tricks used by the abductor.* All eight survivors received different tricks—no certain pattern was found. Nevertheless, using tricks shows a power relations gap between the abductor and the survivor. The abductors viewed the survivors as an object that could be used for profit, as the objects of capitalist patriarchy.

(3) *Survivor's motive.* All survivors have different motives, with no certain pattern found. However, it should be underlined that this motive aspect emphasizes that each survivor has agency and autonomy in making decisions. On the other hand, the perpetrators viewed them as subhuman, with no agency and autonomy.

(4) *Migration to China.* Only three survivors explained the way they were taken to China. They all were taken by road crossing the border between Vietnam and China. This accessibility results from an agreement between the two countries regarding economic globalization.

(5) *Survivor's place of origin.* Two survivors said they are from "isolated" and "mountainous" rural Vietnam. The other three explicitly said that they are from Lao Cai and Sapa. According to the Vietnam Ministry of Industry and Trade website, Lao Cai is a wide province with rural and urban areas. Meanwhile, Sapa or Sa Pa is a part of Lao Cai province. This cannot be the base of the conclusion that bride trafficking survivors are always or a majority of them are from rural areas. However, given that the majority of survivors coming from rural areas in this research, it proves the thesis of this research that women in rural Vietnam are prone to be the victim of bride trafficking to China.

(6) *Treatment and remarks to the survivor.* All eight survivors in this research received various violence and threats. The use of violence and threats are manifestations of the power relations gap between perpetrators and survivors. It shows how the perpetrators had power over the survivors. Moreover, this power relations gap is formed through the illusion of women's sexuality, that is, the illusion that women are an object that can be treated in certain ways instead of a subject with autonomy.

From the above analysis, we can find double oppression in the case of bride trafficking from Vietnam to China. First, patriarchal oppression can be seen in sexual objectification against the women survivors. Whatever the justification or reason for men to 'buy' women as their wives, this act is a form of sexual objectification. Women's sexual identity is translated as women's life purpose to fulfil men's sexual needs. Sexual objectification against women also indicates fragile masculinity. Men's masculinity is so fragile that they need to 'own' women as their wives to protect and maintain their masculinity. No survivors above mentioned that bride trafficking occurred because of patriarchy, but some of them mentioned that they experienced this because they are women. One of the survivors even explicitly said that this practice often targets women.

Second, oppression by capitalism is manifested in the efforts to accumulate capital and profit through objectifying women. In cases where the perpetrators have low economic status, their marginal position in economic order drives them to do anything to earn income. One intermediary in abducting the victims mentioned that he had limited economic conditions, and he did this because he had been promised a luxury cell phone. This condition shows that women can be treated freely to obtain luxury goods, money, and other material things. Furthermore, as the coding table above only found two survivors deceived for economic purposes, it proves that the basic problem is not on women as survivors. Instead, the basic problem of bride trafficking is capitalist patriarchy that systematically objectifies women sexually and exploits women for profit.

Feminization of Survival through Bride Trafficking

Poverty and marginalization of certain society groups in Vietnam is a phenomenon called the counter-geography of globalization. This refers to various setbacks of globalization (Sassen, 2000). Counter-geography of globalization creates various circuits of income-making in developing countries that are not integrated with the conventional economic system, hence classified as shadow economy (Sassen, 2000).

Bride trafficking is a counter-geography of globalization because its emergence is related to two of three things found in globalization: the formation of the global market and the intensification of transnational or trans-local networks (Sassen, 2000). Markets started forming along the border of Vietnam and China in the early 1990s after the two countries normalized their relations (Duong et al., 2007; Xiaosong & Womack, 2000). As the markets formed, so did the transnational and trans-local network of the people. Duong et al. (2007) even mentioned that bide trafficking from Vietnam to China happened through this market.

Furthermore, economic globalization facilitated bride trafficking from Vietnam to China. Globalization encouraged the two countries to open their shared border. In 1991, Vietnam and China agreed to normalize

their relations and to begin cooperation in various fields, such as development, economic reformation, and open access for foreigners (Xiaosong & Womack, 2000). This is considered globalization because the boundaries between the two countries seemed to disappear. One of the significant changes from this normalization is the restoration of transportation infrastructure between Vietnam and China, such as national and province harbours, railways, roads, and river transportation (Xiaosong & Womack, 2000). This easy access, accompanied by weak security, made human smuggling possible (AFP News Agency, 2014; Hodal, 2017; Vaughan & Tran, 2018).

In addition, the opening up between Vietnam and China opened the information door to Vietnam people about job opportunities in China. China is a relatively richer country than Vietnam. Thus, a job opportunity in China is an interesting alternative, given the limited economic condition in rural Vietnam. Liu et al. (2021) and CNA (2019) found that some of the survivors of bride trafficking from Vietnam to China were initially promised job opportunities. They surely would only get interested if they had known that China is more developed than Vietnam.

One matter that should be noted is that these income-earning circuits operate on women's shoulders. The changes in economic institutions due to globalization do not work gender-neutral (Sassen, 2000). Without women's presence, society would not survive and make a profit. The government would not be able to 'secure' or minimalize its expenditure (Sassen, 2000). This economic practice works by monetizing the role women are assigned to by patriarchy. Reduction of women's agency and autonomy becomes an act that generates money.

The sexual economy works by treating women and their sexuality as commodities. Here, patriarchy and capitalism meet and strengthen each other. At the same time, accumulation of capital and wealth obtained by the oppressor encourages them to maintain the gender hierarchy order. Women, as the controlled group, face two different oppressions simultaneously. As a labour, a woman's sexuality is exploited for work considered women's 'nature.' As a commodity, women are sold like goods, inanimate goods with no agency.

Bride trafficking from Vietnam to China is a practice of sexual economy. The perpetrators earn money by trading women's sexuality as a symbol. The price for one woman ranges from ¥23,725 to ¥88,946 (Liu et al., 2021). Poverty and the underdevelopment of the economy made this 'business' a significant source of income. The setback of globalization resulted in human needs being fulfilled by using power over women's bodies. The government benefits from this practice as well. The people's capability to survive through this economic system, through bride trafficking, saves the government from spending money on helping their welfare. The survival of the Vietnam government as an institution, along with the individuals within it, depends on power instrumentalization over women's bodies.

The connection between globalization and the economic gap is found in research by Liu et al. (2021) and Xia et al. (2020). Both studies found that most perpetrators of bride trafficking from Vietnam to China are farmers. Xia et al. (2020) even used the term "peasant," which shows that those farmers have low economic status. This can be related to the fact that 70% of Vietnam's workforce worked in agriculture in the 1990s (Le, 2013), and now the formation of a global market has suppressed the chance for farmers to earn income and profit due to monopoly by big companies in agriculture (Le et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Bride trafficking from Vietnam to China is a form of double oppression against women. The oppression occurs as two oppressive structures meet and strengthen each other, namely patriarchy and capitalism, thus creating the capitalist patriarchy structure. Globalization then helps this oppressive structure in the development of bride trafficking from Vietnam to China. The subordination of women encouraged the commodification of women's sexuality as an alternative to life survival. Globalization also paves the way for bride trafficking through the ease of mobility and access between Vietnam and China.

This research proves that bride trafficking, and women trafficking in general, are not merely caused by poverty or lack of education. It is capitalist patriarchy that forces the objectification of women as a trade commodity. This research also proves that oppression against women is always class-biased. Regarding the economic aspects, women in the middle and lower classes are more prone to oppression than women in the upper class. Therefore, the fight against patriarchy to liberate and free women shall not use the one-fits-all approach because oppression against women works in the context of certain economic classes.

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