

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

China's missing children

By Lucy Hornby

Zhaoyuan was playing by the village store when he disappeared. His worried grandparents found the toddler's footprints in the path by the local temple. And then, nothing.

The villagers waded through ponds and probed wells. They combed through abandoned houses and sugar cane fields. After a few hours, they called the boy's father home from his factory job in the nearby city. He called the police.

That was January. Nearly a year later, there are no clues. Every morning before his factory shift begins, Zhaoyuan's father Chen Shengkuan searches preschools and parks in Zhanjiang, a small city in southern China. Squatting on the kerb he scans passing children.

"I can only relax if I've tired myself out with looking," says Mr Chen, a 28-year-old whose legs were paralyzed by childhood polio. "Every day at work, I am consumed with the thought of him. At night, I lie in bed thinking: 'How could he have disappeared from the village?'"

Zhaoyuan's family has come to the grim conclusion that he is one of the thousands of children trafficked in China. The trade ranges from the informal - babies given up by impoverished rural families - to criminal gangs who kidnap children and sell them. The police are treating Zhaoyuan's disappearance as a kidnapping.

In China, babies and toddlers, especially boys like Zhaoyuan, are in demand for adoption. Girls might be raised as future brides. Teenagers can be tricked into prostitution or work as unpaid laborers in low-margin industries like brickmaking.

For this year's Seasonal Appeal, the Financial Times is working in partnership with Stop The Traffik, an organization that raises awareness of this modern-day slave trade, whose victims the UN says have been found in 124 countries. Many cas-



es blur the lines, especially as vulnerable people cross borders to escape conflict or look for work. Forced labor - the main form of trafficking in central and east Asia - accounts for 40 per cent of all cases and, according to the International Labor Organization, generates USD150bn a year in private profits. In China as elsewhere, teenagers lured with the promise of work find themselves uncompensated and unable to escape.

"There are many cases where trafficking isn't necessarily a helpful term - or where it might not be the most accurate," says Bridget Anderson, research director at Oxford university's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society. "But kidnapping children in China is as clear as it could be."

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crumbling brick houses and lanes filled with weeds. Mr Chen visited as often as he could. Family photos show him beaming with pride at his son, who shares his long eyelashes and crooked grin.

The country's rapid economic development has been driven by the flood of young adults like Mr

Chen into growing cities. That creates an opening for kidnapers to nab toddlers like Zhaoyuan who play unsupervised in half-abandoned villages or city slums.

By the time Mr Chen joined the search for his son, Zhaoyuan was probably long gone. Traffickers typically pass a drugged, sleeping child to young women who board a long-distance bus. Hand-

ed off again at a train station, he could have been whisked anywhere on China's 120,000km rail network.

"Child abduction ties into more people leaving their hometowns for work," says Pi Yijun, a criminologist at the China University of Political Science and Law. "When there are more migrant workers there are more left-behind children."

Recent legal cases against traffickers in Mr Chen's province, Guangdong, have revealed that the price of a trafficked child ranges from Rmb10,000 (USD1,500) to Rmb100,000. Boys on average fetch twice the price of girls. Most stay within China but some end up in international adoptions - joining the millions of people forcibly moved across borders in what is a growing global trade.

China's child trafficking problem is inseparable

from its policy on population control. Kidnappers steal from regions where enforcement is lax - like the rural south-west - and sell into regions where tough enforcement of the one-child policy has left a shortage of heirs and brides. In some provinces, it is cheaper to buy a child than pay the fine for having a second or third. Rising infertility in cities creates more demand.

For years, harsh punishment for violating the one-child policy created a supply of healthy and available babies. Boys were quickly placed in China; over the course of two decades about 120,000 children, mostly girls, were adopted overseas. "The one-child policy put a price on healthy children, primarily male children, through creating a shortage. This manifested itself in two ways: through the international

China's missing children (continued)

adoption market, and likely in domestic cases of missing children," says Mei Fong, author of *One Child, the Story of China's Most Radical Experiment*.

But by the mid 2000s, the one-child policy had eased, more couples could afford fines and birth control was more reliable. Birth rates plummeted. Suddenly, there were fewer babies. International adoptions out of China peaked in 2005. In 2007, Beijing introduced eligibility restrictions on foreign adoptions, indicating there were fewer healthy infants available.

That year, a couple from eastern China opened a clothing store in Huizhou, a crowded southern factory town. They sent their 11-year-old daughter and five-year-old son to buy milk at the neighborhood shop. The girl stopped to play with a friend. When she looked up, her brother Xiaosong was gone.

"We stayed up all night making posters and plastering them around the neighborhood," says his mother, Xiong Shuifeng. They only attracted fraudsters. Within 10 days, Xiong and her husband Xiao Chaohua had paid out almost Rmb40,000 to callers claiming to know the boy's whereabouts. "When someone says they have your child, your heart leaps," she recalls. "You don't think straight."

Mr Xiao says that "pretty soon we realized there were lots of these cases". Unable to get help from police in Guangdong he covered a van with photographs of missing children and drove to Beijing to petition the government to act against the trade.

He got little satisfaction but he did find a sociologist named Yu Jianrong, who has turned kidnapping into a national issue by



Screenshot of the website Baobeihuijia.com

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posting photos of missing children on his blog.

In the years since Xiaosong vanished, trafficking stories have shocked China. A father searching for his missing son liberated hundreds of teenagers enslaved at brick kilns. A mother discovered her 11-year-old daughter had been sold into prostitution and was working in a brothel run by police. Doctors tricked parents into giving up newborns, family planning officers seized undocumented children and some orphanages bought babies for placement overseas.

Parents like Mr Xiao formed a network of volunteers who fan across the country looking for kidnapped children. "In the cities where we've been, there's a lot of publicity around this," Ms Xiong says. "But in the countryside, they still don't know

to guard against it."

The lost children strike a national chord. Decades of turmoil, migration and the one-child policy have fractured many Chinese families. The website, Baobeihuijia.com or "Baby Come Home", carries 15,000 listings and co-ordinates 20,000 volunteers. Postings include parents looking for children they were forced to give up long ago, adoptees hoping to find biological parents, and even missing adults. It is a tapestry of grief and hope.

In the face of public outrage, China revised its criminal law last month to punish people who buy children. Earlier laws forbidding the abandonment, stealing or selling of children were only enforced in the past few years, as the one-child policy eased and kidnapping cases grew more prominent.

Activists hope China's recent relaxation of the one-child policy will reduce kidnapping but they also fear it could reduce the number of babies available for adoption, thus creating an even stronger incentive to steal.

In 2009 - as fears over kidnapping became a public obsession - police set up a national anti-trafficking task force and a DNA database to match parents with missing children. The task force concentrates on retrieving babies or toddlers passed through trafficking rings. "Police are under

pressure to perform well in cracking cases, so it's unavoidable that they want to see a higher number of rescued children," Mr Pi says. "However, when people try to assess the abduction sit-

uation, they are reluctant to talk about it."

Reported trafficking cases and the number of children rescued have both climbed steeply since 2009. While the Baby Come Home site receives about 1,000 appeals for help a year - probably a good proxy for the number of kidnappings - official statistics for trafficked women and children have soared, from 6,513 in 2009 to 20,735 in 2013. Media reports say 13,000 women or children were rescued in 2014, and 24,000 in 2013. The police declined inter-

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through informal brokers is a long tradition in the countryside. Only a minority of trafficked children are kidnapped.

Southern Metropolis Daily, a Guangdong newspaper, analyzed 380 trafficking cases tried in provincial courts over the past two years. About two-thirds of the children had been sold by their birth parents or close relations, due to poverty, to avoid fines or because the parents were unmarried.

Some kidnapped children have been returned to their birth parents after traffickers were arrested. Other purchased children - who were not kidnapped - have been torn from the only families they have ever known and deposited, unclaimed, in orphanages.

Ms Xiong scoffs at the idea that parents might not realize they bought a stolen child, especially an older one like Xiaosong. "Adoptive parents might think it's an extra child that's been brokered. But no one would sell a boy!"

Xiaosong would be 14 now. He might not look much like the wide-eyed boy plastered on his father's van, wearing a sweater knitted by his mother. "I just want a glimpse of him, to know how he's doing," says Mr Xiao.

Mr Chen faces a similar agonizing wait. As a teenager, he joined the flow of migrants out of China's villages. He found work in Zhanjiang at a factory employing disabled workers. He also found love with Zeng Huarong. Their second son was born in October.

But having spent Rmb30,000 in his search for Zhaoyuan, Mr Chen worries that the arrival of his second son leaves him even fewer resources to find his first. "I'm happy, but I am also sad. One child is at home and the other missing. Sometimes I don't know what to do."

In the 11 months he has been gone, Zhaoyuan will have grown several inches; he may no longer understand his grandparents' Leizhou dialect, or remember his own name. The odds on Mr Chen noticing him outside a pre-school are small, but the alternative is giving up altogether.

"I believe I will find him, if I just keep looking," he says. "I hope he remembers me, remembers that I am his father."

Additional reporting by Luna Lin, Wan Li and Anna Hsieh

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Make this modern-day slavery a thing of the past

Lionel Barber*

Human trafficking is one of the great scourges of our time. The slavery trade is as ancient as it is barbaric. The fact that it has not been eradicated demands urgent action.

Tragically, as a series of reports that begins today in the Financial Times reveals, this appalling trade is booming in many parts of the world. The UN refugee agency estimates that a record 59.5m people have been forced to flee from their homes because of wars, conflict and persecution. The worldwide tally of migrants, both within countries and internationally, is in the hundreds of millions. All too often such people - and those they leave behind - are preyed upon by human traffickers.

Among the victims are kidnapped children snatched from near-deserted villages in China, as described in Lucy Hornby's powerful report, and Brazilian laborers forced by ranchers in the Amazon to work without wages and threatened with death if they complain.

Some cases of human trafficking have become notorious: mass forced labour in North Korea; slave ships that fish for seafood off the Thai coast; Iraqi women forced by Isis to become sex slaves. Others are rising dramatically. The number of Nigerian women entering Italy by sea - most of whom are trafficked to work as prostitutes - has quadrupled since 2014, as criminal gangs push them through perilous but relatively cheap routes carved out by refugees.

The International Labor Organization has es-

timated there are almost 21m victims of forced labor worldwide. But there are still not enough hard data on trafficking. More knowledge about this evil trade is needed if it is to be stopped. That is why the Financial Times is delighted to be working with Stop the Traffik, an organization that seeks to raise awareness about human trafficking, for this year's seasonal appeal.

Stop the Traffik's goal is to shine a light on the criminal underworld of human trafficking to bolster prevention efforts, rather than to support individual victims directly. In the coming days FT correspondents will report on this modern-day slavery and the efforts to make it a thing of the past.

*Editor of the Financial Times



The bubble tram atop the Canton Tower



An outdoor sculpture at the Redtory Art and Design Factory in Guangzhou



Buckets of live scorpions for sale at a market



Roasted goose from a food stall in Guangzhou

By Nicole Evatt

TRAVELOGUE

2 days in Guangzhou: A taste of Cantonese culture

THE southern Chinese city of Guangzhou offers all the hustle, bustle, culture and commerce of other major Asian metropolises minus the massive tourist crowds. But that could change as more travelers are lured to the modern port city by affordable flights and a 72-hour visa-free transit policy. Just a two-hour train ride from Hong Kong, Guangzhou is an easy weekend getaway or, in my case, a two-day stopover on my trip from Los Angeles to Malaysia.

COME HUNGRY

Often touted as the birthplace of dim sum, Guangzhou takes its Cantonese cuisine seriously. Head west to the historic Liwan district to stroll through the shop- and restaurant-lined Shangxiajiu Pedestrian Street. Pick up a traditional mooncake filled with lotus seed paste at Lianxiang Lou or try the delectable dim sum at the popular Guangzhou Restaurant.

Just off the main strip are side streets brimming with tasty food stalls and bustling markets selling fresh produce and traditional remedies such as live scorpions and dried snakes.

If like me, you're overwhelmed by Guangzhou's copious culinary choices, book a local guide though Eating Adven-

tures Food Tour, <http://www.eatingadventures.com/>, and tackle this foodie's paradise like a pro.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Canton Tower, <http://www.cantontower.com/en/>, is one of Guangzhou's top tourist attractions and for good reason. At 1,968 feet (600 meters), the modern monolith offers panoramic views of the cityscape and winding Pearl River. It also features rotating restaurants and, for thrill-seekers, a 100-foot (30-meter) free fall ride. I opted for the leisurely bubble tram and snapped the stunning sunset views while slowly rotating in a glass pod on a track atop the tower.

CULTURE CULTURE

Craving a creative boost? Head to the Tianhe District for the Redtory Art and Design Factory, <http://www.redtory.com.cn/english/redtory.php>. This sprawling canning factory-turned-sleepy artists' village boasts a bevy of contemporary galleries, exhibits and restau-



Canton Tower lit up at night

rants. Pick up a milk tea from one of the trendy cafes and peruse the small shops of artsy handicrafts, clothing, books and accessories. Redtory is si-

milar to Beijing's 798 Art Zone, but not yet quite as developed. Still, you can easily lose a few hours in this off-the-beaten path cultural compound.

SOUVENIR SHANGRI-LA

Cross off your entire shopping list with a visit to OneLink International Plaza, <http://www.onelinkplaza.com/en/main.php>. This massive wholesale mall off of Haizhu Square is a winding, multi-floor maze of toys, home goods, electronics, clothing and accessories. I spent three hours in this shopper's wonderland and barely scratched its surface.

GO UNDERGROUND

If you can overcome the language barrier, taxis are affordable and abundant in Guangzhou. But I'd recommend beating the traffic and hopping on the metro. The subway is clean, quiet, air-conditioned and cheap (single ride tokens are 32 cents and day passes are USD3.15). It's also easy to navigate with most maps, and the announcements are in English. Keep in mind the Chinese government blocks thousands of websites including Facebook and Google. You'll need a virtual private network, or VPN, if Google Maps is your go-to navigation tool. **AP**

Chinese solar-panel makers face possible renewal of EU tariffs

Jonathan Stearns

THE European Union threatened to renew tariffs on solar panels from China, potentially rekindling what was the EU's biggest trade dispute of its kind.

The European Commission said it would examine whether to re-impose two sets of duties introduced in December 2013 to counter alleged below-cost - or "dumped" - imports of solar panels from China and alleged Chinese subsidies. The opening of the renewable-energy trade probes coincides with a United Nations meeting in Paris aimed at striking a global agreement to curb fossil-fuel pollution, of which China is the biggest source, that is blamed for climate change.

The reviews "will determine whether the expiry of the measures would be likely to lead to a continuation or re-



currence" of dumping and subsidization and "a continuation or recurrence of injury to the union industry," the commission, the 28-nation EU's trade authority in

Brussels, said on Saturday in the Official Journal. The anti-dumping and anti-subsidy duties were due to expire on Dec. 7 and will now stay in place during the inquiries, which can last as long as 15 months.

The levies are tied to an EU-China agreement in late 2013 to curb European imports of Chinese solar panels after the commission concluded that they unfairly undercut producers in Europe such as Solarworld AG. The case covered EU imports valued at 21 billion euros (USD22.9 billion) in 2011 and involved high-level political consultations between Europe and China.

The two-year accord set a minimum price and a volume limit on European imports from China of solar panels. Chinese manufacturers that opted to take part in the pact are spared the EU anti-dum-

ping and anti-subsidy duties as high as 64.9 percent.

The deal has shown cracks during the past several months, when the commission revoked duty exemptions for several Chinese companies that it accused of having broken the terms of the price-floor arrangement. The commission has also been probing whether exporters in China evaded the levies by shipping solar panels to the EU via Taiwan and Malaysia and whether Chinese prices should be excluded from a benchmark that underpins the agreement.

The investigations into whether to renew the anti-dumping and anti-subsidy duties stem from Sept. 4 requests by EU ProSun, a group representing European solar-panel manufacturers, the commission said on Saturday.

The levies cover EU imports from China of crystalline silicon photovoltaic modules or panels and cells used in them. In a third probe opened on Saturday, the commission said it would review whether cells should continue to be subject to the duties. That inquiry will also last as long as 15 months. **Bloomberg**

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



FINDING BALD SPOTS ON YOUR CAT AND WHAT THEY COULD BE

The most common causes of bald spots I see in cats include:

- Parasites
- Ringworm infections
- Thyroid problems
- Allergies
- Stress
- Hereditary causes

Cat hair loss and bald spots may be caused by the natural seasonal shedding, but may also be caused by other diseases. Bald spots may be self inflicted, as the cat can lick and scratch its skin excessively due to different conditions. The cat bald spot diagnosis can be done by performing a few tests, but a few additional symptoms may also help detecting a possible medical condition.

EXTERNAL PARASITES

External parasites such as fleas or mites can lead to skin lesions and itchiness which can cause hair thinning and self inflicted bald spots.

In addition, if the cat is allergic to the parasites, the bald spots may also be caused by the irritation.

The parasites can be easily identified and treated and the hair should grow back as soon as the parasites are removed.

RINGWORM INFECTIONS

Ringworm is not a "worm" or parasitic

infection but a fungal infection that will cause bald spots in round like lesions. The hair loss is in the shape of a ring and you may also notice flaky, crusty skin.

The infection can be detected through a skin scraping or woods lamp test and can be treated with itraconazole or griseofulvin.

THYROID GLAND PROBLEMS

The thyroid gland produces the thyroid hormones; if these hormones are in excess or in deficit, the hair can fall out causing bald spots.

The cat can be affected by hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism, which can be detected through blood testing; there are several treatment options for thyroid gland problems in felines.

ALLERGIC REACTIONS

Allergies cause irritation and itchiness and this can lead to hair loss and often bald patches.

In addition to hair loss you may also notice frequent scratching, licking, crusty skin, bumps, blisters, hot spots or dermatitis.

The allergen may be in the cat's environment and should be detected, so it can be eliminated.

Allergies can be identified through testing; if the allergies are caused by food, several weeks or months of testing will be required.

STRESS FACTORS

A stressful environment or certain factors that cause stress in your pet can make it chew, lick and bite his fur, causing bald spots.

The stress factor can be a new pet or family member, a new owner or even the change of the cat's room.

CUSHING'S DISEASE

Cushing's disease is a condition caused by an excess of corticosteroids in the system. The disease will manifest through skin redness, acne and seborrhea. The seborrhea can make the hairs loose and the cat can easily pull the hair out, causing bald patches.

HEREDITARY CAUSES

Cat bald patches may be caused by a rare inherited condition that causes periodical hair loss. This condition doesn't require any treatment, as the hair will grow back in a few weeks.

Watch out for other possible causes of cat bald spots such as the administration of certain drugs or treatment (i.e. chemotherapy), pregnancy, leukemia, FIV or skin infections.

Hope this info helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan



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