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Job Mobility of Brothel-based Female Sex Workers in Current Northeast China: the process from xiagan

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Job mobility of Brothel-based Female Sex Workers in Current Northeast China: the process from *xiagan* worker (lay-offs) to sex worker

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Mar 18, 2004

Abstract

This paper describes the preliminary findings of an ethnological study on brothel based female sex-workers in Northeast China, where the economic situation is worse and there are more and more xiagang (lay-offs) female workers. The FSWs in such social-economic context have some unique characteristics comparing to those in other areas. The study focuses on FSWs' job search process from being laid off by the state-owned enterprises to entering sex work and different work experiences as state-owned workers before being laid off, waitress, massage girl, peddler and sex work, aim to better understand why they choose sex work as their job from a job mobility perspective. Data collected from community-based observation and interview, and coded under different topics. 3 red-light communities, 103 female sex workers were involved.

Key word and some phases:

xiagang nv gong ----- lay-off female worker

Brothel-based female sex worker ----- falang xiaojie

Job mobility

Guanxi ----- social network

Hukou ----- resident registration

Getihu ----- individual businessman

Danwei ----- work unit

Daiye ----- waiting for job

I. Literature Review

A. Situation of FSWs in Current China

1. Prosperous sex industry in China

China's commercial sex industry has exploded in the last 20 years and it was estimated that there could be up to three to four million sex workers working in Mainland China (Joint China Ministry of Health and UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in China, 1997; Kaufman, 2002). However, the definition of FSW is usually not clear and the estimation is still uncertain. According to the population-based probability survey in 2000, 6.4% men 18-60 years old have had sex with a FSW at least once during their lives. 1.62% men from 18-60 years old had sex with a FSW at least once in the latest 3 month (during the survey time from Aug1999 to Aug 2000) who had have sex with 1.97 FSWs average. The main clients of sex workers are middle class men (officials and businessmen) under 35 years old. Men with income in the highest 5% were 33 times as likely as those in the bottom 40% to have bought sex. (Pan, 2004). Based on the number of Clients and business situation of CSW in China[[ii](#)], the total number of females who provided sex services (sexual intercourse, oral sex, anal sex) is from 133,000 to 489,000 ($\alpha=0.05$). Assume that the number of FSW based on a widely definition (including those who provide other kind of services, such as masturbation or escort) is three times of narrowly defined FSW, there are about 400,000 to 150,000 FSWs in current China(Pan et al, 2003)[[iii](#)].

2. Typology of prostitution

Prostitute is stereotyped either as poor girl from the rural areas and is forced to do the immoral job for survival or, on the other opposite, person who can still anything including body and soul just for money. However, great heterogeneity does exist among this population. Geographically speaking, prostitutes in different special places have different characteristics according to different economic, political and social environment. They have different self-identity, autonomy and power in the relationship with managers and clients and have different practices in prostitution (Huang, 2002). Generally speaking, there are at least 7 classes among prostitutes (Pan, 1999) differentiated by working situation, income and prostitutes' demographic characteristics.

Table1

	Name	Organization of Work and Employment Status	Income	Demographic Characteristics
1	Second wife (E'nai)	Hired for a period by one client Self-employed	High & stable	Variable education
2	Courtesan	Big hotel, VIP club Self-employed	High	Well educated, beautiful, young
3	Karaoke dancing girl	Big karaoke and dancing bar Employed by manager	Middle	Middle-level education, beautiful, young
4	Massage girl (Anmo nu)	Massage parlor Employed by manager	Middle	Middle-level education, young
5	Beauty Parlor girl (fang xiaojie)	Work in barbershop, small singing dancing bar, or small roadside restaurant. Controlled by manager or pimp	Middle-low	Middle-low education, young-middle age
6	Streetstanding girl (zhanjie nu)	Solicit in street, park. Employed by pimp or self-employed	Low	Low education, tend to be older
7	Factory girl (gongpeng nu)	Solicit in construction field or small factory. Employed by pimp or self-employed	Lowest	Low education, middle age, tend to be older

3. Organizational types among brothel based prostitution.

Brothel based prostitutes are named comparing to street-based prostitutes and those work independently. They usually work in a regular setting and well organized, relating to category 3, 4, 5, especially category 5 (fang xiaojie) which consists of the largest part of prostitution. There are about 3 types of relationship between the prostitutes and the managers (Mami, usually 30-40 years old women): 1) Slave-based, which means the prostitutes are controlled by the managers and have no/little freedom. Under such organization, the prostitutes have little autonomy and power. 2) Work and live together, which means the prostitutes live and eat together in the brothel but not slaved or by force. 3) Employment-based, which means the relationship between the prostitute and manager is similar to employee and employer. Prostitutes have freedom to come or leave (Pan, 2001, Huang 2002). Prostitutes under different organization type have different practices.

4. Existing Risks

FSWs in China are illegal and stigmatized by the society and under the risks of :a) being arrested by the police and fined for money; b) Violence from clients, managers and even police; c) Being pregnant and experience abortion; d) Infection of STD/HIV which are causing more and more attention(Huang, 2002). "Sexual transmission obtained more and more attention with the prosperous sex industry and the coming of "sex revolutionary era" (Pan, 2003). HIV among sex workers tested in Guangxi and Yunnan province in 2000 were 10.7% and 4.6%, respectively (The UN Theme Group), in some areas, FSW are overlapped with IDUs. According to a recent study in Fujian, HIV positive among FSWs in re-education center is above 2%, and among those who are both IDUs and FSWs, the prevalence is above 10%(Yin, Canada STD/HIV conference, Aug, 2003.).

B. Increasing Xiagang workers (lay-offs) in Northeast China

With the progress of market-oriented reform, a great number of laid-off (Xiagang) workers have occurred in China's cities since 1994 and the accumulated Xiagang workers totaled 16 million (zhang, 2001). Xiagang workers are those who have been laid off from state-owned enterprises with little chance of recall. They first began to appear in the early to middle 1990s, and became a serious phenomena in urban nowadays, when party-state officials permitted managers to start shrinking their workforce at state-owned enterprises. These workers are not been considered to be unemployed officially, because state-owned enterprises are responsible for issuing stipends to their xiagang workers. But in nature xiagang is similar to unemployment.

The three provinces in the northeast area are China's most strategically significant industrial bases, in particular for heavy industries and military industries. As a matter of fact, these areas were consistently severely afflicted with massive lay-offs since 1993 (Gao, 1998, p. 181; Edward Gu, 2003), and their GDP growth rates were also below the national average level during most of the 1990s (see China Statistical Yearbook, 1999, p. 62). Female lay-offs consist of a large part of the *xiagang* population. It was reported that in 1998, there were 46.78 female employees, 3.00 million female registered unemployed persons and 3.93 million female laid-off workers in urban China (see China Labour Statistical Yearbook, 1999, pp. 3, 88, 442; Edward Gu, 2003). Generally speaking, most of female laid-off workers had been middle aged, less educated, received less occupational training and hard to be reemployed in the labor market.

Nowadays, there are many sayings popular in the society about females from urban areas engaged in sex work after they lost their formal job from the state-owned enterprises (especially *Xiagang* female workers in Northeast China, where the economic situation is worse and there is a lot of laid off workers because of shrink of state-owned enterprises). What's more interesting is that some of the popular sayings support the *xiagang* female workers entering prostitution, and the society hold a relatively pathetic attitude toward such kind of phenomena rather than blame and criticize them as usual.

C. Previous Researches on FSWs: lack of job-mobility perspective

In summary, the literatures on prostitution since 1980s mainly focused on four perspectives: **a)** the history of prostitution and anti-prostitution from a history perspective; **b)** policy analysis for a social control purpose (eg. how to abolish prostitution); **c)** STD and AIDS prevention and intervention done by epidemic doctors; **d)** research from social science and anthropology field (Huang 2002).

Most of the papers are some superficial and serve for the government or for the conservative sexual moral system. In recent years, more and more attention, including research and intervention, has been paid on female sex workers (FSW) in China due to the HIV/AIDS rapid epidemic. There are proliferate studies, most of them are from public health perspective, focus on FSW's risk behaviors and STD, HIV/AIDS situation. However, profound qualitative study on the social and cultural context of prostitution is still in lack. There is often a passive neglect about defining exactly what kind of work prostitutes perform in what location (Ronald Weitzer, 2000; Hyde 2000).

Among the few research papers in sociology field, researchers cast their eyes on the current social and business situation of the sex workers in the red-districts of the rural areas or outskirts of the cities (the demographic characteristics of the sex workers, the sex commercial trade, skill training, relationships between Mami (the manager), sex workers and clients, the structure of the community, etc) (Pan Suiming, 1999, 2000; Huang Yingying, 2002).

Though a few previous researches regarded prostitution as an occupation and describe the organization and business situation among it, most of researches haven't realized that prostitutes (*xiaojie*) are also workers, and sex work is also one kind of occupational selection (either positive or negative). Thus, in Chinese context, prostitutes' identity as a laborer is double neglected in the research field-----on one hand, those who engaged in studying on prostitutes neglected their job-hunting experience in the labor market, on the other hand, main steam feminists neglect prostitutes are the females who also need attention.

II. Framework of the study

1. Objective

This study focuses on female sex worker's job transition, which means it portrays them as workers; try to figure out their employment situation, including their employment opportunity, job-hunting process and the result. From this perspective, the aim of the study is to explore the process of how these girls entered sex industry after they had been fired by the factory or state-owned enterprises and enrich further understanding of why they engaged in sex work. Concretely, the objects of this study are:

- a) Explore their five kinds of work experiences: sex work, the formal job in state-owned enterprises, the nearest job (the job just before sex work), the second nearest job, and the third nearest job. Here we perceive the formal job before *xiagang* (lay-off) as the jumping-off point of occupation mobility, sex work as the end point up to now, and the nearest three jobs as the sticking points.
- b) Compare these job experiences, especially the nearest three jobs and sex work on the job category, income and work condition.
- c) Discuss the direction of their job mobility and the reason why these females chose sex work at last from a labor market view. What should be pinpointed here is that all of the FSW are not coerced to do sex work except one, thus the experience of being as a sex work could be compared with other work.

2. Methods

A. Definition and Sample selection

Sex work is a generic term for the commercial sex services, performances, or products given in exchange for material compensation (Weitzer 2000: 5). More specifically, it is an institution or pattern of impersonal and/or time-limited transactions between socially unrelated individuals involving purchase and sale of sexual services at an acknowledged and agreed unit price (de Zalduondo, Barbara O, 2000) Combining the situation in China and a wide definition, sex workers include those who provide cohort service or other erotic performance, as well as kinds of direct sexual intercourse for money or gifts (most of them exchange sex for money).

The study focused on brothel based female sex worker who works in certain settings such as small massage parlor, bathing house, small singing and dancing house, small Karaoke bar, which are very common in Northeast China and usually provide massage, escort services as well as sexual service.

B. Site selection.

Given the reason that there are considerable differences between sex work from one place to another, before the study began, the team leader went to the Northeast China to examine the conditions of local prostitution, collected data of its extent, the main characteristics, the specific terms and language used, and the types of organization. At last we selected three sites from 11 for this study.

The three sites are all famous for their sex industry, while the heterogeneity still exists.

Site	Characteristics of the site	Extent of sex industry	Main Form of sex trade setting	Characteristics of clients

A	A satellite town, middle-level economic situation	middle	Small karaoke bar	Residents from nearby cities
B	Known for oil field, rich area	large	Karaoke bar, dance bar, massage parlor	Business men from all over the country
C	Most serious xiagang (lay-off) phenomena, poor area	Middle-large	Massage parlor Bath house	business men from other cities and nearby cities

C. Interviewer training

All the interviewers should familiar with the interview schedule and related conditions (e.g. local sex industry and labor market) of the three sites we selected beforehand and translate the outlines and questions into the local language that could be understood by the subjects. All the interviewers are young female students on the consideration of gender perspective and interview convenience.

D. Data collection

The illegal and stigmatized label make prostitutes a highly sensitive group in China, which requires more methodological consideration than other studies. Besides, in most of the brothel-based prostitutes are well organized by managers (Mami) or bosses and mostly gathering in a certain community (red-district), it is important to explore the in-depth social-cultural background of their living and working environment and social network. Therefore, comparing to most of the studies on prostitutes using survey or one time interview, we combined ethnography and semi-structured informal interview to collect data on the spot in a community level. The procedure of this method is as followings:

- § Map and select sites which are often characterized as red-district before the field work.
- § Look around the community, familiar with the distribution of the settings; settle in a hotel convenient for observation and communication with subjects and stay in the community for certain time.
- § Experience ways of contacting with prostitutes and find an appropriate one.
- § conduct informal semi-structure interview and collect data by using ways of listening, observing, communicating and so on.
- § Write down every details that we collected after back to hotel. Data are usually coded in two ways: on different topics and different cases.
- § Discussion .

3 red-light communities, 103 female sex workers were involved. Qualitative data were coded in two ways: by cases and by topics. Content analysis and basic statistical analysis by spss10.0 were conducted. Besides, the names of the FSWs and places are all changed for anonymous purpose.

III. Results

FSWs in Northeast China are somewhat older comparing to those of other areas, and the range of age is wider. The average age is 25.1, while the youngest is at 16 and the eldest is at 47. Two significant characteristics owned by these people are:

- a) More than half of them (51%) were xiagang female workers or unemployment workers who once worked as the formal labor in state-owned enterprises and had relatively high social status.
- b) Almost all of the FSWs are from nearby urban areas (owns urban Hukou,95%)

A. FSW and Xiagang Female worker

Xiagang female workers and FSW have the great different public images in Chinese society. Xiagang female workers often owns a positive image, being characterized as laborers aged from 30-40, fired by the state-owned enterprise, have a great burden of family, and sympathized by the society. On the contrary, FSW are usually portrayed negatively and immorally, 'trading their self-esteems for more money'. Thus, FSW are those young girls who are degraded, discriminated and have traditionally been perceived as 'bad girls' by the society. These two images are impossible to be put together until the moral system met with the great economic changes, which means under the condition of the high tide of xiagang and economic crisis in Northeast China, quite a few xiagang female workers entered sex industry and became FSWs.

According to our study, half of our interviewees (51%) were xiagang female workers or unemployment workers who once worked as the formal labor in state-owned enterprises and had high social status. In addition, the difference among the three sites is significant. In Site A, 47.5% of the interviewees were xiagang female workers, in Site B, the num. is 41.7%, while in Site C, there is a much higher percentage of 72.7% for its worst economic situation.

Among the 51% xiagang or unemployment female workers, the situations before they laid off by the original Danwei are as followings: almost all of them worked in the local formal Danwei (98%), which are mostly state-owned enterprises (74%); most of them were unskilled workers (62%), which means they have little chance to be reemployed; the main reason that they were laid off was due to the enterprises (work force shrinking, bankruptcy, enterprise reform, and so on) (74.5%), and only a few females gave up the job themselves. This is particularly significant in Site C (93.8% workers were compelled to lose their job).

The other 49% FSWs are mostly in the situation of waiting-for-job (called Daiye), which means they have the ability to work while have never worked as a former worker.

B. Geographic mobility and Reduction of anonymity necessity for sex work

Anonymity is usually seemed as the basic necessity for modern sex work (Kaweibo, 2001), for modern sex work requires an environment of "strange society". Only in a strange society, the FSW could work out of the "gaze" from relatives and friends, thus the influence brought by the stigmatization upon women who trade sex for money could be minimized. In a word, anonymity necessity is derived from the stigmatization of sex work.

In order to create a strange society, the FSWs usually have strategies such as using a byname and a faked ID card, concealing their hometown and other demographic data, etc. Among all of these, working in a strange site far away from the hometown is of most important. Farther they go, safer they feel. That's why most of the FSW are afraid of being known by their family, and that's why they work in a different province from where they live. This is the situation we met before and could be perceived by most of the people. However, it's not the case for FSWs in Northeast China. As the data in table1 indicates, most of the FSW there are from nearby cities.

Table2: Work sites & Hometown (%)

work site	Category of hometown				
	Local city	Within 50 km.	Local province	Other places of the north	The south
Site A	37.2	30.2	16.3	7.0	9.3
Site B	15.8	31.6	26.3	23.7	2.6
Site C	68.2	13.6	4.5	13.6	0
total	35.9	27.2	17.5	14.6	4.9

We can tell that 80.6% FSW doing commercial sex trade in the local province, among which 63.1% FSW work within 50 KM, and 35.9% FSW work in the local city. The data indicate that most of the interviewees are doing sex work near their hometown, and have the high risk of being noticed by their acquaintances. Thus the anonymity necessity for sex work is reducing in these areas, especially in Site C where the economy level is the worst (68.2% FSW work in the local city).

The main reasons for the reduction of anonymity necessity lie in at least three aspects.

First, in the context of the serious situation of xiagang, lots of the women being unemployed and have little chance to get a formal job, as a result, most of them encounters economic crises. Under such circumstance, the local public opinion toward sex work has some changes, such as deems sex work as a way of surviving and has less condemnation on it. Therefore, the pressure (moral, psychology) caused by the stigmatization is reducing and the justification of being as a sex work is strengthened to some degree. In a word, the economic necessity wins the anonymity necessity.

Second, from a cultural perspective, Northeast China is an immigrant society in the history and the political control over "sex-related" entertainment is not as serious as that of other places. Thus, the body-distance of male-female is relatively much nearer. In such a tolerant culture, settings like bathhouse, massage parlor, dancing and singing bar are prosperous. Most of the settings are also serving for local people either male or female, so even though people would know this settings are sex-related, they shut their eyes. In this way, the cultural tolerance reduces the anonymity necessity.

Last but not the least, the women (especially young girls) from Northeast China are famous for their modern, freedom, sexy and floating all over the country. Ordinary speaking, young girls have more advantages in sex industry, and they are much more likely to float to other places of China (such as Southeast China). Oppositely, the elder married females (like our interviewees) have much more family burden (husband, child), and they have to stay near their family. That's why most of the interviewees are local elder females. Moreover, earn money to support the family is a much more reasonable explanation for their entering into sex industry. That's also why the anonymity is not so necessary for this group of females.

C. Job mobility: the process From Xiagang worker to Sex worker

1. Job mobility rate

Only a few interviewees (9%) entered sex industry directly after their xiagang or unemployment or select sex work as their first job. The period from their xiagang to being as sex workers is average as long as 51.5 months, and each female has experienced 4.7 jobs average. Thus, if a job lasting for one month can be counted as a regular one, 87.4% FSW had at least one regular job; and 65% FSW had at least two regular jobs; 38.8% had at least three regular jobs. All of these contribute to the fact that FSW are **not** born for sex work, are not "immoral" (as the society labeled) in nature. They were struggling in the labor market as most of the other workers do.

2. The nearest three jobs previous sex work

There is a popular believing in the Chinese society that a deep gap does exist between sex work and any other occupations, which means that there is a steeply downwards movement from other occupations to sex work — a process that transforms from a good female to illegal and immoral prostitute.

Is there really a deep gap between sex work and other work? How did these former state-owned enterprise workers enter the sex industry? Why did they ultimately select sex work, which is stigmatized? The process and reason for their choice are the key points we are endeavoring to explore in this study from an occupational mobility perspective.

We have mentioned that most of the interviewees did not enter the sex industry directly after they were laid off. Instead, they have struggled in the labor market for a long time. We also learned from the study that most of the FSW were highly satisfied with their formal job before their *xiagang*, because working in a state-owned enterprise gave them high occupational status, and the jobs they generally held just before moving into sex work meant they were in a low social status. What we want to highlight here is that these females had already fallen to a low occupational status before they entered the sex industry, and that the occupational mobility between sex work and their previous jobs was a kind of horizontal mobility (rather than upward or downward). That also means these jobs enjoy parallel status, both of which are marginalized by the Chinese labor market.

The data in Table 3 below indicates three trends.

§ **Firstly**, all kinds of service work (such as waitressing, singing bar, hotel work and so on) comprised large part of previous three jobs (40.3%, 33.3%, and 33.3%). White collar work (such as secretarial work) comprised a small fraction of the sex workers.

§ **Secondly**, with their jobs changing, the percentage of quasi-sex work (such as masseuse, escort girl, hair washer, etc.) was increasing, from

7.5% (the third most recent job) to 24.2% (the second most recent) then to 31.1% (the most recent job). The reason why we call these jobs as quasi-sex work is due to the fact that the settings of such work are much more likely to provide sex service. Moreover, the body distance between the service females to the male clients is very close.

§ **Thirdly**, almost all the jobs are informal and have an absolutely low occupational status except those few white collar workers. Even those who work as individual trader (Getihu), they often do some dickers (small trade) by themselves or with their family, and are also struggling in the margin of the labor market. In any case, there is no big difference in occupational status among these occupations.

Table3: The nearest three jobs previous current sex work (%)

	Waitress and the like	Qusi-sex work			Street peddler			Other low-status job			White collar
		Massagist and the like	Escort girls	total	Street peddler	Getihu (individual businessman)	total	manual labor	nursemaid	total	
third nearest	40.0	7.5	0.0	7.5	27.5	7.5	35.0	10.0	2.5	12.5	5.0
Second nearest	33.3	22.7	1.5	24.2	21.2	4.5	25.8	12.1	0.0	12.1	4.5
nearest	33.3	26.7	4.4	31.1	8.9	14.4	23.3	6.7	2.2	8.9	3.3

3. The income comparison between the nearest three jobs and sex work

As we know, not all of the jobs have fixed income, especially for those informal jobs that most of our interviewees have experienced. Thus for those whose income is changeable, we asked for both the minimum and maximum income amount and then took the average. Considering the small sample, here we compare the income using three calculations: the median, the minimum and the maximum.

Table 4: The income of the nearest three jobs and sex work/RMB

	third nearest	Second nearest	The nearest	Sex work
median	500	600	500	1500
minimum	100	250	-10000	350
maximum	3500	4500	1500	4500

The data indicate the median income of the three jobs ranges from 500RMB to 600RMB, while sex work has a much higher median of 1500RMB. In addition, there are significant differences between the minimum and the maximum earned in their three most recent jobs or sex work. As we learn from the interviews, the income of jobs like masseuse, street peddler, and Getihu (individual business women) is the most variable. For certain workers, their minimum income was sometimes negative because of losing money in their business and having debt (the minimum number could reach minus 10000 RMB, as we can see from the table above).

Even though the income of FSW in Northeast China is lower than that of other places, it is two times higher than the wages earned in the interviewees three most recent jobs (1500RMB vs. 500RMB). Thus, higher income is the main motivating force triggering these females conducting sex trade, regardless of morality. That is sex workers in China are on the same treadmill as sex workers in other parts of the world...

4. Different roles of social network (guanxi)

In China, social network plays an important role in every aspect of one's life, and occupational mobility is no exception. There are four kinds of network that we are trying to explore in this study during the process of the occupational mobility of our FSWs. They are no social network (depending on themselves), relative-based network, friend-based network and official-based network (labor market, or formal job agencies)

**Table 5: different role of the social network
in the nearest three jobs and sex work (%)**

	The third nearest	The second nearest	The nearest	Sex work
Depend on oneself	48.4	41.1	35.6	32.0
Relatives-based	35.5	21.4	18.9	17.0
Friend-based	6.5	21.4	23.3	41.0
Official-based	6.5	3.6	8.9	10.0
others	3.2	12.5	13.3	--

The data in table 4 implies several significant trends:

The importance of "no social network" is declining from 48.4% (the third most recent job), 41.1% (the second most recent job), and 35.6% (the most recent job) to 32% (sex work). That means in the beginning quite a number of the *xiagang* female workers (48.4 %) found the job by themselves. With time, and after struggling in the inferior labor market, they became less independent in the process of job-hunting. The more difficulties they encountered, the less courage and capacities they had. On the other hand, the high percentages indicate that "no relationship" (depending on themselves) played an important role in their horizontal occupational mobility.

The percentage of "relative-based network" is not as high as that of "no social network", while it was also declining from 35.5% for the third most recent job to 21.4% for the second most recent job to 18.9% for the most recent job and finally to 17% for sex work. Despite the fact that some females (more than 30%) turned to the relatives for help after they were laid off by the original Danwei (work unit), fewer of them depended on relatives in the later job experience, especially in entering the sex industry.

Contrary to the former social network, friend-based network was increasing at a rapid rate and won the bid ultimately. The percentage ranges from 6.5% for the third most recent job to 41% for sex work. Thus, with the limited effectiveness of relatives, friends become more and more important for occupational mobility. Especially for sex work, the need for anonymity on one hand and for reliability on the other is somewhat conflicted, for the former requires acquaintance-avoidance while the latter acts oppositely. As a result, friend-based relationships fit the bill and become the most "important others" (guider or information provider) to FSW.

Official labor markets and job agencies did little to help these females. Most of our interviewees had no idea of such formal methods of job-hunting, not to mention turning to it for help, although these places might have been just nearby. Therefore, we can see that the formal labor market is still a stranger to most job-hunters, especially for the people of low status.

IV. Brief Discussion

A. Cost-benefit calculation: the gap between previous jobs and sex work

Normally, the direction of occupational mobility is judged by the integration of income, power and prestige related to the occupation. Based on our interviews, here we analyze the status of the nearest three jobs and sex work roughly according to six aspects associated with FSW. Those aspects are: intensity of the job, working hours, degree of freedom, workfare, income, and psychological cost.

As we have mentioned, most of the recent jobs were kinds of service jobs (such as waitress, seller), street peddling, Getihu and so on. Both the recent jobs and sex work are informal and unstable occupations. The recent jobs have no related welfare (such as housing compensation) as most of the formal work has in China, not to mention power and influence. While sex work is even worse, it actually has negative amount of welfare or power considering the high risk of being arrested by the police, infected by STD or even HIV/AIDs, and being treated rudely by the clients. Thus, in this way, the nearest three jobs has slight advantages over sex work

As for the psychological cost, sex work is in an obviously inferior situation for its serious stigmatization and marginalization, which means being a sex

worker, should have a much higher psychological cost than other jobs. However, according to our study in Northeast China, with the increasing economic necessity and with a relatively tolerant attitude toward sex work, such, the psychological cost would be decreased.

Sex work has a slight advantage over the recent jobs in terms of intensity and working hours. Most mainstream informal work generally require more than 12 hours of work per day, and the difference exists in the freedom of the time and different period during one day (e.g. the hours of sex work are usually unfixed, from 4 pm - 4 am, while other work have fixed hours from 8 am-8 pm). While, the intensity of other jobs is greater than sex work, and the most popular word used to describe their previous jobs is "too tired". "Too tired" is also the main reason why these females gave up their previous work in our study. But what should be mentioned here is that the necessity of staying up late all night for sex work, combining having more possibility of abortion and other factors, has a great effect on the females, just as most of them complained "it's much easier to get old [in this job]"

When it comes to both 'freedom' and income, sex work is definitely superior. These two factors may alone determine why the women engage in sex work despite of the discrimination. As we mentioned above, this is especially true about the high income. Judged purely on income parameters sex work obviously has a higher occupational status.

In conclusion, engaging in sex work or not is a kind of balance between costs and benefits and, to some degree, is the result of rational consideration. From our point of view, sex work has a similar occupational status to jobs like street peddler, masseuse, waitress etc., and the mobility from such jobs to sex work is a kind of horizontal mobility balancing all these factors above. Moreover, if there is a gap, it already existed between the formal job before *xiagang* and the informal job just after *xiagang*. In addition, from the sexuality perspective, there is only one thing changing in the process of the mobility from other jobs to sex work—the body distance between the females and males is shortened to a minimum, "the departure of the body-mind" becomes possible and sexuality can also be rationalized.

B. Lacking resources necessary for a upward mobility

Struggling in the second section of labor market, these females are lack of all kinds of resources necessary for moving toward a higher occupational status.

First, they are short of personal resources, which including education, still training, helpful relationship and experience accumulated from the original enterprises. For they are impossible to find a similar state-owned enterprises (most of the enterprises are streamlining) and do a similar job, what they have learned in the state-owned enterprises usually do little help for job-hunting. Under such situation, work in a lower status occupation is the most possibility just after they were released from the own-state enterprises or collective. Meanwhile, as what we have analyzed in the previous part, most of the nearest jobs they have been experienced are temporary, changeable, low salary and great intensive, little recourses (such as useful social worknet) could get from these. Moreover, their support system such as relatives and friends were usually in the similar status as themselves, and could do little help for pursuing a better job.

Second, these females own less economic resources, even though they had little before *xiagang*. For example, in our study the compensation for *xiagang* is 23000RMB at most while minus 4500RMB at least, the average number is 1400RMB and the median is zero, which means most of the *xiagang* female workers got **no** compensation or stipends at all. As a result, the only thing they could do is doing small business at the street and such alike. All of these contribute to the horizontal mobility during their job-hunting.

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[i] Researches done by Pan Suiming and Liao Susu since 1997

2. According to the population-based probability survey, 6.4% men 18-60 years old have had sex with a CSW at least once during their lives, 1.62% men from 18-60 had sex with a CSW at least once in the latest 3 month (during the survey time from Aug1999 to Aug 2000) who had have sex with 1.97 CSWs average. Previous researches on CSWs indicated that average sex acts per sex worker per day is from 0.2-0.5, and the average duration of worktime as sex worker is from 4.5-6 month (Pan 1997, Liao susu, 1998). Combining the census in 2000 and the multiplier method used for estimating the size of populations (UNAIDS, 2003), the total number of females who provided sex services (sexual intercourse, anal sex) is from 133,000 to 489,000 (a=0.05). Assume that the number of CSW based on a widely definition (including those who provide other kind of services, such as oral sex or escort) is three times of narrowly defined CSW, there are about 400,000 to 150,000 CSWs in current China.

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