

What's your strategy to improve
your treasury's performance?

Get the Insights

WELLS
FARGO

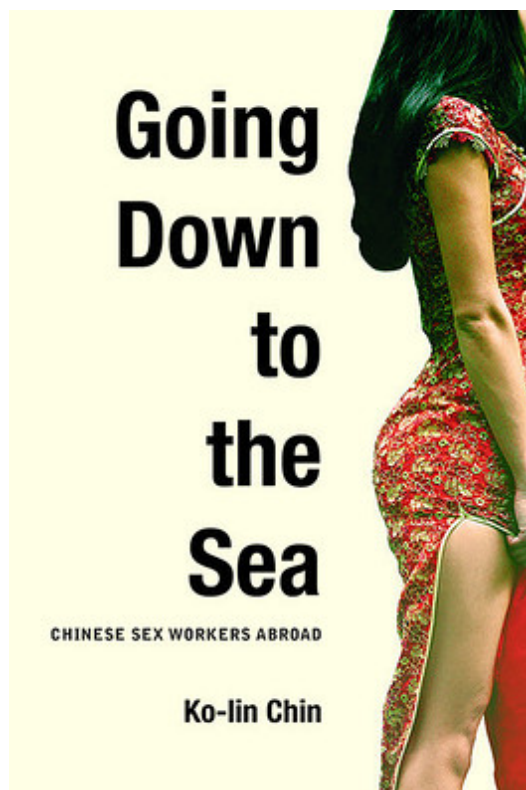
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

September 4, 2014, 3:47 PM HKT

Writing China: Ko-lin Chin, 'Going Down to the Sea: Chinese Sex Workers Abroad'

What's it like to be a Chinese sex worker? Ko-lin Chin, a criminal justice professor at Rutgers University, has traveled around the world to find out, interviewing sex workers about their working conditions and how they got into the trade.



Silkworm Books

Earlier this year, Mr. Chin published a compilation of 18 interviews with Chinese sex workers from Hong Kong to Los Angeles in "Going Down to the Sea." In the book, the women speak candidly with Mr. Chin about their motivations for entering the trade, how much money they make and their future plans. Mr. Chin chose to focus on Chinese nationals working in the sex trade—known as "going down to the sea" in Chinese.

China Real Time spoke with Mr. Chin about how China's economic growth has affected the country's sex trade and his experiences researching the industry.

Why did you write this book?

The public often reads about sex trafficking in the newspapers, but unfortunately these news reports can sometimes be misleading. I thought one of the best ways to understand the problem would be to listen

to the stories told by the women themselves.

Was it difficult persuading the subjects to speak candidly with you?

Yes. I have interviewed many hard-to-reach subjects in the past and initially thought it would not be a difficult task to approach sex workers for an interview. I thought that these women are everywhere if you are looking, so how difficult could it be to find them? Only later did I learn that while it is not much of a problem to locate them, it is a challenge to persuade them to be interviewed. Many big-time gangsters, human smugglers and drug kingpins are surely not willing to attract public attention, but at the same time they are not ashamed of who they are, and some of them are not so reluctant to talk to a college professor. However, no woman is willing to admit that she is a sex worker unless she is working and the person in front of her is a potential client.



Professor Ko-lin Chin

Nick Romanenko

Were you worried about running into problems with law enforcement?

Yes, especially when I was hanging out with sex-ring operators such as [madams], agents, escort agency owners and jockeys (drivers). I was worried I was getting too close to the sex ring operators, and also that the police might mistake me as a sex buyer and arrest me. Throughout the many months I spent in the field, there were many close calls.

How has the explosive growth in China's economy affected the sex trade?

Well, that's the main reason there is such a strong demand for commercial sex. There are now many more successful businesspeople, corrupt officials and floating migrants willing to pay for sex.

How big a problem is human trafficking in China?

As pointed out in my book, the vast majority of the women working in the sex industry are not trafficked. However, if we are talking about prostitution, it is a big problem indeed. In China, the size of the sex industry, the varieties of the sex markets and the level of the penetration into mainstream society by the sex trade are all extraordinary.

What are countries doing to combat sex trafficking/illegal prostitution?

Not much. As China is now an economic powerhouse, it is not easy for countries to prevent Chinese citizens from arriving on their shores. Besides, many of these women are aided by local people, so it is not easy for the authorities to stop them from selling sex once they are there.

[More In Writing China](#)

[Writing China: Nicholas Lardy, 'Markets Over Mao'](#)

[Writing China: Jack Livings, 'The Dog'](#)

[Writing China: James Jiann Hua To, 'Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese'](#)

[Writing China: 'Chomping at the Bitcoin,' Zennon Kapron](#)

[Writing China: Yan Geling, 'The Criminal Lu Yanshi'](#)

Many of the women don't tell their families in China what they are doing overseas. How do they hide it?

This is the one thing that they are most concerned about, so they try very hard to keep it a secret. For example, those who are going to Thailand will not tell their families where they are going because many people in China know Thailand has a thriving sex industry. When they go home from abroad, they are very careful with what they wear and refrain from smoking and drinking. They also will not show off the money they make overseas.

Some of the women say they are empowered by their work. Was that a common refrain?

Yes. But more importantly, regardless of how lucrative sex work was, most of them believe their engagement in sex work is temporary, and that they will quit once they save enough money. The vast majority did not like what they were doing.

–Edited from an interview by Brittany Hite

Copyright 2014 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com