



Characterizing Scam-Driven Human Trafficking Across Chinese Borders and Online Community Responses on RedNote

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Problem: The Rise of “Scam-driven human trafficking”



Scam **leads to** people being trafficked

Human trafficking **converts** people into scam workers

\$64B

generated annually

#Scam

#SoutheastAsia

300,000+

People trap across Southeast Asia

#China

Cambodia extradites alleged scam mastermind to China after arrest



Research Objective



Prior work: Institutional reports, macro-trafficking networks and interviews, mostly outside China (Luong., 2025, Lazarus et al., 2025, OHCHR., 2025)



Our work: How online Chinese community collectively evaluates and responds to the crisis of scam-driven human trafficking?



Why: Bottom-up perspectives informing better intervention strategies

Study Site - RedNote

- Major Chinese social media with **300M+** monthly active users (predominantly young)
- **Global reach:** Domestic and overseas Chinese communities
- **Rich** narratives from individual perspectives



RedNote's antifraud campaign
(Source: China Daily, 2023)



Systematic study of scam-driven trafficking discourse on Chinese social media from bottom-up perspectives throughout phases of scam-driven trafficking

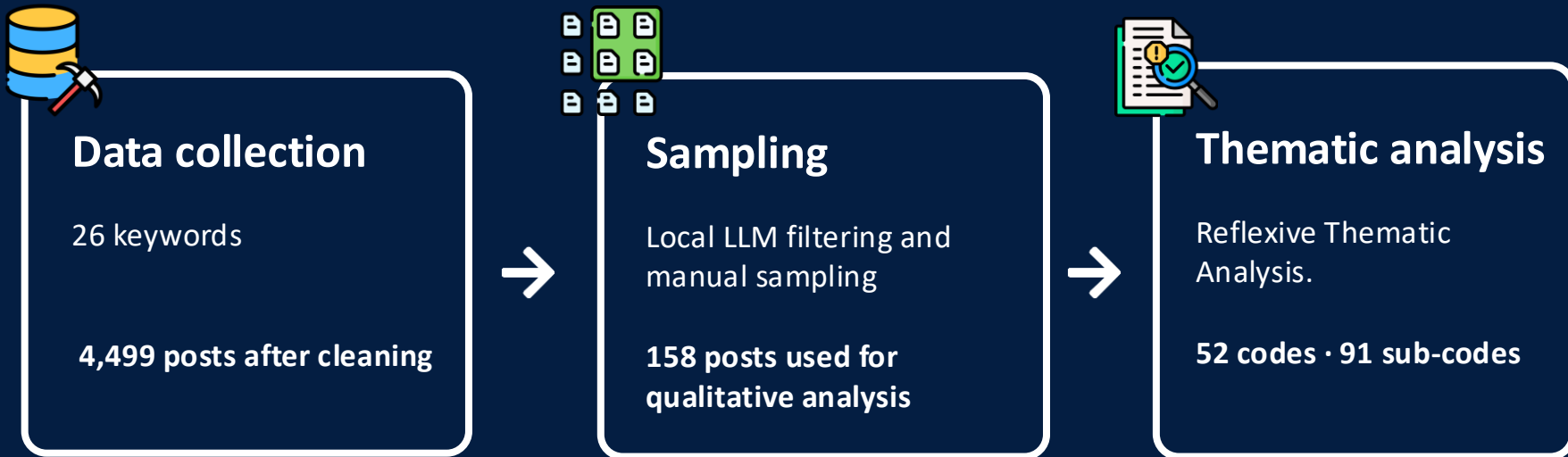
Recruitment

Exploitation & control

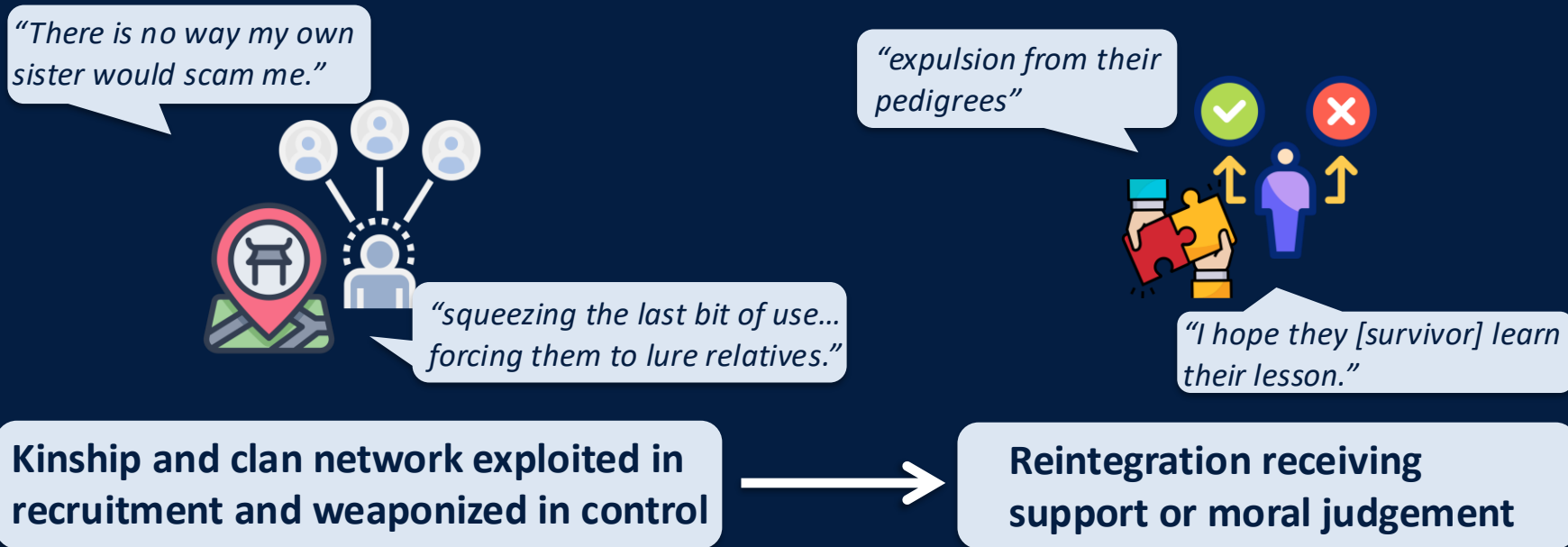
Reintegration

Protection

Methodology



Insight 1: Kinship Factors into Every Phase of Scam-driven Human Trafficking



Insight 2: Recruitment is Targeted, and Digital Skills are Paradoxical



Vulnerable youth
e.g., Left-behind youth



Multilingual/digitally skilled workers



Financial pressure or mobility

Platform Transition: Domestic apps → Less governed foreign apps (e.g., Telegram)

Asset (for traffickers)

Increases value to traffickers

"If you can't read or type, they'll beat and abandon you."

Digital skills

Survival (for victims)

Communication & coordinating

"This is my only chance to signal for help. Please save us."

Insight 3: Escape Does Not End the Harms

"we have no law enforcement or investigative authority"



Formal channels are fragmented

- No overseas jurisdictions
- Bureaucratic delays
- Local corruption

Return is not recovery

- Trauma and rehabilitation
- Family mistrust
- Legal uncertainty due to victim-offender overlap

"...thrown the household into complete disorder"



"... we will just stop caring about him"

When formal rescue fails and recovery face uncertainty, people turn to RedNote for support and information

Insight 4: Users Leverage RedNote for Support While Facing New Risks

Visibility Helps



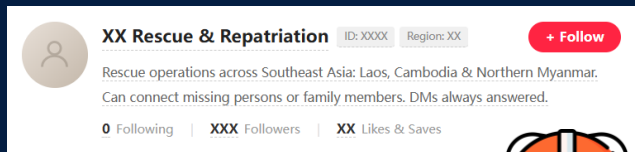
Tailored demographic warnings

#GirlsMustSee

Ransom verification



"I see this message... can they really be saved?"



Grassroot rescue coordination

"Rescue within 3 days, respond in 20 minutes"

Visibility Harms



"No one can force you [survivors] to go if you don't want to"

Contested victimhood & public scrutiny

"hoping for no malicious criticism."



Disclosure anxieties & self-censorship

Implications

Culturally informed trust and governance network



- Leveraging *digital* grassroot governance
- Adapt proven support models (e.g., tech clinic)
- Culturally informed AI personas

Platform-level support & moderation



- Trauma-informed content moderation
- Verify rescue teams
- Transparent feedback

Localized cross-border services



- Connect domestic & overseas networks
- Integrate localized knowledge

Collective Action Against a Global Socio-Technical Challenge

- Expanding beyond China and Southeast Asia to the Globe
- Socio-technical crisis
- Calling for collective action





Thank you

Questions?



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