

On Debt and Human Trafficking during the Northern Wei Dynasty: The Case of Fei Yangpi selling His Daughter

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Abstract

In North Wei Dynasty (514 A.D.), Fei yang-pi, lived in Jizhou (冀州) Fucheng (阜城), sold his own seven-year daughter to Zhang hui as a maidservant, because Fei, who lived in poverty, can not afford to pay the expenses of the funeral ceremony for his mother. Later, Zhang hui resold Fei's daughter to Liang ding-zhi, lived in Yüxian, without an official announcement that the daughter was indeed a *liangren* (freeman or person abiding law; 良人) rather than a slave. The major argument of this case is that a seven-year girl, who was a *liangren* in the first deal, became a slave after the second deal.

The Emperor Xuanwu of the North Wei Dynasty established the system of slaveholding but rectified the slave trade in the society. The case of "Fei yang-pi" represents an important event in a series of slaveholding problems; in particular, why the slave trade for a seven-year little girl in the sixth century caused so much dispute in monarchy, causing so many descriptions in the historical records of the North Wei Dynasty? This article focuses on the case and presents discussions on related issues, including debt, purchase and mortgage, legal liability for deal of human beings, the mourning system, and a son in mourning and the law. We explain why this case was so much noticeable and how it brought out open questions at the current period of time.

Keywords: The North Wei Dynasty, Fei yang-pi, the deal of human beings, mourning clothes, citizens and slaves