

The Practice of Foot-binding in China: 1100s to 1930s

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The Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911



- Ming territory (1368-1644)
- Qing territory (1644-1911)

About Foot-binding

- Began when 4-6 years old
- The toes were broken and tightly wrapped with bandages, with the toes pointing to the heel

Risks?

Infection

Rotting flesh

Falling, broken bones



Reasons for Foot-binding



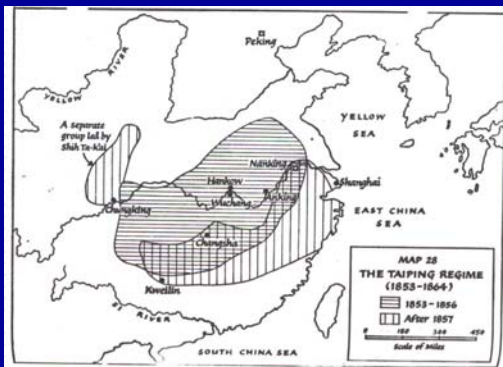
- Why?
 - Class
 - Class aspirations
 - Beauty, sexual desire
 - Marriageability

Attempts to Prohibit Foot-binding, i



- Kangxi, r. 1661-1722
- 1664, foot-binding forbidden
- 1668, ban withdrawn

Attempts to prohibit, ii



- Mid-19th century
- Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), Hong Xiuquan
- Taiping ideology
- Non-Confucian vision for society

1904, An Address to Two Hundred Million Fellow Countrywomen (iii)

- Qiu Jin (1875, textbook)

In a few years, without thinking about whether it is right or wrong, he [the father] forcibly binds his daughter's soft, white feet with white cloth, so that even in her sleep she cannot find comfort and relief until the flesh becomes rotten and the bones broken.

[Women]...send [your sons] to schools. You must do the same for your daughters and, whatever you do, don't bind their feet. As for you young girls among us, go to school if you can. If not, read and study at home.

...a girl's future life is placed in the hands of a couple of shameless matchmakers...

Attempts to Prohibit, iv



- Early 20th century

Republic est. 1912, Sun Yat-sen
(he dies 1925)

- Foot-binding banned in 1912

- How was the ban enforced?

Government inspectors

Heavy fines, beatings

Forced unbinding

My Step-grandma



- b. 1914
- Tóngcén 董, Ānhuī 皖
- Grandpa: military officer for Chiang Kai-Shek, successor to Sun Yat-Sen, 1925

- Why were her feet bound?
 - Arranged marriage
 - Not educated
 - Countryside still in chaos



Taken July '07, 93 years old

My Grandma



- b. 1923
- Zhènyuán 仝, Guizhou province 黔
- My family surname = 仝

- Why weren't her feet bound?
 - Her and her family were educated
 - By then, more thorough enforcement of law



China During the Mid-20th Century



- 1931, Mao Zedong
- "Women hold up half the heavens."
- Oct. 1, 1949, establishment of the People's Republic of China

The Persistence of Culture



- Zhou Guizhen, b. 1921, Yunnan

"When people came to inspect our feet, my mother bandaged my feet, then put big shoes on them. When the inspectors came, we fooled them into thinking I had big feet."

"Then [during my childhood], bound feet were seen as a mark of class. Now [2007], they stand for female subjugation."

"I regret binding my feet," Zhou says. "I can't dance, I can't move properly. I regret it a lot. But at the time, if you didn't bind your feet, no one would marry you."

"There's not a single other woman in Lijuyicun [Yunnan province] who could fit their feet into my shoes," she says. "When my generation dies, people won't be able to see bound feet, even if they want to."

先師孔子行教像



Chinese Society



- Confucian
- Class hierarchy?
 - Emperor and his family
 - Scholar-bureaucrat
 - Peasants
 - Merchants
- Status of women?