

Foot binding: the tragedy of women conforming to society

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The absurd tradition of foot binding has caused women living in Asia to experience incredible agony for an alarming ten centuries.

This excruciatingly painful process results in extreme deformities in the foot, inflicting a lifelong disability on countless numbers of female victims. To bind a girl's foot, the bone structure must be drastically altered in a barbarian-like manner, in which bandages keep the foot in an unnatural, almost unbearable position. This causes the arch to be completely broken, the toenails to be removed, and the toes to be forced underneath the sole of the foot – all of which entirely change the way one moves. Undoing this process is as torturous as having it performed in the first place, meaning that most girls who are involuntarily made to have their feet bound are fated to a perpetual, incapacitated state. The youngest victims of this terrible custom are only four years old, still too young to advocate for their own wants and needs.

However, their parents felt it necessary to put their daughters through this grueling procedure, as it was considered unladylike, vulgar, and even shameful to have normal, healthy, and functional feet. Despite the fact that the modern era considers foot binding to be inhumane and repulsive, tiny feet were treasured in preceding centuries. This is a prime example of how throughout history, women have constantly felt intense pressure to conform to the standards of society in a pursuit to be accepted. From the middle of the tenth century up until 1949, three inch “lotus feet” remained the ultimate perception of true beauty in certain areas of the Eastern hemisphere. In this time period, the size of a girl's feet was the only variable which determined the life she would live; a girl's personality, outer appearance, and social standing were not nearly as crucial as miniature feet.

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For instance, if a woman had unbound feet, depending on the family and region, it was extremely difficult to find a suitor, and impossible to marry into wealth or a higher socioeconomic status.

In addition, some families would even go as far as disowning their young daughters should they object to going through the process of foot binding. This meant that girls were doomed to live an undesirable state of poverty for the rest of their lives. Thus, it was an uncommon decision for a female – or her guardians – not to have her feet bound. The only reasonable choice left was to assent to the expectations of society. While the methods through which women from the United States currently change in an effort to be approved by civilization are more discreet than foot binding, it is still a serious problem that deserves proper recognition.

Women, whether they are aware of it or not, are continuously changing themselves in order to be considered to be “attractive” and “normal” – as already previously defined by past generations. Females starve themselves, undergo plastic surgery, and put their bodies through various other extremes, all to meet ideals that are merely social constructs. Society has created unrealistic expectations that are drastically limiting the quality of life for millions of women around the world. This is a phenomenon that unfortunately, has always existed. The practise of foot binding serves as a warning to future generations by demonstrating how it is very possible for society to be corrupted in way which disturbs such a prominent aspect of life.

Foot binding reminds people to always be vigilant and protective of the health and rights of all citizens, and to guard against the tyranny of cultural criterions; foot binding is merely one case of when people failed to advocate for themselves. Oftenly, social normalities similar to these completely disregard the needs and wishes of those who are most affected by them. While this example is the most obvious and outrageous, every society manages to define beauty for women in idiosyncratic and capricious ways. It is necessary to raise awareness, for most people are completely ignorant of this insidious evil influence. Some detrimental behaviors have become so common that people do not consciously contemplate the motives for their actions. Foot binding is only one example of the misery women go through to be accepted; there exist numerous other ways women adapt to the standards of society.

Even though the goal to wholly change this preexisting concept is unattainable, it is imperative to commence the effort to eradicate the unrealistic and impractical expectations society has set for women all around the world.