



# Topic Research

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## Topic Overview

Starting out as a desirable trait to having small feet, it eventually integrated into Chinese culture and beauty standards in the 10th century. Young girls would have their foot bones broken and tightly bound, forcing their feet to grow into the position it's constrained in with a permanent effect. It is now a banned practice, but the remaining women with "lotus feet" still live today.

## Concept

The direction of this publication will revolve around the concept of beauty standards and how societal standards are so powerful that they get to the point where people augment their bodies to fit them.

Visually, I want to incorporate the idea of "binding", and have some of the type and images feel uncomfortable and tight while maintaining legibility.

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## Content + Distribution

The first section's content will revolve around the history of Chinese footbinding, touching on its process, why it was practiced, and show images of the process.

The second section of the publication will discuss and visualize the symbolism of beauty standards, marks of beauty, wealth, and status during this practice. It will also cover sexual attraction and desire, along with the variations of foot sizes and their meanings. The most desirable woman possessed the three-inch foot (known as the golden lotus), the acceptable four-inch foot (known as the silver lotus), and any foot larger would be described as the "iron lotus", which was seen as unattractive.

The flow of the narrative and design will follow the transition of the practice, from its peak to the period where it became banned. The third section will go over how the practice became banned, and how society and standards shifted along with it.

The last section will revolve around the physical and emotional outcome of the practice, and talk about the survivors of Chinese footbinding.

- How it began: the history of Chinese Footbinding
- The physical process: the victims
- Why was this practiced? Beauty standards, societal impact, attraction and desires
- Golden Lotus, Silver Lotus, Iron Lotus
- How it ended: banning the practice
- The survivors: their emotional and physical traumas



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## Audience + Feelings

I don't have an intended audience, this project is serving as an educational design piece for anyone to learn from. Anyone who is curious about beauty standards and societal impact can learn more from this publication in comparison to the Western world.

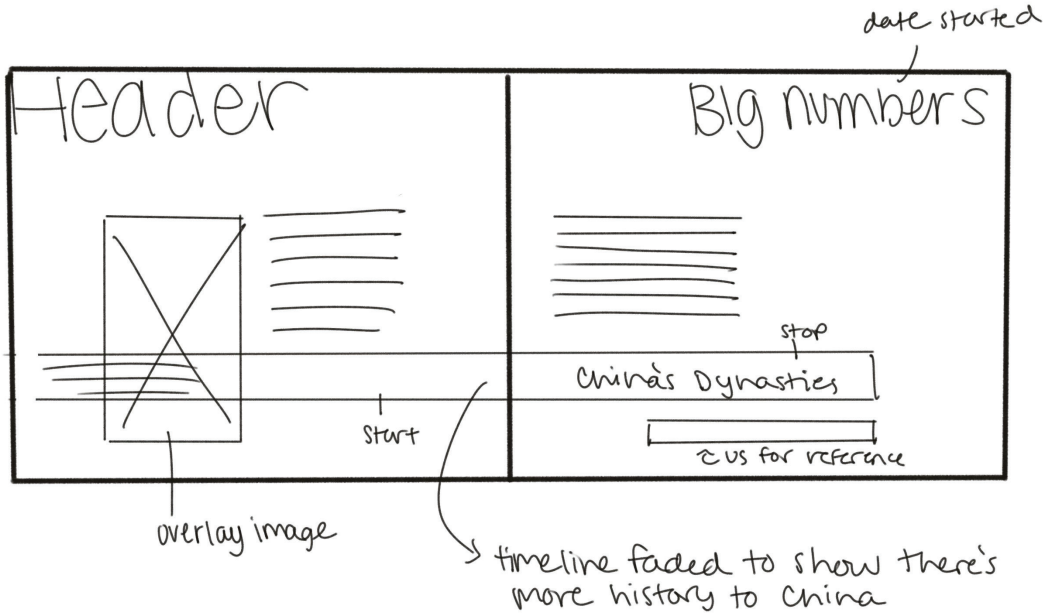
I want the audience (assuming they are not as knowledgeable in the topic) to be shocked and disturbed, but also intrigued when learning about footbinding. Naturally, the audience will also empathize for the victims of Chinese footbinding, and understand how impactful this practice was to them.

## Interview

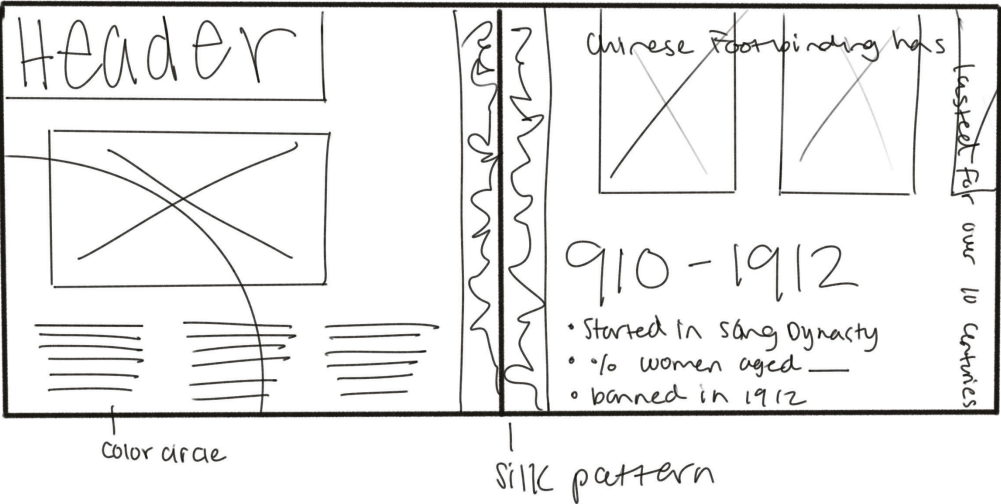
I plan on using a secondary source as an interview for my content. Some sources I can explore include documents from the time this practice took place, interviews of the survivors of footbinding, books and articles, and research reports.

# Thumbnails

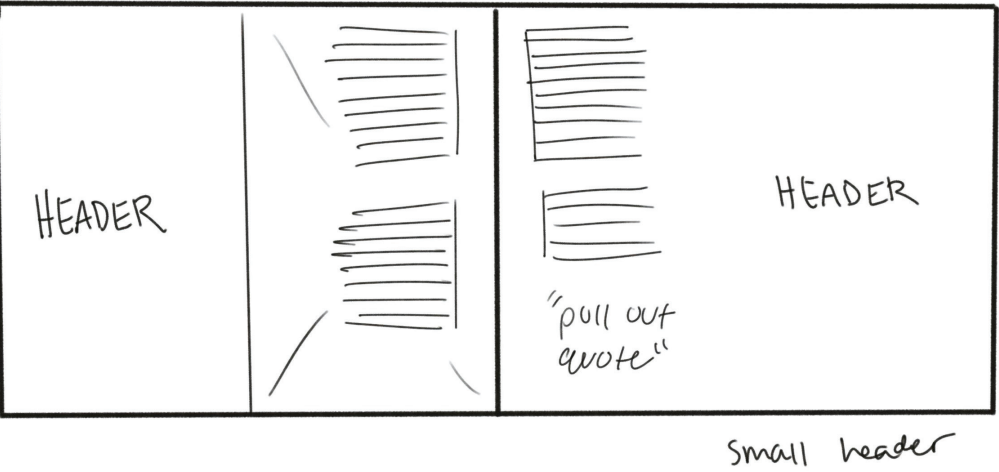
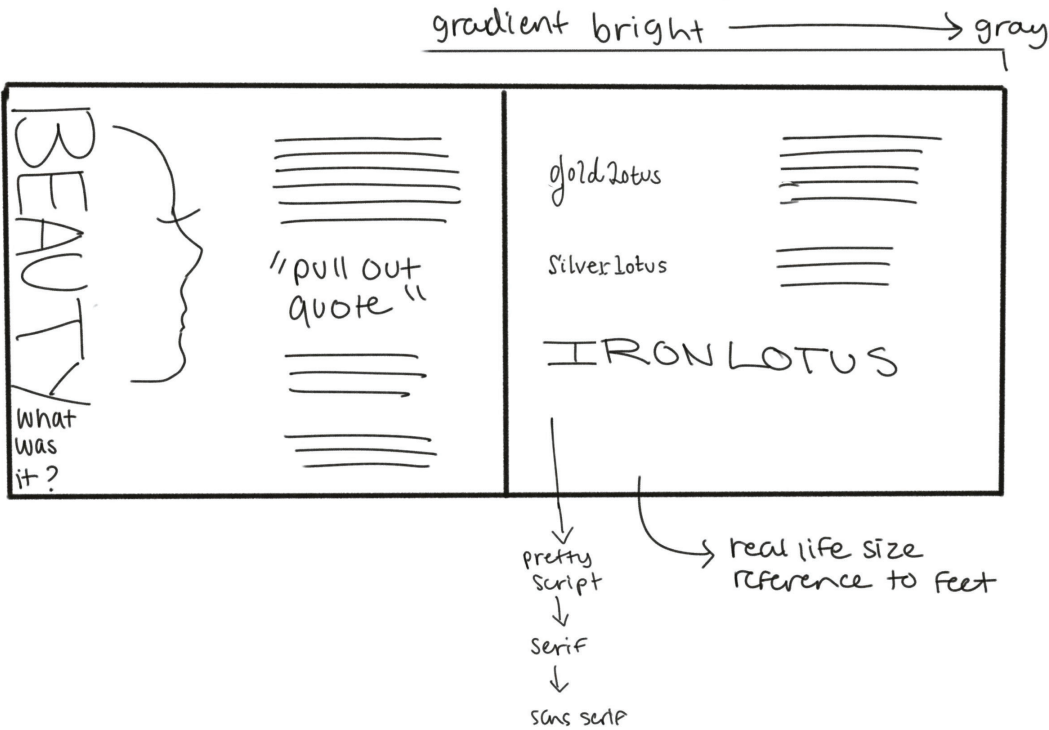
layout # 1



- overlapping images
- tight margins
- transparent images



layout # 2



# Casting Sheet

## Cover

- title is big & on edge
- subhead is small?

- history / origins
- article on Yao niang

overlay  
of Yao  
niang

## Millennium practice (overlay of 1000 years)

bar | timeline showing how  
long it was practiced  
today ended 10<sup>th</sup> century  
US history

## What is beauty?

- what makes  
a woman attractive?
- ↳ marriage
- Cinderella  
↳ became emblematic  
as the trend grew

gold lotus

silver lotus

IRON LOTUS

- size comparison of feet ↑
- paragraph on what they  
meant

talk about ritual  
& the process



big proverb  
"a pair of small  
feet, a bowl  
of tears"

how many survivors  
there are today

- how it ended

imagery

# Roughs

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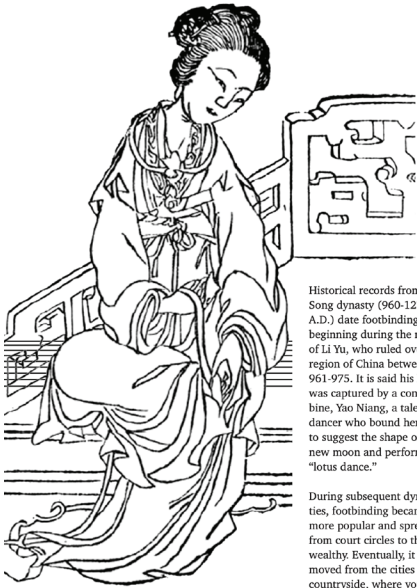
# LOTUS

An Analysis  
on Chinese  
Footbinding

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During subsequent dynasties, footbinding became more popular and spread from court circles to the wealthy. Eventually, it moved from the cities to the countryside, where young girls realized that binding their feet could be their passport to social mobility and increased wealth. When the Manchu nobility came to power in 1644, they tried to ban the practice, but with little success.

The first anti-footbinding committee was formed in Shanghai by a British priest in 1874.

But the practice wasn't outlawed until 1912, when the Qing dynasty had already been toppled by a revolution. Beginning in 1915, government inspectors could levy fines on those who continued to bind their feet. But despite these measures, footbinding still continued in various parts of the country. A year after the Communists came to power in 1949, they too issued their own ban on footbinding. According to the American author William Rossi, who wrote *The Sex Life of the Foot and Shoe*, 40 percent to 50 percent of Chinese women had bound feet in the 19th century. For the upper classes, the figure was almost 100 percent.

# History

## Legend Has It

*The origins of footbinding go back as far as the Shang dynasty (1700-1027 B.C.). The Shang Empress had a clubfoot, so she demanded that footbinding be made compulsory in the court.*

### Women Represented By Parts

According to historian Dorothy Ko, "we hardly know what footbinding is about because the archives fail to answer even the most rudimentary questions. Legends aside, when did it start? How did it spread through time, across geographical regions and across class lines? And, most important, how did women feel about it?" Ko cautions that "there is no neutral or objective knowledge about footbinding" because our sources and informants have a "modern nationalist bias," owing in part to the "intrusion [into China] of Euro-American missionaries" in the mid-nineteenth century.

Ko makes several compelling points, including that the custom of footbinding, which lasted over a thousand years and affected

virtually every province in China, had so many variations in practice, stories of origin, and reasons for being that it is difficult to speak with any certainty about a master narrative.

Women, especially, have a long history of being represented by parts. Their bodies praised, doted upon, idealized, and fragmented, their breasts, or lips, or legs have often stood-in for their moral, or physical, or reproductive value—and not just in the West. Regarding the Chinese roots of the Cinderella tale, for instance, she says the Cinderella story is "part of a long literary tradition whereby poets and storytellers fixated on parts of a maiden's body as a stand-in for the beauty or worth of her entire person."



# Type Tests

# History



## Song Dynasty

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But the practice wasn’t outlawed until 1912, when the Qing dynasty had already been toppled by a revolution. Beginning in 1915, government inspectors could levy fines on those who continued to bind their feet. But despite these measures, footbinding still continued in various parts of the country.

Furthermore, when first-world scholars move beyond a surface-level comprehension of this pervasive tradition, the absence of a complex understanding necessarily points to other elisions, including what Gayatri Spivak might call knowledge of the “consciousness of the woman as subaltern.” But, neither of these points would be apparent when reading the literature of Asian America.

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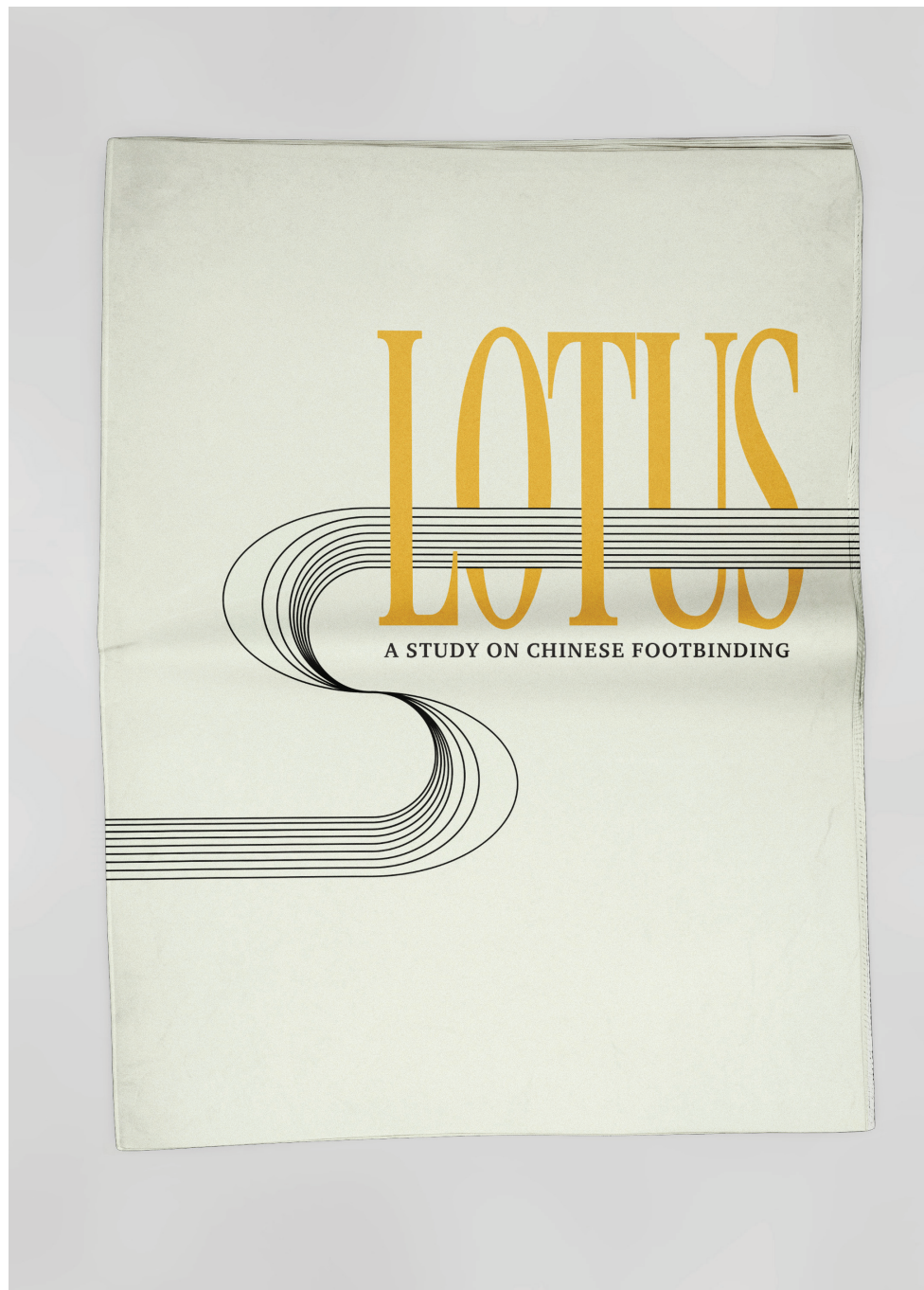
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# Mockups











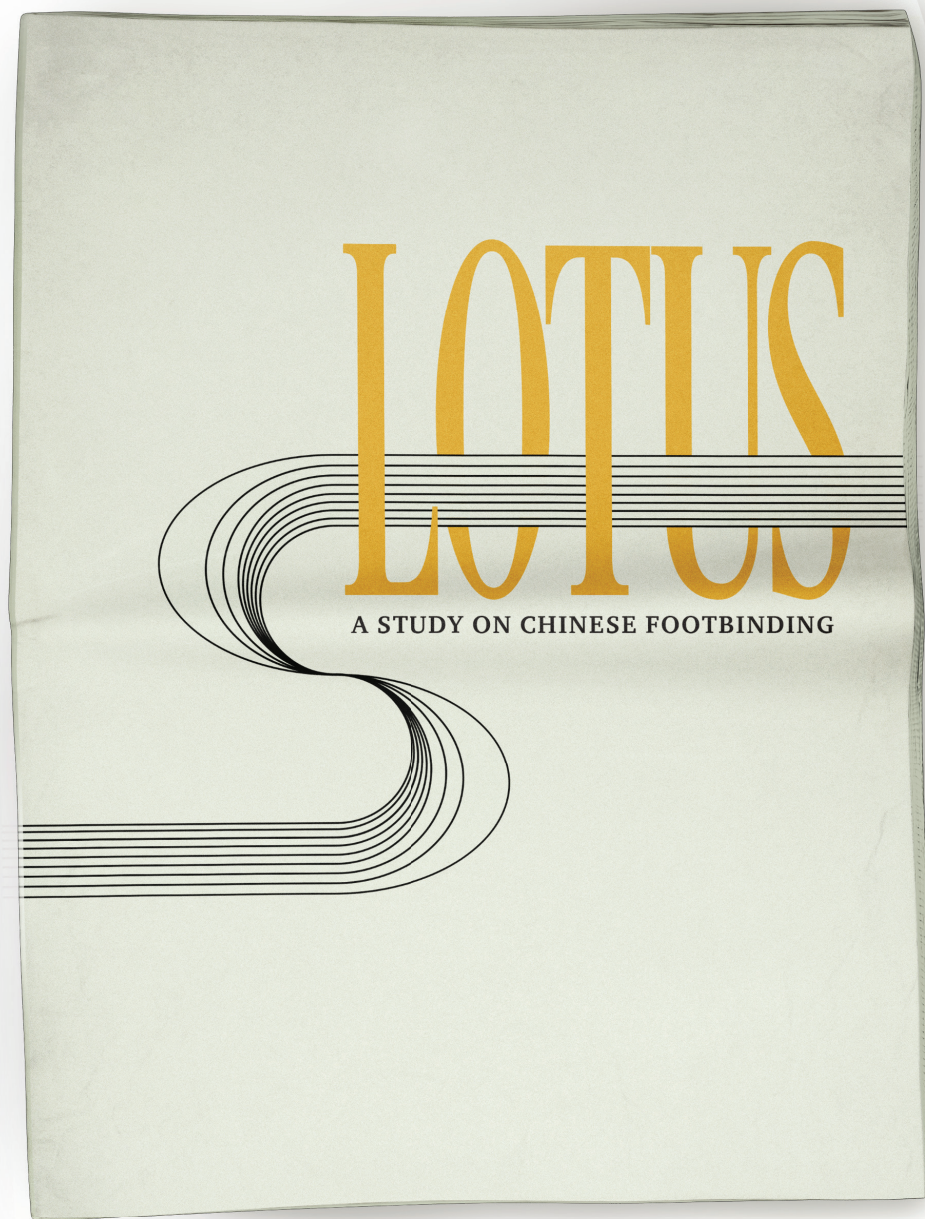








Final Submitted






Chan zu (lit. 'bound feet') is the practice of binding young girls' feet very tightly in order to prevent further growth and normal development. The custom prevailed in China for about 1,000 years until the last reported case of binding in the mid-20th century. At first these tiny and re-modelled feet were merely fashionable for the elite, but very gradually became socially acceptable. The next stage was when the concept of 'lotus feet' (lian zu) became a custom and gained wider acceptance and eventually became an essential element in the very definition of femininity. There was never one type of lotus foot or shoe, instead there were many forms in which local and regional fashions and developments played an important role, namely in the size, shape and final appearance of the feet and their coverings. It was always the aim to create the appearance of a tiny foot.

Only the shaped tip of the foot was placed in the shoe, the heel was normally supported by bandages and sometimes with strips of bamboo. The heel was hidden from public view by a series of wrappings, leggings and trousers.

Lotus feet were also a means of gender differentiation:

boys did not have their feet



boys  
did  
not  
have  
their  
feet

their  
fee

bound, while girls did and in later life this had

an effect on the different roles of men and women. Both men and women considered lotus feet aesthetically beautiful, with their own innate daintiness and symbolism. Such tiny feet also meant that a girl or woman would walk

called the lotus gait, which was regarded as sexually enticing to men. This gait was regarded as important for finding a suitable husband and by doing so increasing the position of the girl and her family. It

also meant that, in many cases, it was difficult for a woman to walk, thus making her literally dependent upon her husband, family and servants.

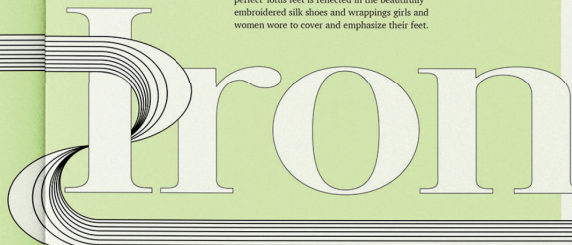
Throughout the centuries a marriageable girl was frequently chosen for the

size of her feet and the quality of her needlework, especially for her footwear. A pair of shoes she had made and embroidered were sent to the home of a prospective husband to be judged by his family. Very small and elaborately decorated shoes were regarded as a sign of self-discipline, patience, fortitude and forbearance with extreme situations, as well as evidence of artistic creativity and household skills.

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X-ray image of a bound foot (Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden).



embroidered silk shoes and wrappings girls and women wore to cover and emphasize their feet.

# Iron

Many women, and their families, took great pride in their tiny feet, which were said to take the shape of a lotus bud with a wide and rounded base (the heel) going into a pointed tip (the toes). Hence their names of lily feet or lotus feet.

The ideal foot length was about 7 cm, which was called the golden lily or the **golden lotus**. Between 7 and 9 cm was known as the **silver lotus**.

In some areas a woman's unbound feet were called **iron lotus**, a term that was regarded as being insulting. Yet badly bound or shaped feet were seen by some as far worse than 'long' or unbound feet. Mis-formed bound feet were called names such as half-squeezed foot, half-blocked foot and little crooked bone. The pride and social necessity of 'perfect' lotus feet is reflected in the beautifully embroidered silk shoes and wrappings girls and women wore to cover and emphasize their feet.



An early tinted photograph of two wealthy Han Chinese women with bound feet (c. 1870; courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-14686).

Boy with his elder sister who has bound feet (late 19th century; courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-07450).

Type size is accurate to the three bound feet  
 □ lengths: Golden Lotus, Silver Lotus, Iron Lotus.



# History

It is said that the practice of foot binding originated among court dancers in the early Song Dynasty (960-1279). The earliest relevant written records date to the 13th century and refer to the fame of the dancing girls with tiny feet and beautiful low shoes at the court of the Southern Tang Dynasty (937-975) in southern-central China. Over the centuries foot binding was practiced by many elite families and later became widespread among all social levels. Many women with bound feet were able to walk unaided and work in the fields, albeit with greater limitations than women whose feet were not bound.

It is estimated that by the early 19th century up to 40%, and possibly higher, of Chinese women had their feet bound. Among the elite women this would have been nearly 100%. Most of these women were Han, but other groups such as the Dungan and Hui peoples and some Cantonese practices this 'art' as well. Some families practiced variations of foot binding, such as loose binding, which did not break the bones of the arch and toes but simply narrowed the foot. In contrast, since 1644 when the Manchu Qing Dynasty came to power in China, Manchu women were forbidden to bind their feet. Instead they invented their own form of shoe with a platform or central pedestal that meant they walked in a similar, swaying manner. These shoes were called 'flower bowls' or sometimes 'boat' and 'moon' shoes.

# Process

The process of foot binding started between the ages of 5 and 8, when the arch of the foot was still soft and not fully developed. The entire process took 2 to 5 years and caused extreme pain. It was generally an elder female member of the girl's family, her future mother-in-law or a professional foot binder who carried out the initial breaking and ongoing binding of the feet. This was considered preferable to having the mother do it, as she might be too sympathetic to her daughter's pain and less willing to keep the bindings tight.

Each foot would first be soaked in a warm mixture, which was intended to soften the feet. The toenails were cut back as far as possible (or even removed) to prevent in-growth and any subsequent infections. To enable the size of the feet to be reduced, the toes on each foot were curled under, then pressed with great force downwards and squeezed into the sole of the foot until the toes bent or broke.

The large toe was left unturned in order to help with balance. The toes were held tightly against the sole of the foot while the foot was drawn down straight with the leg and the arch forcibly bent upwards. The long, cotton bandages (3m long and 5cm wide) were repeatedly wound in a figure-eight movement, starting at the inside of the

foot at the instep, then carried over the toes, under the foot, and round the heel. At the same time the toes were pressed tightly into the sole of the foot. At each pass around the foot, the binding cloth was tightened, pulling the ball of the foot and the heel together, causing the foot to fold at the arch, and pressing the toes underneath.

The girl's bent feet required a great deal of care and attention and they would be unbound regularly. In some wealthier families the process of unbinding and rebinding with fresh bandages were carried out every day, while poorer families may do it twice or three times a week. Each time the feet were unbound, they were washed, the toes carefully checked for injuries and the nails trimmed. The feet were also massaged to soften them and to make the joints and bones more flexible. The feet were then soaked to cause any dead flesh to fall off. Then the girl's toes were folded back under and the feet were rebound. The bindings were pulled ever tighter each time this occurred.

Loose binding is where a narrow, bow-shaped foot is required rather than the arched foot described above. This form of binding was associated with women in more remote regions where the weather and working conditions did not suit the tighter form of binding. It consisted of wrapping the toes under the sole, but with not enough pressure to break the bones. The aim was to create a narrow foot that gave the appearance of a bound foot. Symbolic binding took place in some areas, so a woman may walk around unbound while working, but when approaching a town or for a festival she would bind her feet in the manner of traditional binding. Another form for girls was to have their feet slightly bound just before they got married and then the binding was undone after the wedding.

During the late 19th century Chinese, Western and Muslim reformers challenged foot binding, but it was not until the early 20th century that foot binding began to die out. This was due to concepts of 'modernization' (Westernization), changes in social conditions, as well as various active anti-foot binding campaigns. Some groups, for example, argued that foot binding weakened China as it disabled and enfeebled women, who in turn might bear weak sons. Others attack it as causing women suffering, but the latter seem to have been in the minority. The Empress Dowager Cixi, a Manchu, issued an edict forbidding foot binding, but it was never seriously enforced. 1912 saw the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the introduction of the Nationalist government of the Republic of China. They officially banned foot binding, but with little vigor or success. It was not until the Communists came into power in 1949 that the practice was forbidden and remains officially banned in China to the present day.

The widespread acceptance and popularity of foot binding is reflected in the presence, during the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, of troops of dancers with bound feet, as well as circus performers who stood on moving horses. The diaspora of Chinese families throughout the world in the 19th century, also meant that women with bound feet could be found in Europe, Asia, notably Hong Kong and Indonesia, and America.

Some estimate that as many as 2 billion Chinese women broke and bound their feet to attain this agonizing ideal of physical perfection.



A group of peasant women with lightly bound feet (early 20th century; courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ggbain-08997).



# Today

## Zhou Guizhen, 86

She remembers tricking the government inspectors.

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

Zhou is now a fragile 86-year-old with a rueful chuckle. Tittering along in her blue silk shoes embroidered with phoenixes, she marvels at how the world has changed. Born into a rich family and married into fabulous wealth, all her possessions were confiscated by the Communists. Now she opens the door to her dark, decrepit one-room hut with earthen floors and paper-lattice windows through which the cold wind whistles. Values have been turned upside down since her childhood. Then, she says, bound feet were seen as a mark of class. Now, 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 Liuyicun 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."

## Wang Lifan, 79

She was just 7 years old when her mother started binding her feet: breaking her toes and binding them underneath the sole of the foot with bandages. After her mother died, Wang carried on, breaking the arch of her own foot to force her toes and heel ever closer. Now 79, Wang no longer remembers the pain.

"Because I bound my own feet, I could manipulate them more gently until the bones were broken. Young bones are soft, and break more easily."



One of the Liu Yi ladies, with bound feet, late 20th century. Photograph: The Irish Sun.

Outside the temple in Liuyicun, old women sit chatting, some resting their churched feet in the sunlight. Seven years ago, there were still 300 women with bound feet in this village. But many have since died. The village's former prosperity, from its thriving textile business, was the reason every family bound their daughters' feet. And they carried on long after foot binding was outlawed in 1912.

These women even gained fame of a sort, forming a bound-feet disco dancing troupe which toured the region. Zhou was once the star of the troupe, but now she's too old to dance. Such public display is a far cry from their youth, when their bound feet restricted their freedom, keeping them close to their homes. But the local press criticized the dance troupe, talking of exploitation and freak shows. These women yet again are victims of history in a society that finds their plight an embarrassing reminder of its own recent brutality towards women.

By the end of the 19th century more and more groups, of all nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, were active in fighting against foot binding, but this led to various unexpected consequences. In particular, many bound women were abandoned by their husbands who wished to be perceived as modern. Some men, especially young students, for example, would only marry women with a modern education and natural (tianzhu) feet. Women with bound feet started to feel ashamed of their appearance and at times were publicly ridiculed. In a relatively short time foot binding had gone from a deeply established and time honored tradition to one against which public hostility was increasing.

At the same time more and more bound women started to unbind or "let out" (fangzu) their feet. In some cases this process was as painful as the original binding process. Few fangzu women ever walked in a 'normal' manner again. As the 20th century progressed more and more women had natural feet (tianzhu). When the Communist government came to power in 1949 they were vehemently anti-foot binding regarding it as being archaic and preventing women from taking a more active role in the economic life of the country. The government had inspectors who went around the country recording who was bound and who was being unbound, and to prevent any further binding.

# The End of Foot Binding

# Body Modification & Body Image

## By The Body Project

We tend to think of human bodies as simply products of nature. In reality, however, our bodies are also the products of culture. That is, all cultures around the world modify and reshape human bodies. This is accomplished through a vast variety of techniques and for many different reasons, including:

- To make the body conform to ideals of beauty
- To mark membership in a group
- To mark social status
- To convey information about an individual's personal qualities or accomplishments

Certain body modification practices, such as neck elongation or tooth filing, may strike Americans as strange and exotic, we must realize that we modify our own bodies in countless ways. Dieting, body-building, tanning, ear piercing and cosmetic surgery have long been common in the United States, and practices such as tattooing, body piercing and scarification are becoming increasingly popular.

People may seek to control, "correct" or "perfect" some aspect of their appearance, or to use their bodies as a canvas for creative self-expression. While some seek to improve their body-image, this is not necessarily a motivating factor for everyone who engages in body modification. Additionally, some attempts at body modification can also have unintended negative consequences that might ultimately damage self-esteem

## Cosmetic Surgery

According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), in 2008, Americans underwent 10.2 million cosmetic procedures, paying out just under \$12 billion (Mann 2009). While the general economic downturn has led to a slight decrease in such procedures, cosmetic surgery has increased dramatically in the last decade. In fact, while the majority of procedures are performed on women, men's use of cosmetic procedures has increased 20 percent since the year 2000 (Atkinson 2008).

Opinion is divided on the benefits of cosmetic surgery. Some suggest that cosmetic procedures can improve self-esteem and combat negative body image. Others see surgical interventions as a sad indictment of a culture with rigid and narrow ideas of beauty—a culture that values youth, sexuality and appearance more than experience, character and substance (Jeffreys 2000). Critics also note the potential risks associated with cosmetic surgery. In addition to the risk of post-operative infections and other surgical complications, one recent study revealed a correlation between plastic surgery, substance abuse and suicide (Lipworth, 2007).

## Tanning

Ideas about physical beauty not only vary a great deal from culture to culture, but also change over time. American views of suntanned skin have changed dramatically over the past century. In Victorian America, pale skin was the ideal. Women wore hats and gloves and carried parasols to shield their skin from the sun. At a time when many people still earned a living by laboring out of doors, a pale complexion was an indication of affluence and indoor work and leisure. By the late twentieth century, however, most people were earning a living indoors. So tanned skin became an indication of affluence, a sign that one had the time and money to lounge by the pool, play golf or tennis, or travel to tropical destinations.

## Ask Yourself

How do you and those around you modify your bodies? What motivates you to do so? What are the potential benefits and risks (physical, emotional and social) of such body modification practices?

To what extent do rigid and unrealistic ideals of beauty encourage us to change our bodies? Should we try to conform to these ideals or try to change these ideals?





LOTUS was designed in Dmitry Tetin's Spring 2022 Typography III course in the DFA Communication Design program at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.  
Cover + interior design by Elisabeth Klein

Edited by  
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Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas

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Typography  
Deske Po

Charter Roman + Dold

Images + Content

Eastwood, Gillian Vogelsang. "Chinese Lotus Shoes." Refresh, TRC Digital Exhibitions, 28 Nov. 2020, <https://trc-leiden.nl/trc-digital-exhibition/index.php/chinese-lotus-shoes/item/151-11-bibliography>.

Interview

Lim, Louisa. "Painful Memories for China's Footbinding Survivors." NPR, NPR, 19 Mar. 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=8966942>.