

Bridgewater College

**BC Digital Commons**

---

Research Awards

---

2023

## Love and Labor: Footbinding in Rural China in the Twentieth Century

Meghann Burgess

*Bridgewater College*, [mburgess@eagles.bridgewater.edu](mailto:mburgess@eagles.bridgewater.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/research\\_awards](https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/research_awards)



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Burgess, Meghann, "Love and Labor: Footbinding in Rural China in the Twentieth Century" (2023). *Research Awards*. 18.

[https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/research\\_awards/18](https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/research_awards/18)

This Student Paper is brought to you for free and open access by BC Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Awards by an authorized administrator of BC Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [rlowe@bridgewater.edu](mailto:rlowe@bridgewater.edu).

Love and Labor: Footbinding in Rural China in the Twentieth Century

Meghann Burgess

HIST 415: China Since 1600

December 7, 2022

## Introduction

“Autumn wind blew subtle fragrances of cassia... Children raced with shadows in the yard, playing hide-and-seek. And me? A little girl of eight, I had already begun to do the work of an adult... Spinning with me under the moon were my sister-in-law, two distant aunts, and a neighbor.”<sup>1</sup> This excerpt, written by Xie Bingying, describes the expectations for young rural girls in China. Even in the twentieth century, Chinese girls had their feet bound and were expected to remain in the household, performing domestic labor and handcrafts. Footbinding was a practice entrenched in all levels of Chinese society and likely began during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) as a fashion statement among elite courtesans. The practice diffused from elites to the rural masses and became a beauty standard lasting centuries – all the way up to the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> It involved folding the toes of young girls (typically when they were 3 to 7 years old) under the sole of the foot, then wrapping them tightly in cloth to keep the small shape and prevent the foot from growing. The pain and inability to walk or run properly crippled Chinese women for life. What is interesting is that footbinding in urban upper-class families had “virtually disappeared” in the 1910s because of anti-footbinding movements.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the practice remained among rural populations throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century.

Why?

Despite assumptions otherwise, footbinding was pervasive among rural Chinese populations and would remain so until social and economic factors in the early to mid-twentieth century began the slow demise of the practice. But why was footbinding so common among rural

---

<sup>1</sup> Xie Bingying, *A Woman Soldier's Own Story: The Autobiography of Xie Bingying*, trans. Lily Chia Brissman and Barry Brissman (New York: Colombia Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>2</sup> John Robert Shepherd, *Footbinding as Fashion: Ethnicity, Labor, and Status in Traditional China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Laurel Bossen and Hill Gates. *Bound Feet, Young Hands* (California: Stanford University Press, 2017), 7.

populations – where hard labor was common – when it severely limited mobility? One could argue that the rural masses were simply emulating the upper class, where the practice originated, but that diffusion of culture took place long before the twentieth century. Instead, I argue that women in rural China bound their feet in the twentieth century for two reasons: conforming to societal standards to make marriage matches and to support the handcraft labor system of rural China. Mothers-in-law preferred their sons to marry girls with small bound feet and rural societies reinforced this standard. Having bound feet showed mothers-in-law that a girl could deal with pain, was submissive, and was hardworking (because she could not physically run from the labor expected of her).<sup>4</sup> Also, much of the work rural girls were doing was handcraft related (spinning and weaving cotton, weaving reed mats, processing fruit or silkworms, etc.) which required “dexterity but little... mobility.”<sup>5</sup> This work required them to use their hands, but not their feet – footbinding was compatible with sedentary labor like weaving and spinning, then. By centering the life experiences of rural Chinese women and their experiences with footbinding, marriage, and labor, I hope to shed light on why such a destructive and painful practice lasted until the mid-twentieth century.

## **Rural Footbinding**

There were many methods of binding feet and not every mother desired the ideal ‘3-inch lotus’ for her daughter. A typical binding method is described below – to achieve what was known as a “cucumber foot”. This method was less destructive than attempting to achieve the golden lotus foot as it left the big toe in place, but still crushed the smaller toes under the sole of

---

<sup>4</sup> Laurel Bossen, *Chinese Women and Rural Development: Sixty Years of Change in Lu Village, Yunnan* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 72.

<sup>5</sup> Bossen, 43.

the foot. Cucumber feet were typically 5 to 6 inches and were preferred by rural women who had heavier labor like field work or gathering firewood. Movement was still painful and crippling, but a cucumber foot was easier to walk around on than a lotus foot.

To bind a foot, begin with the four smaller toes. Bend them under the sole; your goal is to bring them across under the forward plantar or ‘palm’ of the foot until they peek out on the inner side, in line with the still-straight big toe. It may not be possible to accomplish this at the first binding. Bind repeatedly, until: a) the right shape is achieved; b) the child resists so violently and determinedly that she is let off with a looser binding; or c) the binder – almost always the child’s mother – can no longer bear the child’s misery, and settles for less than an ideal foot... As the small toes are bound under, the two-yard-long binding cloth is wrapped in figure eight fashion around the back of the heel and the Achilles tendon. This may be done only to stabilize the wrapping of the toes, pulled firm against the structure of the foot, but not further distorting it.<sup>6</sup>

One woman, Hsieh Ping-ying remembered having her feet bound by her mother. She described herself as a “prisoner” shouting and howling. She “felt as if the bones of [her] feet were broken and... From henceforth [she] spent most of [her] days sitting by the fire spinning.”<sup>7</sup> This reflects two key concepts. The first is that young girls had no say in whether their feet were bound or not – and that the experience was a traumatizing, agonizing one. The second is that as soon as her feet were bound, Ping-ying spent the rest of her days spinning cotton within the house. This is an experience known intimately by girls across rural China. But why? Why did Chinese mothers bind their daughters’ feet? Laurel Bossen and Hill Gates argue that mothers bound their daughters’ feet “because it was an efficient way to make them stay seated and work with their hands.”<sup>8</sup> Handcrafts were an invaluable aspect of rural family incomes. Having a sedentary labor force of young girls who remained in the house and spun and wove handcrafts day in and day out was a sure way for rural households to bring money in. Binding their feet,

---

<sup>6</sup> Hill Gates, *Footbinding and Women’s Labor in Sichuan* (London: Routledge, 2015), 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Bossen, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Bossen and Gates, 12.

therefore restricting their movement outside the home, left rural girls with little choice but to devote themselves to this (often unacknowledged) labor.

Historian Dorothy Ko argues that the majority of footbinders in the modern era were peasant women.<sup>9</sup> Anti-footbinding societies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century had heavily decreased the levels of footbinding among the urban upper classes, but the practice remained incredibly popular among rural populations. This can be seen clearly in the study conducted by Hill Gates in the Sichuan region of China. Gates interviewed nearly 5,000 rural women, but her full sample size was 16,478 women (the relatives of the 5,000 interviewed women). From this study, Gates discovered that virtually 100% of the women born in 1850-54 had bound feet. This percentage would slowly decrease over the decades, but the number of footbound women in Sichuan would not drop below 50% until the 1935-39 birth cohort.<sup>10</sup> This clearly shows the prevalence of footbinding in the rural regions of Sichuan. Other studies have been conducted in rural China populations and have found similar results.<sup>11</sup> There are exceptions, especially among ethnic minorities like the Hakka (who typically do not bind their women's feet).

It is also important to discuss the intricacies of rural footbinding. For example, rural families that were extremely poor tended to not bind their daughters' feet as they "required their heavy labor in the fields."<sup>12</sup> Footbinding complemented light labor better (spinning, weaving, etc.) and yet scholar John Robert Shepherd argues that "footbinding interfered with field labor less than is usually assumed, and bound-footed women worked in the fields as their families

---

<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Gates, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Hill Gates and Laurel Bossen have both conducted numerous studies related to this topic and have pioneered the theory that rural footbinding and rural girls' handcraft labor are interconnected i.e., when this labor became obsolete thanks to factory-made yarn and cloth, footbinding also declined in rural areas.

<sup>12</sup> Bossen, 39.

needed, despite awkwardness and discomfort.”<sup>13</sup> Like in most cultures, the pain of women is ignored in favor of the labor they can perform for the ‘superiors’ in their life. The most destitute families of course would avoid binding their daughters’ feet, but even poor families pursued footbinding. A woman interviewed by Laurel Bossen in Yunnan claimed that “the households with the most difficult lives did not bind feet very small, they just bound them to be smooth feet (*shun, shun jiao* – these are also called ‘cucumber feet’ because of their narrow, tubular shape).”<sup>14</sup> Poor families, or those looking to bind their daughters’ feet but still remain some measure of physical ability, would choose the ‘cucumber’ method.

### **Footbinding and Marriage**

Bound feet, especially 3-inch ‘golden lotus’ feet, were a beauty symbol in China for centuries. This held true even among the rural populations. Laurel Bossen argues that “...the belief that binding was beneficial to women, making them beautiful and improving their marriage chances, was also deeply ingrained in the population.”<sup>15</sup> Beyond the economic incentive, rural mothers bound their daughters’ feet because it made them more ‘beautiful’ and increased their chances of making a good marriage match – or getting married at all. This way of thinking was so prevalent among rural women that the expression *daijiao yatou jie bu dao* (“big footed servant girls do not get married”) became popularized.<sup>16</sup> The classist undertones of this expression – bind your feet or you’ll end up an ‘ugly’ servant! – would suitably frighten rural girls into accepting the agony of footbinding. Better crippled and in pain than unmarried and

---

<sup>13</sup> Shepherd, 112.

<sup>14</sup> Bossen, 53.

<sup>15</sup> Bossen, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Bossen, 52.

ugly. Having bound feet, even the larger ‘cucumber’ style, would make rural girls more appealing to prospective mothers-in-law.

Properly bound feet were a way to attract marriage prospects. As John Robert Shepherd states, high-quality bindings and shoe embroidery were signals to possible mothers-in-law of a girl’s “character, her ability to endure pain, her diligence, and her craftsmanship,”<sup>17</sup> all selling point for a future daughter-in-law. It wasn’t so much about how appealing a girl was to her future husband, but how useful she could make herself for her mother-in-law, as that is whose work she would be supplementing upon moving to her new home after marriage. Rural girls were made to fear not attracting marriage offers. This is seen clearly in the account of an anonymous women going by “Lovely Flower.” During her interview with Laurel Bossen and Hill Gates, she relayed this story:

“I was seven years old when my mother took me out to the fields. There, while the buckwheat was in bloom, Mother bound my feet, tightly winding the cloth around them. She used a binding cloth to bind them tightly; it would [eventually] break the bones. When I cried, my mother just hit me. Ma said that my feet were too big; no one would want me, and I would not find a *poiija* [literally, mother-in-law family].<sup>18</sup>

This story reflects the fears of rural girls that their feet would be ‘too big’ to attract a *poiija*, a mother-in-law who would bring her into her home and family. “Lovely Flower” was made to endure this pain because it would better ensure her chances of marriage in the future. ‘No one would want’ her big feet – footbinding was the only way to increase her marriageability. Footbinding was also a method of “marrying up” for rural girls – or, at the very least, it was sold to them as such. In an interview with Ida Pruitt, Ning Lao-t’ai-t’ai (who was born in 1867) said

---

<sup>17</sup> Shepherd, 60.

<sup>18</sup> “Lovely Flower”, interview by Laurel Bossen and Hill Gates, October 19, 2008, in *Bound Feet, Young Hands*, page 1.



that “match-makers were not asked ‘Is she beautiful?’ but ‘How small are her feet?’ A plain face is given by heaven but poorly bound feet are a sign of laziness.”<sup>19</sup> A girl’s physical beauty – or lack of it – could be ignored if she had small bound feet. This calls back to previously mentioned ideas among rural women that bound feet signaled that a young girl would make a proper, submissive, hard-laboring daughter-in-law. If her feet were bound, it did not matter if a rural girl was beautiful or not. She could still make a good marriage match – or even marry above her station.

During her research in Sichuan in the 1990s, Hill Gates interviewed many elderly rural women about their experiences with footbinding. One woman, a Ms. Wu from Suining (born in 1887) told Gates that in her natal village, “many girls nearby were bound only with cucumber feet, but I had heard stories of women whose mother-in-law and husbands tormented them about having big feet, so I never tried to escape footbinding.”<sup>20</sup> This reflects the idea that rural girls typically bound their feet cucumber-style. It also shows how pervasive the marital motivations were for binding feet. Ms. Wu was afraid she would marry into a family that would berate and shame her for having too-big feet because of stories she heard from other rural women. Thus, she ‘never tried to escape footbinding’ and likely bound her feet smaller to ensure she would never meet the fate of the women she reminisced about. Gates interviewed another woman, a Ms. Liu in Lezhi (born 1905) whose story resembled Ms. Wu’s in many ways. Ms. Liu’s parents died when she was young, and she actually bound her feet herself at 7. She also chose the lotus method over the cucumber method to ensure her feet would be small. Her mother was not alive to force her to do it – she chose footbinding of her own volition. But why? Ms. Liu said she did it

---

<sup>19</sup> Ida Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Ms. Wu, interview by Hill Gates, April 24, 1992, in *Footbinding and Women’s Labor in Sichuan*, page 30.

because “she was afraid that the Lius, who had brought her into the family, as a child daughter-in-law, might change their minds and sell or give her away to yet another family. And binding was very much the local custom.” She willingly bound her feet to appease her family-in-law and to ensure they would not kick her out. To keep her marriage, and her marital family, Ms. Liu bound her feet. She also mentioned that footbinding was a ‘local custom’, reinforcing that it was popular among rural populations. Beyond marital motivations, Ms. Liu also bound her feet because she “wanted to be pretty.”<sup>21</sup> So, it was a way of achieving the beauty standard for her as well. Small, bound feet could make girls beautiful *and* help them make marriage matches.

A woman by the name of Jin Suxin relayed her experiences with footbinding to Yao Lingxi in the 1930s. Lingxi was obsessed with lotus feet and collected literature relating to footbinding. He published his findings in *Cai fei lu* [Records of Gathering Fragrance]. Jin Suxin told the story of how she started footbinding. She spoke of enduring the initial agony of beginning to bind her feet. She once went to a party where she saw two young girls whose feet are smaller than hers. Her uncle then said to her, ““Look at their feet, so small and straight. How respectful! Look at yours, so big and fat. Who will be willing to be your matchmaker?”” Jin was made to feel ugly and humiliated as everyone at the party laughed at her feet (which were only 4 ½ inches long). Her uncle’s words reflect the idea that bound feet were a beauty symbol, and that without small feet Jin would not find a matchmaker who would get her a good marriage. This experience convinced Jin to bind her feet even smaller, no matter the cost, so that she could be beautiful like the two girls at the party – and so she could find a matchmaker. She eventually succeeded in binding her feet to 3.8 inches, and then even smaller. Villagers then began admiring

---

<sup>21</sup> Ms. Liu, interview by Hill Gates, April 8, 1992, in *Footbinding and Women’s Labor in Sichuan*, page 43.

her feet, “which had become the number-one beauty in the surrounding villages.”<sup>22</sup> Jin achieved the small, beautiful feet she had wept for. Those who had previously mocked her ‘large’ feet, like her uncle, were now praising her for her beauty. The social pressures broke Jin down until she felt she had no choice but to painfully destroy her feet to meet beauty standards. Jin’s story, and the experiences of women like Ms. Wu, Ms. Liu, Ning Lao-t’ai-t’ai, and “Lovely Flower” prove how strong the connection was between marriage, beauty, and footbinding in twentieth century rural China.

### **Rural Labor while Footbound**

In twentieth century, rural China, young women brought in a valuable source of income for their households by producing handcrafts. Coincidentally, handcraft labor and footbinding complement each other. Handcrafts, like spinning and weaving cotton, require girls to have deft and talented fingers – not properly functioning feet that could give them maneuverability. Thus, binding girls’ feet, which crippled their mobility and often restricted them to the house, could supplement the handcraft labor system of rural China. By forcing girls to remain in the home, they would have little choice but to spin yarn, weave cloth, make clothing and shoes, etc. Other examples of handcraft labor included “pick[ing] and/or process[ing] tea; pick[ing] opium...field work... housework...non-textile craft...”<sup>23</sup> There would be “little economic loss” for families that did not require their daughters to help in the fields – they could devote all of their time to making handcrafts. And, even in families that needed their daughters to work in the fields (typically poorer families), binding was not always abandoned completely. Instead, it was “postponed” or girls’ feet would be bound in “a less severe form” so as to not fully damage their

---

<sup>22</sup> Ping Wang, *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>23</sup> Gates, 134.

mobility and lifting abilities. Lastly, families that practiced “dry” agriculture (like wheat) were more likely to bind their daughters’ feet compared to those that practiced “wet” agriculture (like rice). This was because wet fields meant bound feet were likely to “sink into the mud.”<sup>24</sup>

Laurel Bossen and Hill Gates make the argument that rural mothers purposefully bound their daughters’ feet because it forced them to remain in the house and do housework or handcraft labor. Once a girl was bound, she could not “escape work” and “could no longer run and play” because she was in so much pain, she could do nothing but stay “obediently at home.” And, until factory-made cloth and yarn arrived in China to challenge the domestic-made products, it was practicable and profitable for rural girls to remain in the house producing handcrafts. Mothers and mothers-in-law were more productive at their weaving if they had young girls in their household who, because they were footbound, could do nothing but produce yarn for the mothers to weave. Eventually, due to factory-made yarn and cloth defeating its domestic competition, girls’ handcrafts stopped being as profitable and therefore “the incentive to bind their feet” vanished.<sup>25</sup>

While handcraft labor was an important income-source for rural households – and motivating factor for binding daughters’ feet – girls living in agricultural-based families bound their feet in many cases as well. The cucumber-method of binding was prevalent, but even in families where women were expected to do fieldwork or any labor that required being on their feet, more severe methods of binding occurred. Ms. Liu, with her lotus-feet, is one example of this, as we shall see momentarily. Also, women still worked the wet rice paddies and did intensive labor like hoeing dry fields despite having bound feet. Some women would even “bring

---

<sup>24</sup> Shepherd, 99.

<sup>25</sup> Bossen and Gates, 8-24.

an extra pair of cloth shoes and bindings to the flooded rice fields.”<sup>26</sup> Others would strap thicker materials like palm leaves to their feet when working the paddies to keep from sinking into the ground, or from the mud sinking into their bindings and infecting their feet.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the ways footbinding could limit mobility mattered little to rural women who still wished to achieve small feet. They found ways to labor in the fields regardless of how their bound feet limited them. There were some regional differences as well. In northern China, the growing season was shorter, so women spent the longer winters making handcrafts in the house. They still did fieldwork when necessary, but the climate and labor system in the north tended to be more compatible with footbinding. Southern China had a longer growing season so more hands were needed in the fields. Women tended to bind their feet less in the south, or at least in less severe ways.<sup>28</sup>

Hill Gates’ interviews support the ways in which rural labor and footbinding were interconnected. Ms. Wu did agriculture, sewing, embroidering, and spun yarn. When she was 18, she also “started to help the family outside too, picking cotton.”<sup>29</sup> Wu had bound feet, and while she performed handcraft labor to supplement her household’s income, she also did agricultural work. Another woman interviewed by Gates, a Ms. Gao, mentioned how she “didn’t work in wet rice fields” because of her bound feet since “that’s how you get infections.” Beyond agricultural work, Gao took care of livestock, shell corn and actually stopped binding her feet when she was 13. She had moved in with her marital family at this point, and they were poor (and her sister-in-law crippled from improper binding) so Gao had to take on a lot more (and a lot heavier) labor.

---

<sup>26</sup> Bossen, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Shepherd, 101.

<sup>28</sup> Shepherd, 99-100.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Ms. Wu, page 30.

She spun yarn, raised silkworms, dug fields, made shoes, etc.<sup>30</sup> Like Wu, Gao produced handcrafts, but unlike Wu, Gao did not work the fields and actually did more labor outside the home. Both women had bound feet, but performed different kinds of labor, and Gao would eventually ‘let her feet out’ because it was not economically viable for her to have limited mobility with her marital family. Ms. Liu, who had lotus-bound feet, did a lot of heavy outdoor labor. She would spend her days, with her tightly bound 3-inch feet, “weeding fields, collecting fuelwood, carrying basketloads of 60 to 70 *jin* (80 to 95 pounds), and pushing the stone rice-polishing mill.” Liu working the rice mill is the most fascinating aspect of her entire interview. With her feet bound as small as they were, her mobility *should* have been severely limited. At the very least, she would have experienced intense pain upon forcing herself to take part in such heavy labor. The rice mill itself was difficult for footbound women to work because one needed foot traction to push it. Women with their warped feet covered in cotton cloth would find it incredibly difficult to work the mill. Beyond the herculean task of hard labor and working the mill with 3-inch lotus feet, Liu also spun and wove cotton.<sup>31</sup> Wu, Gao, and Liu are three examples of the varying kinds of labor rural Chinese women participated in with bound feet.

‘Lovely Flower’ whose feet had bound so brutally by her mother so that she would make a good marriage match, contributed greatly to her family’s income by producing handcrafts. This handcraft production was, of course, facilitated by Lovely Flower’s bound feet, as she was forced to remain in the house and had no other choice but to produce handcrafts. The day her feet were bound for the first time, Lovely Flower returned home and her mother:

...just made me sit down and spin thread. At that time, they did not let girls go outside. When I was smaller, I could still go outside to run around, but when I grew, then I could not go out; I had to stay at home and work, spinning thread and weaving cloth. The yarn

---

<sup>30</sup> Ms. Gao, interview by Hill Gates, April 12, 1992, in *Footbinding and Women’s Labor in Sichuan*, page 37.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Ms. Liu, page 42-43.

that I spun was very good. I also spun yarn for other people, earning money. Other people brought cotton to me, and when I had finished spinning, they came to take the cotton thread that I had spun. They gave me money or gave me *mantou* [steamed bread]. When I was young, I also wove straw hats. My father took them to market to sell.”<sup>32</sup>

Lovely Flower stayed in her home once her feet were bound. She was no longer allowed to go outside and play and even if she were allowed to, the pain from her bound feet would have likely kept her from running like she used to. Instead, she remained in the house ‘spinning thread and weaving cloth’ like so many other rural girls would. The handcrafts she produced were then sold for money. Any straw hats she produced were also taken by her father to be sold. Upon binding her feet, Lovely Flower was relegated to the household as a money-producing source of handcraft labor. She could not and was not able to leave the home. Until she married and moved to her marital home, she existed as a labor source for her natal family, and her bound feet facilitated this relationship. There are intricacies to everything and not every rural family bound their daughters’ feet. However, there are enough firsthand accounts that show that footbinding (and its codependent relationship with handcraft labor) was prevalent among many rural households during the early to mid-twentieth century.

## **Conclusion**

Footbinding was a fundamental aspect of Chinese culture for centuries. Where once it was a practice found only among the elites, it eventually diffused to all levels of Chinese society. It reached its peak of popularity during the Ming and Qing dynasties and began its gradual decline towards death beginning in the late nineteenth century. By the 1950s, the practice of footbinding would be practically dead. However, it died out much quicker in urban areas of

---

<sup>32</sup> “Lovely Flower” interview, page 1.

China than it did in rural China. In fact, footbinding was most pervasive among rural populations. This paper has discussed the multiple reasons why footbinding was so prevalent – and lasted so much longer – in rural China in the twentieth century. I have argued that rural Chinese women bound their feet in the twentieth century because it allowed them to make marriage matches and because it supported the rural labor system of handcrafts. Footbinding was a beauty symbol for rural women. It was also a method of making marriage matches as mothers-in-law were always looking for daughters-in-law with properly bound feet as it told them that a girl was submissive, diligent, and able to withstand pain. In some cases, it could allow girls to marry above their station. Footbinding was also complementary with rural handcrafts because it forced rural girls to remain in the home where they produced handcrafts which supplemented family incomes.

Despite these incentives to bind their daughters' feet, rural populations would eventually stop practicing footbinding, much like urban populations had. This would be due to the anti-footbinding efforts of the Nationalists and the Communists. It would also happen because of changing economic conditions (factory made yarn and cloth dominating over domestically produced handcrafts) and changing beauty standards (the CCP prioritized physically able women over beautiful women in their communes). Yet, despite its death, footbinding remains a dramatic example of Chinese culture and fascinates scholars and the broader public alike. The practice is dead, but the memories remain and are not likely to ever fade – especially with something as physically destructive and morbidly fascinating as footbinding.



## Bibliography

**Primary Sources**

Bingying, Xie. *A Woman Soldier's Own Story: The Autobiography of Xie Bingying*, trans. Lily Chia Brissman and Barry Brissman. New York: Colombia Press, 2001.

“Lovely Flower”, interview by Laurel Bossen and Hill Gates, October 19, 2008, in *Bound Feet, Young Hands*.

Ms. Gao, interview by Hill Gates, April 12, 1992, in *Footbinding and Women's Labor in Sichuan*.

Ms. Liu, interview by Hill Gates, April 8, 1992, in *Footbinding and Women's Labor in Sichuan*.

Ms. Wu, interview by Hill Gates, April 24, 1992, in *Footbinding and Women's Labor in Sichuan*.

Pruitt, Ida. *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967.

**Secondary Sources**

Bossen, Laurel and Hill Gates. *Bound Feet, Young Hands*. California: Stanford University Press, 2017.

Bossen, Laurel. *Chinese Women and Rural Development: Sixty Years of Change in Lu Village, Yunnan*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

Gates, Hill. *Footbinding and Women's Labor in Sichuan*. London: Routledge, 2015.

Hong, Fan. *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*. London: Frank Cass & Co., 1997.

Ko, Dorothy. *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Shepherd, John Robert. *Footbinding as Fashion: Ethnicity, Labor, and Status in Traditional China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018.

Wang, Ping. *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.