

**‘WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS’ CHALLENGE THE MELANCHOLY
SIDE OF PATRIARCHY**

Dr. Vatika Sibal,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Sociology, St. Andrew’s College,
Affiliated to University of Mumbai, Mumbai, India.

ABSTRACT

Women are bound to patriarchy in the state and society. They are destined to be mother, wife, lover and friend. Being born with the ability of bearing a child is a moral obligation. Because women can create, they are also destined to form a union with a man and to have children. By holding the key to procreation a woman is destined to be desired by men who need a woman to accomplish any living organism’s sole purpose i.e. reproduction. Foot binding as a rite of passage in the Chinese culture served to teach a young girl just how much she is bounded by the patriarchal state. Binding her feet represented the binding she had to her womanly body. Because of her womanhood she was destined to withhold herself, to restrain, and to painfully resume her inner struggle. Man makes patriarchy and within patriarchy man makes a woman the slave to her body. By binding her feet he legally tells her what she is to become and how she is to act. When elite women started to begin the anti-binding movement they realized that the pain felt by foot binding was unnecessary. Menstruation, consummation, pregnancy, and giving birth were all pain that a woman is bound to have but foot binding was not. Freedom from foot binding opened the doors to the hope of women that one day their daughters might be given the writing brush with the understanding that they could become a reader, writer, or scholar just like their sons. Maybe even some day they might even be given the chance to unbind the patriarchal state.

KEY WORDS:

Gender exploitation, mutilation, patriarchy, social reform.

Introduction

A rite of passage is a ritual event that marks a person's transition from one status to another; such as milestones within puberty, marriage or death. Initiation ceremonies¹ such as baptism, confirmation are considered important rites of passage for people of their respective religions. According to anthropologists rites of passage show that social hierarchies, values and beliefs are important in specific cultures.

Rites of passage have three phases: separation, transition, and reincorporation; as Arnold Van Gennep in his book 'The Rites of Passage' describes, "rites of passage as a separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world or *postliminal rites*." In the first phase, people withdraw from their current status and prepare to move from one place or status to another. "The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group ... from an earlier fixed point in the social structure²." There is often a detachment or "cutting away" from the former self in this phase, which is signified in symbolic actions and rituals. For example, the cutting of hair of a person who has just joined the army. He or she is "cutting away" the former civilian self. This is also called as Resocialization, because in this process the person leaves all his/her way of life he/she use to lead earlier, and starts to follow the way of life required or asked of him/her to do so.

The transition (liminal) phase is the period between states, during which one has left one place or state but has not yet entered or joined the next. The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous. In the third phase (re-aggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated by the ritual subject. Having completed the rite and

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Initiation_ceremonies

² Victor Turner. Excerpt from *The Ritual Process*, London: Aldine, 1969

assumed their "new" identity, one re-enters society with one's new status. Re-incorporation is characterized by elaborate rituals and ceremonies, like college graduation, and by outward symbols of new ties: thus in rites of incorporation there is widespread use of the 'sacred bond', the 'sacred cord', the knot, and of analogous forms such as the belt, the ring, the bracelet and the thread.

Thus the concept of rites of passage as a general theory of socialization was first formally enunciated by Arnold van Gennep in his book 'The Rites of Passage', to denote rituals marking the transitional phase between childhood and full inclusion into a tribe or social group. The issue of food binding is located within this context. Women in China, right from the ancient times had to adopt various ways to beautify themselves so that the men in the society would look at them and appreciate their beauty. This process of beautifying one's self included a lot of pain and damaging the body in various ways. This was supported by every member of the society, as the actual meaning of the process was not to allow the women to become independent and make them aware of the male dominance in the society.

History of foot binding

Foot binding was a Chinese tradition of the binding the feet of women. This tradition lasted for 1,000 years. Mothers bound their daughters' feet and foot binding evolved into a rite of passage to initiate young girls into womanhood within the Confucian system; which laid strong emphasis on female domesticity and the arts. The historical origins of foot binding are frustratingly vague, although brief textual references suggest that small feet for women were preferred as early as the Han dynasty. This custom was the act of wrapping a three-to five-year old girl's feet with binding so as to bend the toes under, break the bones and force the back of the foot together. Its main purpose was to generate a tiny foot, the "golden lotus", which was three inches long and thought to be both lovely and alluring. 'The Poisoned Lotus', article written by Beth Harrison confirms the following: "Although foot binding in China can be traced back to the twenty-first century BC, the practice spread during the Song dynasty (960-1279CE). By the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), despite a ban imposed by the Manchu rulers, all classes of Han women (the predominant Chinese ethnic group) bound their feet".

Foot binding as a rite of passage symbolized the Chinese nation, civilized man, and the patriarchal power; in order words, the smallness of the feet became a source of pride for the woman - she was considered unmarriageable without them. In addition, foot binding was the way to introduce a young girl to the patriarchal power that would exist and dictate a woman throughout her entire life. Although foot binding increased a woman's chances of marrying well, it was a violent act against women. In fact, foot binding was enduring violence and pain, mutilation and self-mutilation in the name of beauty and good marriage, and was transmitted only through codes of silence which was a deception.

In 'Bound Feet Written', by Jeanine Holman, when asked about the purpose of foot binding the overwhelming majority of women surveyed responded very plainly that without bound feet it was impossible to find a husband. A normal footed woman was commonly viewed as a freak of nature, and with unbound feet her pain overflowed into not 1,000, but 5,000 buckets of tears. She was considered lewd and unrefined, often subject to mockery and the brunt of village ridicule. At times in certain areas such women were so rare and unbelievable they were thought to exist only in myth. Women of the upper classes could never have imagined finding a husband of equal status without binding their feet, and if a normal footed woman of a lower class could not find a suitable mate among her economic peers, she could hope for no more than to be sold into slavery or service to those who did bind.

The effects of foot binding on the women in China

The multiple values, inclining beauty and morality, which women believed their bound feet embodied, remained relevant. Foot binding was a tradition that evolved in the concept of "ideal image" including beauty, marriage and sex. Foot binding was also considered charming, showed a sense of class, and was the symbol of chastity in most Chinese cultures. It was believed to promote health and fertility, although in the reality the tradition was aromatic and virtually crippling. In fact, it was a way to keep women in isolation from the rest of the world, which made them more dependent on others and less useful around the house. Therefore, the beauty of the foot could not be divorced from the beauty of the shoe.

Women marrying into the patriarchal family could disrupt its stability by offering dissenting opinions about the allocation of labor and goods within the family, or by simply refusing to accept patterns of authority and interaction already established, and returning to their natal homes foot binding functioned differently in the premarital and post marital phases of female's life. In fact, foot binding was even a reason for a man to call off marriage if he found out that the woman that had been arranged for him to marry did not have bound feet. This situation was very sad because there are very few accounts of women who were successful. These women would end up suffering trying to work in the fields tottering on their bound feet. A mother was obligated to bind her daughters' feet or she almost certainly would never get married. The bound foot woman had to walk with all of her weight on her heels and tottered as she walked. For instance, Vento Marie explains: "Within the areas and classes in which foot binding was widely accepted, a girl of marriageable age with natural feet had only limited prospects for making a 'good' marriage, one which reflected well on her family's ability to raise her properly. Having a daughter with bound feet conferred many potential benefits both on the girl and her family, transforming the biological disadvantage of being born female into a distinct social advantage by increasing her opportunities for making a lucrative marriage her selection in marriage was the responsibility of her prospective mother-in-law, whose criterion for a good daughter-in-law was the discipline that the bound foot represented, thus a daughter learned that she carried the reputations of both her natal family and the family into which she married in the bind of her feet."

Although females were less valued in the traditional Chinese society, the family members may have viewed foot binding as a good investment on their daughters. It could elevate the status of the family by increasing her opportunity for making a lucrative marriage. In fact, foot binding offered not only the parents some economical and political advantages of marrying their daughter into a rich family, but also the daughter got some positive things.

The most immediate source of economic gain was the gift of money sent to the bride's family from the groom's parents. Other potential sources of profit, such as loans or business deals with the son-in-law's family, were less immediate and hinged on a multitude of unforeseeable factors.

Political benefits, however, were more persuasive. For having relatives in office or even making contracts with influential people was the best way to gain immunity from political exploitation. In addition to political gains for the family there were advantages for the daughter; for the higher she married into, the less degrading manual labor she would have to perform.

Foot binding brought woman married life in two duties to fulfill in order to keep a good relationship with her husband.

1. In realizing her primary function of reproduction, the young woman transgressed critical social boundaries by the taint of uterine discharge and the introduction of her and her babies unfamiliar, unsocialised bodies into the family to which she was married.
2. Foot binding prepared the young woman for the aggravation, pain, and dread associated with menstruation, sexual consummation, pregnancy, and giving birth.

John Mao an anthropologist said, “To an extent, foot binding was considered a component of female attire or adornment and, not a form of body mutilation, as the body was not necessarily viewed as an enclosed physical entity³. Correct attire was regarded as the ultimate expression of Chinese culture and identity, differentiating them from “inferior” foreign neighbors while marking social and gender distinctions within their society. The clothing of bodies was imbued with specific cultural meaning, with properly attired bodies reflecting order and control and unadorned bodies and feet serving as visible signs of disorder and dangerous nonconformity, with the individual risking association to barbarian outsiders⁴. Besides signaling femininity and gender distinctions, foot binding functioned as a marker of national boundaries.

Throughout one thousand years of foot binding, its practice was a violent act against women. Not only did women have to face the physical pain transmitted since their childhood, but also they had to cover their emotional and psychological pain. In fact, foot binding caused enormous pain and agony for Chinese women; for example, each time they tried to walk around the house, they

³ Butler, KG. Footbinding, Exploitation and Wrongfulness: Non-Marxist Conception. Diogenes (International Council of Philosophy and Humanistic Studies). Fall 1985.

⁴ Goody, J. The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive. 1990. Cambridge University Press.

encountered great difficulties. Some of the other problems foot binding caused were the loss of toes and/or even death. If the woman's feet were not properly bound, an insufficient amount of blood supply in the feet led to gangrene, causing the decayed toes to fall off. The article 'Deformities of Childhood', by New York Times⁵ confirms that, "the practice of foot binding created an outside swelling of the abdomen, a line down the back due to the muscle stress and the lumbar vertebrae would curve forward".

Hence foot binding not only gave the women a status they wanted in the society it also affected their health and even became a cause of their untimely death. Not only did little girls lead psychological and emotional pain, but also their parents had to struggle against consequences of foot binding. Little girls lost appetites and sleep at the beginning of practicing foot binding. They tried to run away, hide, loosen their bandages, and endure beatings while attempting to comply with their mother's demands in order to escape from their reality. At the time of initial process, only wealthy young girls received a servant in order to look their personal needs during their terrible nights of pain; consequently, these girls developed into a life-long relationship which provided mutual psychological dependency, as well as comfort, affection and companionship.

Death of a Rite

Opposition to foot binding first began to appear during the Quing period and Manchu rule. The Manchus, who ruled China during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), did not believe in the custom and sought to have abolished it; their attempts failed but it paved the way for others. When foreign missionaries began to gain footholds in China after the Opium war, foot binding began to be a symbol of something other than beauty. The bound feet of women began to symbolize their oppression. It was a practice of old China and it was seen as a barbaric to the rest of the world. In 1645, the first Shunzhi emperor mandated that foot binding be banned, but his successor, the Kangxi emperor, revoked the ban, apparently deciding that the practice was too firmly rooted in custom to be amenable to imperial dissolution. Anti-Footing Binding societies were formed in

⁵ Deformities in Childhood, Footbinding among Chinese - New York Times Mar 14, 1897

1895 growing in numbers. The members of these societies would refuse to bind their daughter's feet and only allow their sons to marry those who did not have their feet bound. In these societies the advantages of natural feet were taught as were the fact that other countries did not bind women's feet, and it made the Chinese look like a barbaric and old fashioned culture. One of the main points of these societies was that the pain of the foot binding process that women must go through was an obstacle to their education. In the Qing period, opposition began to emerge, although it was both belated and weak. The Qing ruling nobility, who were ethnically Manchu, attempted to prohibit the custom among the conquered Han Chinese. In 1645, the first Shunzhi emperor mandated that foot binding be banned, but his successor, the Kangxi emperor, revoked the ban, apparently deciding that the practice was too firmly rooted in custom to be amenable to imperial dissolution.

During the late 1800s reform-oriented scholars and western missionaries began speaking out against the brutal custom, yet it wasn't until the 1920s that change finally began to take hold. Intellectuals plucked the issue of foot binding from the realm of morals and aesthetics and remolded it into a question of patriotism. Women were told the practice was not only harmful to their own physical and emotional health, but also a costly disability to the nation, retarding its political and economic development. In 1928 the Nationalist government announced its plan to eradicate foot binding, requiring girls under the age of fifteen to let their feet grow naturally. Some local officials took a tougher stand, requiring that all women unbind their feet or be subject to fines and sometimes physical punishment. Some anti-foot binding speeches required "to cast foot binding as a horrible crime committed by parents against their children". Fathers began to feel sad when they saw their daughters walking badly. There, they understood what place their daughters have to be in the world. This is why some fathers in the late 1890's began to stop having their daughters with bound feet, and supported the anti-foot binding movement.

The work of the anti-foot binding reformers had three aspects. First, they carried out a modern education campaign, which explained that the rest of the world did not bind women's feet and that China was losing face in the world, making it subject to international ridicule. Second, their education campaign explained the advantages of natural feet and the disadvantages of bound

feet. Third, they formed natural-foot societies, whose members pledged not to bind their daughter's feet, nor to allow their sons to marry women with bound feet. These three tactics effectively succeeded in bringing foot binding to a quick end, eradicating in a single generation a practice which had survived for a thousand years. Young girls were thereafter spared the tortures of foot binding, although older women with bound feet may still be seen in China and Taiwan.

Alison Bowler in her book 'A history of foot binding in Chinese culture' states that the rise of the New Republic of China following the fall of the Qing dynasty passed a law forbidding foot binding in 1915. With this law in place, foot inspectors with the right to impose monetary fines attempted to prevent further girls suffering this painful process. However, foot binding, as a rite of passage persisted for many years particularly in remote rural villages.

Physical emancipation, particularly in the custom of foot binding, which continued to be practiced to some extent in China until 1949, became the prerequisite for wider emancipation. The Cultural Revolution struck a blow of the furthering of the rite. Through the medium of women's bodies, Fan Hong in her book 'Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom' says: "The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China explores the significance of religious beliefs, cultural codes and political dogmas for gender relations, gender concepts and the human body in an Asian setting. Moreover the dramatic and brutal patriarchal tradition of physical repression of the female body in Chinese history, particularly the inhuman institution of foot binding, makes the physical emancipation of Chinese women an issue of special significance in the history of liberation of the modern female body". The rise of the communist government of Chairman Mao led to women with bound feet to unbind them. Foot binding was banned. Women doing so suffered extreme pain as their deformed feet started to expand. Owing to this pain, many women had to re-bind their feet in order to be able to walk. The last factory in China to make these special shoes closed in the 1980s.

In 2007, National Public Radio interviewed women in their 70s and 80s who had their feet bound in childhood despite the ban - which sometimes carried the threat of a death sentence for refusing to comply - because their families worried they would not be able to find husbands if they had normal-size feet. Their deformities proved a liability under the communist government: Their

misshapen feet hindered the women's ability to work in the fields and made them less able to support their families. Today elderly Chinese women who still have bound feet have either to make their own or rely on a local craftsman for their footwear.

Conclusion

The history of foot binding is full of contradictions and unexpected turns. Conventional views of foot binding as a rite of passage of patriarchal oppression often neglect its complex history. This revisionist history, elegantly written and meticulously researched, presents a fascinating new picture of the practice from its beginnings in the tenth century to its demise in the twentieth century. Neither condemning nor defending foot-binding, Dorothy Ko debunks many myths and misconceptions about its origins, development, and eventual end, exploring in the process the entanglements of male power and female desires during the practice's thousand-year history. The author of 'Cinderella's Sisters' argues that rather than stemming from sexual perversion, men's desire for bound feet was connected to larger concerns such as cultural nostalgia, regional rivalries, and claims of male privilege. Nor were women a helpless victim, the author contends. Ko describes how women - those who could afford it - bound their own and their daughters' feet to signal their high status and self-respect. Femininity, like the binding of feet, was associated with bodily labor and domestic work, and properly bound feet and beautifully made shoes both required exquisite skills and technical knowledge passed from generation to generation. Throughout her narrative, Ko deftly wields methods of social history, literary criticism, material culture studies, and the history of the body and fashion to illustrate how a practice that began as embodied lyricism - as a way to live as the poets imagined - ended up being a Rite of Passage.

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