**CHW3M Chinese Women**

We know about patriarchy, the Confucian emphasis on filial sons, and the need for a son to perform the rituals of ancestor veneration. We need to explore the context of women in China before we can fully discuss the ethics of footbinding.

Ban Zhao, tutor in the Late Han court, wrote Lessons for Women, questioning the lack of education for women.

Now examine the gentlemen of the present age. They only know that wives must be controlled, and that the husband’s rules of conduct manifesting his authority must be established. They therefore teach their boys to read books and (study) histories. But they do not in the least understand that husbands and masters must (also) be served, and that the proper relationship and the rites should be maintained. Yet only to teach men and not to teach women, - is that not ignoring the essential relationship between them? According to the ‘Rites’ [a book of proper social behavior] it is the rule to begin to teach children to read at the age of eight years, and by the age of fifteen years they ought then to be ready for cultural training. Only why should it not be (that girls’ education as well as boys’) be according to this principle?”\*

\*Quoted in Eleanor J. Hall, Ancient Chinese Dynasties (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2000), 102-103.

Here is a secondary account of the origin of foot-binding.

“Foot-binding was first practiced on girls training to be palace dancers, to make their feet daintier and more appealing. Such light-footed dancers and actresses… charmed the emperor and other men of high rank and started an unfortunate trend. During the Song dynasty, aristocrats began binding the feet of their young daughters simply to make the girls more desirable and marriageable.

Over time, the ideal foot size became smaller and the binding more crippling. The slippers from the 13th century… were scarcely five inches long. Ultimately, the goal became a foot length of about three inches, resulting in a broken instep and toes that were permanently curled under. Women deformed in this way could not even walk properly, and bound feet became a symbol of female submission.” \*

\*Denise Dersin, ed., What Life Was Like in the Land of the Dragon: Imperial China, AD 960-1368 (Alexandria, Virginia: Time Life Books, 1998), 23.

However, another secondary source suggests…

“…but there is evidence that during the Nan Song (unlike any other Chinese dynasty) daughters as well as sons could inherit property in their own names.”\*

\*Kenneth Pletcher, ed., The History of China (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2011), 167.

**Further Reading:**

Patricia Ebrey, Women in Traditional China, Asia Society, <http://asiasociety.org/women-traditional-china>

Women in World History, Gender Difference in History: Women in China and Japan <http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/essay-04.html>

Amanda Foreman, Why Footbinding Persisted in China for Millennium, Smithsonian, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-footbinding-persisted-china-millennium-180953971/?no-ist>