

In the first century A.D., when few women were educated, Ban Zhao was a remarkable exception, a scholar and teacher. Her father and brother were historians for the Han court. When her brother Ban Ku died in prison, the emperor ordered Ban Zhao to finish his work, which included biography, history and astronomy. Despite her accomplishments, Ban Zhao is best known for this essay reminding women of their duties.

The first feminine virtue consists of meekness and humility. In ancient times a female infant, on the third day after her birth, was placed underneath her parents' bed and given a spindle, for spinning thread, to play with. Meanwhile her father would fast and do penance and report to the families ancestors on the arrival of a female child.

The placement of a female infant underneath the bed indicates her inferior position, and the provision of a spindle, as her first toy is to familiarize her, at the earliest possible moment the importance of diligence and hard work.

As a woman, she should always be modest and respectful, should keep constantly in the background, whatever she does; should never speak of her own goodness or flinch from the performance of her assigned duties, however unpleasant; and finally, should be able to endure all the humiliations and insults, from wherever they come. This is what I mean by the acknowledgement of her own inferiority, her inability to live up to it should be her constant worry and fear.

More concretely, she should be the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed in the evening and should work every minute in her waking hours. She undertakes every task inside the house regardless of its difficulties, proceeds with it in an orderly and efficient manner, and completes it in time. This is what I mean by diligence. She waits upon her husband with seriousness and integrity and conducts herself in the most refined manner. She of course never indulges in any frolic, including laughter. At the time of ancestor worship, she sees to it that all religious offerings, such as food and wine, have been prepared most carefully for this occasion.

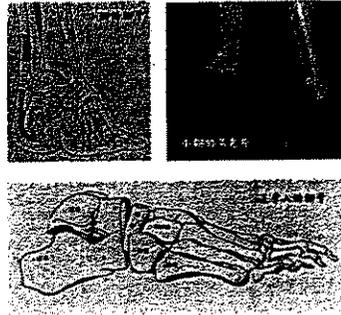
List of reasons why a daughter-in-law or wife could be disowned:

1. Disobedience to the parents-in-law.
2. Not being able to bear a male son.
3. Adultery
4. Jealousy.
5. Having an incurable disease.
6. Talkativeness.
7. Stealing

Obedience was regarded as one of the highest virtues of women. Women were honored or dishonored according to how perfect they carried out the roles of being a virtuous wife, obedient daughter-in-law, or chaste widow.

1. Use a word to describe the attitudes towards women in general in ancient China.
2. Make a list of three feminine virtues for the 2000's.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. Make a list of three desirable qualities for men today.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

The Process of Footbinding



The general purpose of foot binding was to restrict the growth of the feet so that they would not exceed 3-4 inches. Small feet were considered beautiful and elegant. A foot measuring a perfect three inches was called a 'lotus of gold'; a four-inch foot was considered 'silver'; and one measuring more than four inches was an 'iron lotus'. Thus the process normally began when a girl was between the ages of three to eleven years old, the justification being that the pre-bone cartilage of the arch, which was predominantly water, would be more easily molded than matured bone. The mothers or more experienced female relatives who performed the foot binding were at least thoughtful enough to carry it out in late fall or winter when the foot was generally numb so that the pain would not be so severe.

Those who are especially squeamish may wish to skip the rest of this section.

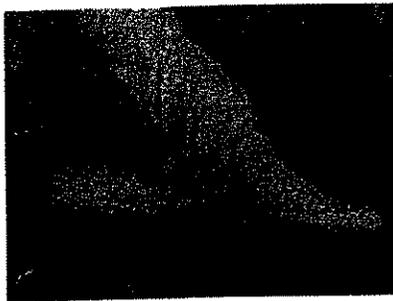
We begin with the ideals of the bound foot: A foot should be ideally no longer than three inches; the cleft between the heel and the sole should be 2-3 inches deep; the foot should appear as an extension of the leg rather than a stand for the body.

This of course means that to achieve these golden ideals, the foot has to be contorted to the extent that the soles are extremely concave, and that the foot is in practice literally folded in two. Don't grimace.



The foot-binding ritual traditionally begins with the clipping of the toenails and the soaking of the feet either in hot water or in a concoction of ingredients ranging from various herbs and nuts to less desirable substances such as urine and warm animal blood. This is allegedly to soften the tissue and bones of the foot to facilitate manipulation. After the feet are massaged (and please bear in mind that these girls have absolutely no idea what they're in for until the day itself). All the toes on the foot, save for the big one, are broken and folded under the sole, and then the toes are bound in place with a 10'x2" silk or cotton bandage. These wrappings are

removed every two days to allow the washing and meticulous manicuring of the toenails to avoid infection. This is no act of kindness - immediately after this pedicure, the bandages go back on, and tighter. And tighter still. Eventually the arch of the foot is also broken and the foot is pulled straight with the leg. The shoe sizes are also reduced gradually to accommodate the shrinking feet.



To encourage the feet to achieve the desired conformation, the girls may be made to walk long distances so that their own weight crushes their feet into shape. Alternatively artificial force in the form of weights may be applied to hasten the process. Occasionally the flesh of the foot would also be lacerated, or sharp objects may be inserted in the bandage to encourage 'excess' flesh to rot away so that smaller feet may be achieved. The washing and binding is carried out by the

mother in earlier years; however as time passes, the girls themselves learn to grit their teeth and tighten their bandages on their own.

At the end of two years of excruciating pain, what you get is a pair of tiny - albeit grotesquely folded - feet. Of course, it doesn't just end there. Because feet will tend to conform to nature and grow, this foot-binding process is carried out for an additional ten years or so to make sure that the toes stay in place.

