13. Paradoxical Performances: Cruel Constraints and Christian Emancipation in 19–20th-Century Missionary Representations of Chinese Women and Girls

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Introduction

In the 1850s, William Milne (1815–1863), who was sent to China in 1839 by the London Missionary Society (LMS), lamented that the stories in children's textbooks and magazines were “revolting” because they “pamper[ed] this greed for stories of the cruel and heartless features in heathen nations” and filled children's minds with “monstrous and hideous notions of their fellow-men.”¹ In his book *Life in China*, Milne attempts to present a more accurate portrait of China and banish existing misconceptions of the Chinese.² Half a century after Milne criticised children's texts for featuring the cruelty of the Chinese, children's performance scripts about China were still highlighting this characteristic through explications of footbinding, a highly-contested issue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Elsie Jeanette Oxenham's *Queen Lexa's Chinese Meeting: A Missionary Recitation for Eight Girls and Three Boys* is one example. It begins with a group of children examining items that their parents had brought back from China. Among the collection is a dainty shoe. While trying to dress up in the Chinese things, they soon discover that the shoe is too small and conclude it must be meant for a big doll. However, Lexa informs them “real grown-up women” wore these tiny shoes and launches into a diatribe on the evils of footbinding, claiming that “mere babies” are subjected to this custom, eliciting sympathy from the audience while highlighting the horror of Chinese cruelty to children.³

1 William Milne, *Life in China*, London: G. Routledge, 1857. The source material that forms the basis of this chapter was gathered from the missionary collections in the School of African and Oriental Studies Library, University of London in May 2007.

2 Ibid.

3 E.J. Oxenham, *Queen Lexa's Chinese Meeting: A Missionary Recitation for Eight Girls and Three Boys*, London: London Missionary Society, 1900, p. 12.

Queen Lexa's Chinese Meeting is just one of several missionary recitations, cantatas and dialogues published by the LMS in the early twentieth century.⁴ Adults hoped that during the process of rehearsing for these performances, children would be inspired to support missionary work or become missionaries themselves. The productions emphasised the notion of an extended family comprised of British children learning about the conditions of their "less fortunate" brothers and sisters abroad. Young British boys and girls were inculcated with the notion that they had a responsibility to improve the lives of these children in faraway lands. The songs in the performance scripts encouraged the audience to answer God's call, urging them not to make excuses because immediate action should be taken: "Let none hear you idly saying, / 'There is nothing I can do,' / While the souls of men are dying, / And the Master calls for you."⁵

Preparing for the performances was a multi-sensorial experience involving auditory, visual and kinesthetic learning. These productions engaged children on many more levels than text-based children's missionary magazines or books. If someone reads or skims through a book about Chinese children, they may easily forget the details. However, it is more likely that those involved in the missionary performances would remember the "facts" about China and the Chinese conveyed in the scripts because acting and singing for an audience requires memorisation of the lines and lyrics, handling the costumes and props, and following stage directions such as how to walk like a foot-bound Chinese girl. Performers in *Missionary Cantata: Every-Day Life in China* were literally putting themselves in someone else's shoes because in addition to dresses and head-bands, shoes were provided for the female actresses.⁶

4 The London Missionary Society and other missionary societies published a number of programs and plays in the early twentieth century. See for example, London Missionary Society, *Boys and Girls of Other Lands: A Missionary Cantata*, London: London Missionary Society, ca. 1900. Other plays related to China include Phyllis M. Higgs, *Blind Chang: A Missionary Drama*, London: London Missionary Society, 1920; Edward Ferris Wills, *Mr. Hu, the Barber of Everlasting Prosperity: A Real Incident*, London: London Missionary Society, ca. 1912; Mrs. E. Campbell, *The Blue Bowl: A Simple Chinese Scene*, London: The Livingstone Press, 1920; H.D. Cotton, *The Case of Farmer Law, a True Story of a Chinese Hospital in Dialogue Form*, London: London Missionary Society, ca. 1920; H.D. Cotton, *Bao's Adventure: A Chinese Play in Two Acts and Six Scenes*, London: London Missionary Society, 1920; Anna Canada Swain, *Chee Moo's Choice: A Missionary Play about China*, New York City: Baptist Board of Education, 1929. In addition to China, India and Africa were introduced to young audiences in F.M. Saw et al., *A Missionary Cantata: The Rani's Sacrifice: A Legend of Chamba, Retold in Verse with Songs Adapted to Indian Melodies*, London: Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, 1912; and Alexander Chisholm, *In Dark Calabar: Missionary Cantata words by J.D.H. Reid and M. Bayne*, Edinburgh: United Free Church of Scotland Mission Study Council, ca. 1915.

5 J.M.B., *He and She from O'er the Sea: Missionary Recitations and Hymns for Twelve Boys and Girls*, London: London Missionary Society, ca. 1900, p. 2.

6 See for example, Charles W. Budden, *Missionary Cantata: Every-Day Life in China*, London: London Missionary Society, 1902; Michelle Elleray, "Little builders: coral insects, missionary culture, and the Victorian child," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011): 223–38; See also John Tsz-Pang Lai, "Christian tracts in Chinese costume: the missionary strategies in translating *The Peep of Day*," in *Translating Others*, vol. 2, ed. Theo Hermans, Manchester: St. Jerome, 2006, pp. 460–82; Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-century England*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 118–20; Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Otherness in the British Empire*,

These performances were also important for economic reasons because they provided opportunities to raise funds for the mission societies. For example, at the end of *He and She from O'er the Sea: Missionary Recitations and Hymns for Twelve Boys and Girls* a boy informs the audience that for one penny a week, they could provide funds to support the London Missionary Society's eighty-three missionaries in China who were involved in the work of "leper asylums, training homes, orphanages and schools for both boys and girls."⁷ Programs such as *He and She from O'er the Sea* were held at weeknight missionary meetings or as part of Sunday services where Sunday-school students performed. The significance of Sunday schools cannot be overlooked because as early as 1851, there were over two million children enrolled in the 23,135 Sunday schools in Britain.⁸ By 1907, approximately 15 per cent of the London Missionary Society's income came from Sunday schools.⁹ Similarly, records reveal that by 1901, the Methodist Missionary Society received 20 per cent of its home receipts from children.¹⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century, there were over a thousand children's missionary societies, some with thousands of members.¹¹ It is therefore important to examine the content of these performances in greater detail considering their substantial audience of both children and adults such as teachers, parents and relatives who undoubtedly came to support the young people who were performing.

Judith Rowbotham argues that while it may be difficult to ascertain the concrete influence of British missionaries on the people they hoped to convert, "the most profound and lasting impacts were arguably on the British domestic scene."¹² The little-explored archives of missionary recitations, dialogues and cantatas shed light on how missionary discourse and images were consumed in the metropole and influenced the British "back home." Missionary performances were reported in local newspapers such as the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, the *Weekly Standard and Express* and the *Essex County Standard West Suffolk Gazette*, and *Eastern Counties Advertiser*. The short notices included the name of the conductor, the amount of money raised and a description of the children dressed up in cultural costumes. If missionaries on furlough gave a talk as part of the event, their names were listed as well.¹³ Despite the seeming endorsement of the missionaries who participated in these programs, paradoxically, the

1840–1900, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 43; Frank Prochaska, "Little vessels: children in the nineteenth-century English missionary movement," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 6(2) (1978): 103–18.

7 J.M.B., *He and She from O'er the Sea*, p. 13.

8 Richard Brown, *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700–1850*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 126.

9 Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-century England*, p. 126.

10 Prochaska, "Little vessels," p. 107.

11 Ibid. pp. 103–18.

12 Judith Rowbotham, "'Soldiers of Christ'? Images of female missionaries in late nineteenth-century Britain: issues of heroism and martyrdom," *Gender & History* 12(1) (2000): 82–106, p. 83.

13 They did not provide descriptions of audience reactions.

content of the performances sometimes contradicted missionary writing from other sources such as diaries, private letters, newsletters, meeting minutes and other primary sources.¹⁴ For example, the scripts are silent on the trouble female missionaries faced as “big-footed” women trying to engage in “woman’s work for woman.” These women found it difficult to be accepted not only because of their unbound feet but also because they were often taller and bigger than the Chinese men.¹⁵ Gender confusion sometimes caused trouble for the female missionaries who taught Chinese women. Angela Zito notes that missionary women in China “lived a position of contradiction, like and not like the Chinese women they wish[ed] to save; like and not like the missionary husbands and leaders they wished to work beside; constantly uneasy about their ability to function in the Chinese world in which they lived.”¹⁶ According to Jane Hunter, there was a saying in China that “a Western woman was ‘neither one nor the other.’”¹⁷ The precarious position they held in Chinese society presented more obstacles for them than they previously anticipated. However, these difficulties were glossed over in the performance scripts because they aimed to create a pathetic portrait of Chinese girls and women to garner sympathy from the female audience and to spur them to “save” their “sisters.” But as I argue in this chapter, during the process of producing these missionary performances, the girls involved may have realised the constraints of their own customs and questioned gender expectations.

Because many children’s missionary associations were composed entirely of girls and girls were more involved in missionary work in general, it is worth examining what these performance programs taught audiences about the lives of Chinese girls in terms of domesticity, marriage, family and education.¹⁸ In this chapter, I focus mainly on *Queen Lexa’s Chinese Meeting: A Missionary Recitation for Eight Girls and Three Boys* by popular children’s writer Elsie Jeanette Oxenham (1880–1960), *Missionary Cantata: Every-Day Life in China* arranged by Charles W. Budden, *He and She from O’er the Sea: Missionary Recitations*

14 For example, Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984; Lawrence D. Kessler, *Jiangyin Mission Station: An American Missionary Community in China, 1895–1951*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996; John Craig William Keating, *A Protestant Church in Communist China: Moore Memorial Church, Shanghai, 1949–1989*, Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2012; Wilbert R. Shenk (ed.), *North American Foreign Missions, 1810–1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004; Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary Seton (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1996.

15 For example, Alicia Little notes that as she travelled, the Chinese people were confused by her appearance: “I was altogether an anomaly. The hair seemed to be the hair of a woman; but, then, the feet were surely the feet of a man!” Alicia Little, *Intimate China: The Chinese as I have seen Them*, London: Hutchinson, 1899, p. 66.

16 Angela Zito, “Secularizing the pain of footbinding in China: missionary and medical stagings of the universal body,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75(1) (2007): 1–24, p. 15. According to Rowbotham, the image of women missionaries from the 1880s onwards became increasingly complicated because there were “dilemmas over the hagiographic presentation of women missionaries as useful exemplars of feminine greatness or heroism.” See Rowbotham, “Soldiers of Christ,” p. 91.

17 Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, p. 214.

18 See Prochaska, “Little vessels.”

and *Hymns for Twelve Boys and Girls* by J.M.B. and *Busy Bees: A Missionary Dialogue in Three Scenes* by “the author of ‘Grannie’s Golden Gift,’ ‘This Shall be Told’ and ‘Chinese Diamonds.’”¹⁹ These materials were produced by the LMS in the early twentieth century and all purport to introduce audiences to life in China, highlighting issues such as arranged marriages, the low status of girls in China and footbinding. I explore the paradoxes surrounding the performances in terms of mother-daughter relationships, pain, and emancipation and point out silences and contradictions. Before exploring these paradoxes in more detail, I will first introduce the genre of missionary recitations, dialogues and cantatas.

Missionary recitations, dialogues, and cantatas

At the World Missionary Conference of 1910 held in Edinburgh, 1,200 delegates discussed the “most efficient methods of interesting children in missions.”²⁰ “Missionary recitations and entertainments given by children” was listed among the answers.²¹ Missionary recitations typically consisted of short scenes coupled with hymns from the *Congregational Hymnal* or original songs written to the tune of traditional hymns.²² Children were sometimes asked to sing hymns in Chinese: an undoubtedly challenging task for many.²³ Performances usually comprised eight to fifteen children aged between six and sixteen. Some productions were larger, such as the missionary cantata, *Child Life on our Mission Fields*, which included a choir of fifty children.²⁴

19 Elsie J. Oxenham, a Congregationalist best known for her Abbey Series stories for girls, wrote several missionary recitations. See for example, E.J. Oxenham, *Malagasy Boys and Girls: A Missionary Recitation for Three Boys and Seven Girls*, London: London Missionary Society, 1908; E.J. Oxenham, *Missionaries to Tea: A Missionary Recitation for Five Boys and Five Girls*, London: London Missionary Society, 1908; E.J. Oxenham, *Professor Lyttleboye’s Lecture: A Missionary Recitation for Four Girls and Four Boys*, London: London Missionary Society, 1908.

20 World Missionary Conference, *To Consider Missionary Problems in Relation to the Non-Christian World*, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, F.H. Revell Company, 1910, p. 28, online: <http://name.umd.umich.edu/1936337.0006.001>, accessed 24 July 2012.

21 World Missionary Conference, *To Consider Missionary Problems in Relation to the Non-Christian World*, p. 29. More conventional approaches such as instruction courses and missionary addresses were also listed.

22 Elias Nason (ed.), *The Congregational Hymn Book: For the Service of the Sanctuary*, Boston, MS: John P. Jewett & Co., 1857. Susan Thorne discusses briefly the appeal of singing and dressing up in costumes for special missionary services, especially among the British working-class. Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-century England*, p. 127. For discussion on missionary theatre, see for example, Raquel Chang-Rodriguez, *Hidden Messages: Representation and Resistance in Andean Colonial Drama*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999; Diana Taylor, “Scenes of cognition: performance and conquest,” *Theatre Journal* 56(3) (2004): 353–72; Max Harris, “Disguised reconciliations: indigenous voices in early Franciscan missionary drama in Mexico,” *Radical History Review* 53 (1992): 13–25; Richard C. Trexler, “We think, they act: clerical readings of missionary theatre in 16th-century New Spain,” in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan, New York: Mouton, 1984, pp. 189–227.

23 See for example, “Chinese Hymn – ‘Guide me, O thou Great Jehovah!’” in J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, p. 9.

24 See “Wesleyan Juvenile Home and foreign missions,” *The Essex County Standard West Suffolk Gazette, and Eastern Counties Advertiser*, Colchester, England, January 20, 1894, p. 8.

The duration of *Missionary Cantata: Every-Day Life in China*, a fourteen-part program consisting of alternating recitations and “Confucian Odes,” was estimated to take one hour and fifteen minutes.²⁵ Most of the other recitations were shorter. The script of *He and She from O’er the Sea* is only fifteen pages long and the structure is simple: a boy or girl recites a monologue on stage, exits and a choir sings a hymn. Then a few children enact a scene and the choir performs another song. One to three characters speak in each scene, sometimes with non-speaking performers standing beside them. There are a total of seven hymns and six recitations. *Busy Bees* is the same length as *He and She from O’er the Sea* but does not contain any songs. In the beginning, Rosie invites her friend Ethel to the “Busy Bees” children’s meeting so they can learn about life in India and China through two question and answer sessions: first with Rosie and a nameless Chinese girl and second with an Indian girl called Shantamma (Patience). After the meeting is over, Rosie, who plans to become a missionary, gives Ethel more information about the Chinese and suggests some things that she can do for the Chinese women and girls (such as selling Christmas cards). Not all children were expected to become missionaries abroad, but the songs in the performances encouraged them to do what they could in the local community: “If you cannot cross the ocean / And the heathen lands explore / You can help them at your door.”²⁶

These plays were priced at around one penny and with the purchase of the scripts, churches could borrow key props and costumes free of charge.²⁷ For example, the title page of *He and She from O’er the Sea* contains the following notice: “The costumes and curios can be borrowed for free, after due notice, from the Mission House for use at meetings held on behalf of the L.M.S.”²⁸ Items include a girl’s dress, boy’s dress, cap and pigtail, priest’s dress, mourner’s dress, doctor’s dress, spectacles, tongue-scraper, chopsticks, divining sticks and a Chinese book. These objects were most likely brought back to England by missionaries. Some of the plays suggest ages for the actors. For example, it was recommended that the scene “Dialogue between a Chinese Bride and a Christian Schoolgirl” in *He and She from O’er the Sea* be performed by two actresses between thirteen and fifteen years old—the age when British girls typically started wearing corsets.²⁹

The program for *Every-day Life* contains very detailed instructions about costumes. Specific descriptions on how to wear the head-bands are included with imperatives such as: “The hair must be parted in the middle and rolled behind in

25 Budden, *Missionary Cantata: Every-Day Life in China*.

26 J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, p. 2.

27 Some offered discounts for bulk purchases. For example, the London Missionary Society offered the price of 8d. a dozen for *Busy Bees*.

28 J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, n.p.

29 See Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 49.

a single knot” and “Girls *must* remove their own outer skirt as well as the bodice of their dress. The throat should be bare.”³⁰ Girls playing the foot-bound female characters were instructed to “walk on their heels and take very short steps” to achieve the effect of the “Chinese gait” but the girl, acting as the slave girl (with her face painted yellow), was supposed to walk “in the ordinary way” because she had unbound feet. Although the purpose of instructing the girls to walk on their heels was to give them the opportunity to experience for a short time the difficulty of walking with bound feet, the fact that the girls were freed from wearing their bodices and could wear the loose flowing Chinese dresses may have caused them to reflect upon their own custom of wearing corsets.

With the exception of Oxenham, a Congregationalist who had never been to China, little is known about the authors of these works. Some of them may have been missionaries while others may have consulted reports sent back from missionaries or other texts about China. Writing in the early twentieth century, they could choose from a plethora of texts as reference material, because, as a 1904 newspaper article entitled “The Flood of Books about China” notes, the two Opium Wars, the Sino-French War (1884–1885), the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), and “most of all the Boxer business of 1900 onwards, have been the source or fountain of a steady stream of booklets, volumes, and tomes in sets, running to a frightful aggregate.”³¹ Curiously, although these performances were published at the turn of the twentieth century, there is no mention of the Boxer Uprising which raged in Northern China from 1899 to 1901. The Boxers sought to eradicate all foreigners from China and a great number of missionaries were killed during the Uprising. Chinese Christians were also targeted and many suffered horrific deaths. Fear about the safety of China mission work during this tumultuous period made mission societies reluctant to send more missionaries to the “Celestial Kingdom.” However, the dangers of the mission field are downplayed in these performance scripts that portray the Chinese girls who became Christians as happy emancipated children, freed from the bondages of footbinding—a practice condemned by both missionaries and other Westerner observers.

Historical context: Footbinding in Western discourse

In 1833, an anonymous author declared in the world’s first major journal of Sinology *Chinese Repository* that “a nation’s civilization may be estimated by the rank which females hold in society. If the civilization of China be judged

30 Budden, *Missionary Cantata: Every-Day Life in China*, n.p.

31 “The flood of books about China,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*, 29 July 1904, pp. 234–35, p. 234.

of by this test, she is surely far from occupying that first place which she so strongly claims."³² Missionaries such as Young J. Allen (1836–1907) and Timothy Richard (1845–1919) conveyed this idea of using a woman's status in society as a measure of her country's level of civilisation (initially conceived in eighteenth-century France) via their writings in Chinese.³³ Many nineteenth-century writers concluded that because the Chinese females held a low status in society and were oppressed by the custom of footbinding, China as a nation was stagnant and unprogressive. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, British missionary and educator John Fryer (1839–1928) posited that the three major reasons holding back China's progress were opium, the literary examination essay and bound feet.³⁴

The practice of footbinding can be traced back to the twelfth century and was only slowly discontinued after the establishment of the Nationalist government in 1912.³⁵ Explanations of the origins of this custom differ, but one commonality among the sources is that it started in the imperial court and with the elite before lower classes emulated the practice in an effort to raise their societal status. According to the historian Dorothy Ko, it was in the eighteenth century when footbinding began to be adopted by commoners.³⁶ Most historians assert that adults (mostly mothers) started binding a girl's feet when she turned six although others state that it began earlier around the age of four.³⁷ Bandages were wrapped around the foot to stunt growth and a few years later the wrappings were increasingly tightened so that the toes were bent under the sole. In addition to the physical pain inflicted by the tight bandages, other issues include the risk of gangrene, ulceration and paralysis. During the last years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), when these performance scripts were written, the Manchu government issued many edicts in an effort to abolish the practice of footbinding. Despite the threat of heavy fines, many people still continued the custom because they feared that women would lose their docility and abandon morality if they unbound their feet. Some believed that women with "liberated" feet would be drafted into the army.³⁸ More importantly, footbinding was seen as a prerequisite for all aspiring brides because according

32 "Remarks, concerning the condition of females in China," *Chinese Repository* II (1833): 313–16, p. 313.

33 Denise Gimpel, "Freeing the mind through the body: women's thoughts on physical education in late Qing and early republican China," *Nan Nü* 8(2) (2006): 316–58, p. 317.

34 Ibid.

35 Some argue that it may have originated earlier in the tenth century. See Alison Drucker, "The influence of Western women on the anti-footbinding movement 1840–1911," *Historical Reflections* 8(3) (1981): 179–99; Sidney D. Gamble, "The disappearance of foot-binding in Tingsien," *American Journal of Sociology* 49(2) (1943): 181–83. For more detailed discussion on the history of footbinding, see Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005; Wang Ping, *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000; Hong Fan, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom: the Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*, London: F. Cass, 1997.

36 Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, p. 132.

37 Drucker, "The influence of Western women on the anti-footbinding movement," p. 180.

38 Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, p. 57.

to one saying, “Bound-foot women became brides; the not-bound became bondservants.”³⁹ As Fan Hong puts it, the bound foot “was the passport to all that was good in life.”⁴⁰ Ko terms this concept the “marrying-up” thesis. As Mrs. Archibald Little (1845–1926) and other anti-footbinding activists observed, one of the difficulties they faced when trying to convince women to discontinue the practice of footbinding was the notion that women would not be able to find husbands if they had “natural feet.” A Chinese woman born in 1867 told American missionary Ida Pruitt (1888–1985) 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.”⁴¹

Missionary discourses on footbinding

The widespread opposition to footbinding among missionaries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is not surprising considering the fact that the number of Protestant female missionaries outgrew the number of male missionaries during this time. For many missionaries, the practice of footbinding symbolised the cruelty, perversion and backwardness of the Chinese. According to one account, in 1860, Mrs. Macgowan, wife of the LMS’s John Macgowan (d. 1922), upon hearing the plaintive cries of the girl next door, rushed to stop her neighbour from binding her daughter’s feet. The woman refused, stating “But you are an Englishwoman, and you do not understand the burden that is laid upon us women of China. This footbinding is the evil fortune that we inherit from the past, that our fathers have handed down to us, and no one in all this wide Empire of ours can bring us deliverance.”⁴² In 1874 John Macgowan tried to “deliver” the Chinese women by establishing the first English anti-footbinding society, the Heavenly Foot Society (*Tianzu hui*) in Amoy and other organisations advocating for the emancipation of Chinese women’s feet soon appeared, many led by women. Most notable among them was Alicia Bewicke, better known as Mrs. Archibald Little, who formed the Society for the Suppression of Foot-Binding (Natural Feet Society) in 1895. According to Zito, both Macgowan and Little “conceived of the body as a natural ally, whether in the cause of conversion or civilisation, against a Chinese culture that degraded, maimed, and even murdered it.”⁴³

39 Cited in Hill Gates, “Footloose in Fujian: economic correlates of footbinding,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43(1) (2001): 130–48, p. 135.

40 Hong, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom*, p. 48.

41 Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, p. 3.

42 John Macgowan, *How England Saved China*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913, p. 26.

43 Zito, “Secularizing the pain of footbinding in China.”

Pain and love

Patricia Ebrey posits that Westerners writing about footbinding from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century have approached the phenomenon from six perspectives: “fashion, seclusion, deformity, perversity, pain imposed on children and cultural immobility.”⁴⁴ In the missionary writing about footbinding, much emphasis is placed on the pain imposed on children by their mothers. For example, the Chinese pastor Reverend Ye in “Discourse on Quitting Footbinding” notes: “I see that during binding, the daughter often cries in pain, but the mother would strike her and make the pain even more unbearable.”⁴⁵ In another account, a girl recalls that because her feet hurt so much she cried and could not sleep but her mother struck her for crying. “On the following days, I tried to hide but was forced to walk. Mother hit me on my hands and feet for resisting.”⁴⁶ The foot pain is aggravated by the mother’s hitting. In commenting that “All pity from the heart of the mother for her little child ... was crushed out by the very bandages that were distorting the feet of her daughter,” Macgowan condemns Chinese mothers for violating their responsibility to lovingly care for their daughters and protect them from pain, implying that British mothers would not be so callous.⁴⁷ Another preacher asserts that parents are “hard-hearted. The ferocious tiger will not eat its offspring, the poisonous snake does not bite its young. Man, of such ability, why does he so torture his child?”⁴⁸ This statement situates the Chinese parents below animals.

Missionaries who protested against footbinding stressed the importance of having “natural” feet because they were meant to be unbound by God’s design; they also opposed the practice based on ideals of domesticity. Although women with bound feet were confined to the home, they were not good homemakers. The missionaries emphasised that these women were more restricted in movement, making it difficult for them to maintain the standards of cleanliness and sanitation around the house. At a conference of Protestant missionaries held in Shanghai in May 1877, an essay entitled “Feet Binding” by Sarah H. Woolston was read and discussed. In the paper, she wonders “how much of China’s poverty and dirt are owing to this cramping custom.”⁴⁹ Woolston’s comment reflects the Victorian obsession with the “cult of cleanliness” which emphasised sanitation

44 Patricia Ebrey, “Gender and Sinology: shifting Western interpretations of footbinding, 1300–1890,” *Late Imperial China* 20(2) (1999): 1–34.

45 Reverend Ye, “Discourse on quitting footbinding,” cited in Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, p. 17, who, in turn cites Baozhuo zi, “Xiamen ji chanzu hui,” in *Jindai Zhongguo nuquan yundong shiliao* (Documents on the Feminist Movement in Modern China, 1842–1911), ed. Li Youning and Zhang Yufa, Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1–75, pp. 839–40.

46 Quoted in Wang, *Aching for Beauty*, p. 5.

47 Macgowan, *How England Saved China*, pp. 30–31.

48 Quoted in S.H. Woolston, “Feet binding,” in *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China*, Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1877, pp. 132–37, p. 135.

49 Ibid., p. 133.

and personal hygiene as “hallmarks of a civilized society.”⁵⁰ Societies that did not prioritise the importance of cleanliness were seen as inferior. Secondly, a mother’s ability to provide proper childcare for her sons and daughters was also hindered if she had bound feet.⁵¹ What do the missionary recitations, dialogues and cantatas say about these issues?

Pain imposed on children

Not surprisingly, the missionary performances for children focus mainly on the “pain imposed on children.” In *He and She from O’er the Sea*, Cherry Blossom explains that for the first two or three months the footbinding “gives us horrible pain, we cannot rest day or night, and we have many a good cry.”⁵² Not only is the pain of footbinding unbearable, girls have to suffer the beatings of their mothers (and sometimes fathers) if they screamed too loudly during the process. In *Every-day Life in China*, the Chinese girl says:

When I was a very little girl, and could run about and jump, my mother called me one day, and sitting down took me on her knee and wound a long piece of calico all over my feet very tightly. I screamed and cried, and she cried a very little, but soon told me to be quiet and behave as all good girls should do; if not, she would beat me.⁵³

Although the mother “cried a very little,” she quickly exchanges her tears for threats. The Chinese girl in *Busy Bees* tells Rosie, “Often they can’t sleep for the *pain*, and moan *piteously* hanging their poor little feet outside the bed ... they dare not cry very loud lest their father should come and *beat* them [original emphasis].”⁵⁴ The agony of the girls is clearly meant to arouse sympathy from the audience.

In some of the performances mothers are portrayed as heartless while in others they are more sympathetic. For example, Chinese mothers are compared to Western mothers in *Busy Bees*: “Eastern women like their children to be in the fashion, as Western mothers do.”⁵⁵ Therefore they follow the custom of binding their daughter’s feet from an early age and “though the mother does not mean to be unkind she persists in spite of the bitter tears.”⁵⁶ The fault is not with the

50 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, New York: Routledge, 1995; Susan Schoenbauer Thurin, *Victorian Travelers and the Opening of China, 1842–1907*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999.

51 Drucker, “The influence of Western women on the anti-footbinding movement,” p. 184.

52 J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, p. 5.

53 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 7.

54 London Missionary Society, *Busy Bees: A Missionary Dialogue in Three Scenes*, London: London Missionary Society, 1902, p. 7.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

56 *Ibid.*

mothers; the unreasonable dictates of fashion are to blame. Cultural and societal expectations force women around the world to torment their bodies. A Chinese saying circulating at the time was, "A mother can't love both her daughter and her daughter's feet at the same time."⁵⁷

Marriage, love, and beauty

Although the origins of footbinding remain unverified and debated, Rosie in *Busy Bees* explains the history of footbinding to her friend Ethel with an air of authority:

You may be interested to know that centuries ago this practice was started. An Emperor of China made a special favourite of the one of his many wives who had small natural feet. The others were so jealous that they decided to pinch theirs and after many endeavours and much pain, succeeded in making them smaller than the coveted one's. And this cruel habit, so unsightly and injurious, became fashionable.⁵⁸

Rosie's story suggests that women were naturally jealous and competitive and willing to suffer injury in order to gain attention from men even though footbinding was "unsightly."

Although a bound foot was "unsightly" in the eyes of British children, Chinese ideals of female beauty were inextricably linked to small feet. In the wedding scene in *Every-day Life in China*, one of the guests inspects the bride and comments disapprovingly, "What large feet she has."⁵⁹ Most women's feet measured between three to five inches long.⁶⁰ Small three-inch feet, known as *sancun jinlian* (three inch golden lily/lotus), were the source of pride for the Chinese girls in these plays. As one bride exclaims: "Just look at my new shoes [*holding up a shoe three inches in length*]. I'm so glad I've got 'golden lilies.' What big feet you have!"⁶¹ Marriage prospects were closely linked to the size of a woman's feet and the girls in these missionary performances often inform the audience that their mothers warned them that they would not be able to find husbands or mothers-in-law if they did not have golden lilies. For example, in *Christ and the Children of China*, Jack, the son of a missionary, asks why ten-year-old runaway Little Bitterness had to submit to having her "awfully queer"

57 Gerry Mackie, "Ending footbinding and infibulation: a convention account," *American Sociological Review* 61(6) (1996): 999–1017, p. 1000.

58 London Missionary Society, *Busy Bees*, p. 13. See Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, pp. 113–31 for discussion of the debates on the origins of footbinding.

59 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 18.

60 Drucker, "The influence of Western women on the anti-footbinding movement," p. 180.

61 J.M.B., *He and She from O'er the Sea*, p. 10.

feet bound. She replies that her mother said “no one would ever marry me with big feet, and when I said I didn’t want to marry, she said I must.”⁶² Marriage is presented as an obligation rather than a choice.

It is worth noting that mothers-in-law are mentioned more frequently than husbands in the performances. In *He and She from O’er the Sea*, Cherry Blossom informs the audience, “Of course, you have heard that we have a custom of binding a girl’s feet when she is five or six years old. They tell us that we shall never get a mother-in-law unless we have small feet.”⁶³ In another part of the performance, Bright Orchid does not express joy at the prospect of having a husband but rather says, “I am quite glad to have a mother-in-law of my own. Don’t you want one yourself?”⁶⁴ Because she is entering into an arranged marriage, she has never met her husband but knows that “he is rich.” Bright Orchid speaks happily about her pending marriage but the Matchmaker in *Every-day Life in China* describes the bride looking sad at the wedding feast because she “is going to live with complete strangers” and will not be able to see her family for the next four months.⁶⁵

A bride’s happiness seems to depend more on the mother-in-law rather than the husband because a daughter-in-law probably spent more time with her mother-in-law than her spouse. For example, in *Every-day Life in China*, the Matchmaker explains, “should her mother-in-law turn out to be very bad tempered she knows that she will lead a thoroughly miserable life.”⁶⁶ She informs the audience, “Our Chinese marriages are based not upon love, but upon convenience.”⁶⁷ It was very important for the brides to maintain a good relationship with their mothers-in-law because, as Lung-kee Sun notes, “It is the mother who picks a daughter-in-law to serve herself, rather than the father who picks a bride for his son.... The personal satisfaction and happiness of the married couple are not top priority.”⁶⁸ Pleasing the mother-in-law would increase the chances of living in a harmonious household.

Ideas of domesticity

In the missionary recitations, women with bound feet are presented as indulging in frivolous activities instead of focusing on important tasks such as working around the house. For example, in *Every-day Life in China*, the slave girl complains

62 M. Maude Hoatson, Florence Hoatson and Carey Bonner, *Christ and the Children of China: A Sacred Cantata for Young People*, London: Sunday School Union, 1918, p. 31.

63 J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, p. 5.

64 Ibid., p. 10.

65 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, pp. 16–17.

66 Ibid., p. 16.

67 Ibid., p. 17.

68 Lung-kee Sun, *The Chinese National Character: from Nationhood to Individuality*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002, p. 198.

that her mistresses “leave us to do all the shopping while they spend their time doing fancy work or playing cards and dominoes.”⁶⁹ As Hunter observes, some of the older missionaries in Shaowu were careful not to play dominoes or cards because they did not want their Chinese servants to misunderstand their games and think they were gambling.⁷⁰ In other performances, a character notes, “My mother said that all a woman needs to know is how to prepare her husband’s food and to obey him.”⁷¹ Clearly the missionaries expected more than that. Although missionaries employed servants as well, they were not idle around the house. Managing a good home meant knowing how to manage the staff properly. The picture presented to audiences was that the Chinese ladies did not engage in useful work or meaningful activities around the house but historians have pointed out that even elite women were expected to ensure discipline was maintained in their homes.⁷²

The performances purport that a Chinese wife’s responsibility was to her father, husband, and sons. The Chinese Slave Girl in *Every-day Life in China* asserts:

Some day a husband will be found for me, and I shall be sold to one that seems suitable. Then I shall have to obey him, for women are never supposed to be their own mistresses. We are bound by what we call the “Three Obediences.” When young we must obey our parents, when married we must obey our husbands, and when widows we must obey our sons.⁷³

Although the girl mentions the Three Obediences, she fails to introduce the audience to the Four Virtues: “womanly work, womanly deportment, womanly virtues, and womanly speech.”⁷⁴ *Sancong side* (Three Obediences and Four Virtues) was advocated in Ban Zhao’s female conduct manual *Lessons for Women* (106 CE) written during the Han dynasty.⁷⁵ Qualities associated with womanly virtues include quietness, purity, chastity and modesty. Womanly work encompasses sewing, weaving and cooking while womanly speech focuses on speaking at appropriate times, refraining from speaking ill of others, and not taxing others with too much talk. Maintaining personal hygiene by washing regularly and ensuring that one’s clothes are clean are important features of womanly deportment.⁷⁶ Perhaps the author was unaware of the Four Virtues

69 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 2.

70 Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, p. 169.

71 J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, p. 10.

72 See Gates, *Footloose in Fujian*, p. 131.

73 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 2.

74 Ryan Dunch, “Christianizing Confucian didacticism: Protestant publications for women, 1832–1911,” *Nan Nü* 11 (2009): 65–101, p. 73.

75 Ban Zhao, *Nü jie qian shi* (Lessons for Women), Shanghai: Sao ye shan fang Minguo 10, 1921.

76 Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (eds), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, New York: Columbia University Press, 2nd ed., 1999, pp. 821–24.

but the silence may be more because the qualities sound strikingly similar to traditional Victorian values that an ideal woman should embody. By contrast, the Three Obediences are highlighted because they point to Chinese women's lack of agency: from childhood to old age, they are "never their own mistresses."⁷⁷

In addition to the Three Obediences, *Every-day Life in China* mentions female suicide as a demonstration of virtue and chastity when one loses her husband:

I must tell you, too, that should a girl in China lose her betrothed, or a young wife her husband, she is highly commended if she takes opium, or in some other way contrives to follow him into the unseen world, and outside the walls of many Chinese cities, as well as in some of the public streets, there are monumental arches, erected by the command of the Emperor, to perpetuate the memory of young women who have killed themselves rather than outlive their betrothed."⁷⁸

This is reflective of the chastity cult that was dominant in late imperial China (ca. 1368–1912), when "widow suicide became one of the most prevalent and widely praised expressions of chastity."⁷⁹ Suicide, according to the author, is treated lightly because "life is so lightly valued by them that the taking of it seems only a very little thing."⁸⁰ Although Christian wives were also supposed to be devoted to their husbands, suicide was not an option. The Chinese widows are portrayed as not cherishing the life bestowed upon them by God and the custom of erecting monuments in their honour is considered erroneous.

Female education

In the performance dialogues, the second most oft-mentioned topic is education. Christian educators of women and girls saw a direct link between spiritual edification and education. This was a greater motivation for them to teach female students to read compared to the necessity of training girls to become capable wives and mothers.⁸¹ In particular, Christian girls lament the fact that the foot-bound Chinese girls are illiterate and therefore unable to read books about God. At the Shanghai Missionary Conference of 1890, Arthur H. Smith remarked, "among the thousands of women who we have met, not more than

77 Scholars have often seen the text by Ban Zhao, *Nü jie qian shi* (Lessons for Women), as promoting female oppression. However, recently Lin-Lee Lee has argued that Ban Zhao was teaching women survival skills in this work. Lin-Lee Lee, "Inventing familial agency from powerlessness: Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women*," *Western Journal of Communication* 73(1) (2009): 47–66.

78 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 16.

79 Janet Theiss, "Female suicide, subjectivity and the state in eighteenth-century China," *Gender & History* 16(3) (2004): 513–37, p. 514.

80 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 16.

81 Dunch, "Christianizing Confucian didacticism," p. 77.

ten had learned to read.”⁸² Female missionaries reported that Chinese women regarded learning to read as a novel concept and questioned their ability to acquire reading skills.⁸³

The characters in the performances also pity the girls who believe that reading is only useful for boys, who are “worth ten times more than a girl.”⁸⁴ For example, in the scene where Eternal Peace wants to give Bright Orchid a book about God, she forgets that her friend cannot read and exclaims “poor Bright Orchid!”⁸⁵ The reply is, “Read! Why that’s only for men and boys to do. I don’t want to read.”⁸⁶ In another play, one of the Chinese boys shares his view on Chinese girls learning to read: “Why, I think it’s stupid.”⁸⁷ In *Busy Bees*, Rosie explains that the Chinese prefer boys because “a girl is supposed to be brainless, incapable of learning anything.”⁸⁸ According to the Chinese boy in *Every-day Life in China*, girls “can cook our rice and cabbage and meat when we are hungry, and make our shoes and stockings and jackets; but they are not good for much else.”⁸⁹ This condescending tone is designed to incite indignation from the audience: of course girls are capable of so much more!

The lack of schools for girls and the ignorance of illiterate mothers and grandmothers are cited as reasons most girls do not receive an education: “There was no girls’ school in my village, and as mother and venerable grandmother couldn’t read a word, it never entered their heads that I ought to learn.”⁹⁰ Education instead of marriage was presented as a better option. Eternal Peace announces, “I go to the foreigners’ school, and am learning so many wonderful things. It’s ever so much nicer than getting married.”⁹¹ Although Eternal Peace makes

82 Quoted in Hong, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom*, p. 53.

83 See Hong, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom*, p. 53. Alison Drucker notes that from the 1840s onwards, Christian missionaries, mostly women, started to oppose footbinding more vehemently and proposed that their churches and church-run schools stop admitting children with bound feet. See Drucker, “The influence of Western women on the anti-footbinding movement,” p. 183. The first school to refuse foot-bound students was established by American missionary Mary Porter Gamewell (1848–1906) of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society in Peking. Although Gamewell envisioned the students at her school running around happily and freely, in reality, she had difficulty with enrolment because mothers were unwilling to unbind their daughters’ feet even though it meant a free education. In the first two years after the school opened, only seven girls were enrolled in the classes. For more information on Gamewell, see Ethel Daniels Hubbard, *Under Marching Orders: a Story of Mary Porter Gamewell*, New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1909.

84 J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, p. 2.

85 Ibid., p. 10.

86 Ibid.

87 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 10.

88 London Missionary Society, *Busy Bees*, p. 13.

89 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 10.

90 J.M.B., *He and She from O’er the Sea*, p. 6.

91 Ibid., p. 10. The Chinese girls and women who learned to read would have been encouraged to study books on domesticity written in Chinese by Protestant missionaries such as *Jiaxue jizhen* (The Christian Home in China) compiled by Ada Haven, and Helen Nevius’ revision of the *Nü sishu* (The Four Books for Women). The three volumes in *Jiaxue jizhen* covered topics such as health and hygiene, childcare, household management, wifely duties, and includes a section against footbinding. Ryan Dunch notes that:

this statement, most of the mission schools taught girls “useful” skills to prepare them for work “in their own homes and in the spheres they must occupy in life.”⁹² The Chinese girls in these performances are enthusiastic about attending a foreigners’ school but, according to Jane Hunter’s research on Chinese girls’ experiences at mission schools after 1900, some of the students found the schools gloomy and not as challenging as they would have liked.⁹³

Supporting missions

Because the purpose of the performances was to garner more support for missions, the positive influence of the missionaries must be brought forth in each. In *Every-day Life in China*, for example, the head-knocking during the wedding ceremony is abolished and “the happy pair, if they may be so called, simply bow. This change has been brought about by the influence of the missionaries.”⁹⁴ The positive influence of missionaries is also listed as a reason a girl called Kien-Ki was saved. She explains that her mother was so disappointed that she was a girl “that she threw me away, and declared she would not keep me.”⁹⁵ If it had not been for her father listening to English missionaries and telling his wife that Christians do not kill their baby girls, Kien-Ki would probably have lost her life. In emphasising the important role of missionaries campaigning against footbinding and changing the attitudes of Chinese parents towards their daughters, the authors of these scripts fail to acknowledge the role Chinese reformists such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao played in rallying against footbinding.

The performance scripts present overly simplistic views on Chinese girls in terms of familial relationships, marriage, footbinding and education. In terms of family, when Little Bitterness in *Christ and the Children of China* meets Jack and Ruth, they welcome her into their home and their missionary parents adopt her into the family as Jesus adopted them to be called “children of God.” Ruth invites Little Bitterness to play with her, excited that they can be friends and “tell each other all our secrets!”⁹⁶ Little Bitterness explains that her name reflects the story of her life because when her brother Little Precious died not long after he was born, she was blamed for his death and everything that went wrong in

while *Jiaxue jizhen* certainly placed considerable emphasis on the domestic roles of women, and justified their education in terms of their domestic role (including their importance in rearing future generations)... It ascribed to women an essential role in ordering the world through their educated agency—moral, religious, practical, and scientific—and for bringing this new age about and putting it on a firm footing. See Dunch, “Christianizing Confucian didacticism,” p. 95.

92 Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997, p. 180.

93 Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, pp. 234–41.

94 Budden, *Missionary Cantata*, p. 19.

95 Ibid., p. 1.

96 Hoatson, Hoatson and Bonner, *Christ and the Children of China*, p. 31.

the family after that. When asked whether her parents will look for her and want to bring her back from the missionaries' home, she replies that they do not love her enough and that her father once said "he would be glad to know I was dead."⁹⁷ At the end of the performance, Little Bitterness's name is changed to "Little Happiness" to reflect her new attitude toward life.

In this short scene, the script writer emphasises the low status of Chinese girls, creating a heart-wrenching story of an unwanted child who needs a new family and presents an idealistic portrait of cross-cultural friendship and sisterly love between the Western children and Chinese children. In theory, missionary parents should have embraced Chinese girls into their family just as Jack and Ruth's father and mother eagerly did. However, as Jane Hunter points out, American missionaries at the turn of the century often discouraged their children from playing with their Chinese peers because they were afraid that Chinese children, who in their view were spoiled, undisciplined, and adept at deceit, would be a bad influence on their innocent ones.⁹⁸ Some of them sent their children back home to receive an education and to prevent them from being "corrupted" by the Chinese environment.

Many of the missionary cantatas and recitations juxtapose the Christian girls with the non-Christians, highlighting the emancipation of the girls in relation to their feet. Eternal Peace (a name reflecting the peace she enjoys because she is a Christian) is happy because her feet were never bound like Bright Orchid's and she can "run about the house and walk to school."⁹⁹ In *Busy Bees*, one character announces that Chinese Christian girls and women voluntarily unbind their feet because they "intend to glorify Him with their body."¹⁰⁰ This is a reference to 1 Corinthians 6:20 of the King James Bible: "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." In *He and She from O'er the Sea* a girl comments that after her neighbour had the bandages taken off her feet, "she walked like a boy. I laughed at her; indeed, we all made fun of her because she had followed the 'foreign devils' and had big feet."¹⁰¹ However, the girl probably would not move like a boy after unbinding her feet, because as Ko notes, women who unbound their feet after the bones were bent found it more difficult to walk.¹⁰² The reality of the pain experienced by those living life with unbound feet is not considered in the performance. The embodied reality of the "unfettered" feet is not an issue for the script writers. It is assumed that the Chinese girls are able to adapt to unbound feet as easily as changing into another set of clothes or taking on a new name.

97 Ibid.

98 See Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, pp. 108–09.

99 J.M.B., *He and She from O'er the Sea*, p. 10.

100 London Missionary Society, *Busy Bees*, p. 13.

101 J.M.B., *He and She from O'er the Sea*, p. 6.

102 Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, p. 11.

Conclusion

In the performances I have analysed, footbinding was equated with bad mothering. However, Chinese women probably thought they were being good mothers by insisting on subjecting their daughters to this pain. As Janet Theiss and others have pointed out, an important element of embodied feminine virtue in China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was physical pain. In addition to bearing the pain of childbirth, a wife must endure the pain of bound feet if she wished to gain respect in the community and power in the family.¹⁰³ Because of their love for their daughters, mothers wanted them to marry well by attracting a rich husband. However, potential suitors would not consider young women without small bound feet. Whereas female missionaries felt they could accomplish more for God if they were single, Chinese women were not so inclined to think this way. In the women's view, the shame and stigma of being an unwanted single woman would probably be much worse than the childhood pain caused by footbinding.

Not only is the content of the scripts problematic, paradoxes revolve around the broader production. Paradoxically, while emphasising the excruciating pain caused by Chinese mothers while binding their daughters' feet, the authors were silent on the plight of British girls suffering under corsets tightly laced by their mothers.¹⁰⁴ In some extreme cases, waists were compressed to only thirty-three centimetres (thirteen inches) wide. In 1909 and 1910, a series of letters to the editor of the general medical journal *The Lancet* argued about the damaging effects of corseting versus the perceived benefits.¹⁰⁵ Detriments to health caused by corsets, such as poor circulation, headaches, indigestion and dizziness, have been well-documented.¹⁰⁶ In the act of performing foot-bound Chinese girls, the corset-wearing British young women may have questioned whether they themselves were glorifying their God with their bodies.

103 Theiss, "Female suicide, subjectivity and the state in eighteenth-century China," p. 514.

104 According to Valerie Steele, "Older women, not men, were primarily responsible for enforcing sartorial norms," and that "the cultural weight placed on propriety and respectability made it difficult for women to abandon the corset, even if they wanted to." Steele, *The Corset*, p. 51.

105 See "Correspondence: civilisation and the corset," *The Lancet*, November 27, 1909, pp. 1630–31, December 4, 1909, pp. 1705–06; December 11, 1909, pp. 1774–75; January 15, 1910, pp. 203–05; February 5, 1910, pp. 397–98. Costume historian Patricia C. Warner argues that corsets supported the weight of massive skirts as well as the back and that tight-lacing was rare. Patricia C. Warner, "Feminism and costume history: synthesis and reintegration," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 18 (2000): 185–89.

106 Kathleen M. Torrens, "All dressed up with no place to go: rhetorical dimensions of the nineteenth century dress reform movement," *Women's Studies in Communication* 20(2) (1997): 189–210.

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