



## Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet

By Dorothy Ko

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### Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet By Dorothy Ko

In *Every Step a Lotus*, Dorothy Ko embarks on a fascinating exploration of the practice of footbinding in China, explaining its origins, purpose, and spread before the nineteenth century. She uses women's own voices to reconstruct the inner chambers of a Chinese house where women with bound feet lived and worked. Focusing on the material aspects of footbinding and shoemaking--the tools needed, the procedures, the wealth of symbolism in the shoes, and the amazing regional variations in style--she contends that footbinding was a reasonable course of action for a woman who lived in a Confucian culture that placed the highest moral value on domesticity, motherhood, and handwork. Her absorbing, superbly detailed, and beautifully written book demonstrates that in the women's eyes, footbinding had less to do with the exotic or the sublime than with the mundane business of having to live in a woman's body in a man's world.

Footbinding was likely to have started in the tenth century among palace dancers. Ironically, it was meant not to cripple but to enhance their grace. Its meaning shifted dramatically as it became domesticated in the subsequent centuries, though the original hint of sensuality did not entirely disappear. This contradictory image of footbinding as at once degenerate and virtuous, grotesque and refined, is embodied in the key symbol for the practice--the lotus blossom, being both a Buddhist sign of piety and a poetic allusion to sensory pleasures.

*Every Step a Lotus* includes almost one hundred illustrations of shoes from different regions of China, material paraphernalia associated with the customs and rituals of footbinding, and historical images that contextualize the narrative. Most of the shoes, from the collection of the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto, have not been exhibited before. Readers will come away from the book with a richer understanding of why footbinding carries such force as a symbol and why, long after its demise, it continues to exercise a powerful grip on our imaginations.

### A Copublication with the Bata Shoe Museum

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## Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet By Dorothy Ko Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

One of the best known, most torturous examples of fashionable alteration is Chinese foot binding. In *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet*, Barnard College history professor Dorothy Ko looks at the making and wearing of lotus shoes, the footwear for women with bound feet. Along the way she discredits some simplistic popular notions about foot binding and emphasizes the economic and social problems that it addressed. While the practice began as an exclusive custom of leisured elites, Ko explains, it spread to the peasantry in the 17th and 18th centuries, resulting in such incongruous artifacts as lotus rainboots and galoshes. Color photographs throughout the book illustrate Ko's explanation of shoemaking, foot binding and the symbolism of the shoes' decorations, though the beauty of the shoes (and this book, which includes step-by-step, how-to instructions for binding) belies the pain of the wearers.

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From [Booklist](#)

Foot binding is often cited as an emblem of the oppression of women and as such exerts a morbid fascination. But Ko, a history professor at Barnard, urges readers not to view the practice through modern eyes but to study it as a cultural phenomenon deeply embedded in Chinese history. Downplaying the tradition's erotic aspects, Ko offers a cogent discussion of Chinese women's lives during the eighteenth century, the pinnacle of the cult of the lotus foot. Mothers bound their daughters' feet, and foot binding evolved into a rite of passage into womanhood within the Confucian system, which valued female domesticity and textile arts. Shoe making became a highly prized craft and an integral part of the foot-binding ritual, and therefore Ko's enlightening narrative is accompanied by gorgeous reproductions of unbelievably tiny, exquisitely embroidered shoes for bound feet. As she identifies various shoe styles, interprets the complex symbolism of their elaborate designs, and elucidates the spiritual and religious aspects of foot binding, Ko convincingly defines the practice as a historical source of female identity, purpose, pride, and power. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"To read or not to read?--that's the question. In the end, it comes down to whether or not such a practice is of historic, cultural and artistic interest. In this regard, Ko's book is persuasive that footbinding meets all these tests."-PACIFIC READER

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**Herbert Beckley:**

What do you ponder on book? It is just for students because they're still students or this for all people in the world, what the best subject for that? Merely you can be answered for that question above. Every person has distinct personality and hobby for each and every other. Don't to be compelled someone or something that they don't need do that. You must know how great in addition to important the book *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet*. All type of book could you see on many solutions. You can look for the internet solutions or other social media.

**Barbara Akins:**

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