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Role of American and British Women in the Fight
against Footbinding

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1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with Chinese custom of footbinding and seeks to demonstrate how important were the activities of several American and British women for eradication of this custom in China. All of the essential steps in building the anti-footbinding movement, that are presented in the thesis, were taken by the women either from USA or the United Kingdom. These women were an initial force behind the successful eradication of the custom and they laid the foundation for the whole movement.

The first part briefly describes the practice of footbinding within its historical and cultural context. The detailed description of the whole process of the binding and its risks for health are given in order to show the reasons why the western women found the custom to be inhuman and why they felt compelled to fight against it. This part should also shed light on the main reason why did the custom persisted for so long and why the Chinese women kept it alive.

To describe the practice is necessary for better understanding of the problems and arguments which the American and British women living in China encountered. Moreover, the footbinding is a cultural phenomenon that is not widely known outside of Asia and so the brief introduction to the subject is needed.

This part also supplies the thesis with a time frame showing that eradication of footbinding began before the national revolution in 1911 and so the women activists can be safely marked as the initiators of the anti-footbinding movement. The last part of the first chapter thus serves as an explanation why is the thesis primarily concerned with the women working in 19th century.

The next part focuses on the work of the Christian missions and role of the women missionaries in China. Since a marital status heavily influenced the scope of a woman's activities and possibilities, I divided the women missionaries into two groups: married and single.

Although, the missionaries concentrated on the work within the Chinese Christian community, they were the first ones to organize the anti-footbinding societies and the girl's schools that would not accept the girls with bounded feet. In doing so, they became the pioneers in employing the major anti-footbinding strategies. The chapter is closely describing a first society and a school of such kind—The Heavenly Foot Society and Peking Boarding School. Also an account of other methods and

accomplishments is given, namely the conference speeches drawing the attention of all the missionaries towards the issue of footbinding.

The fourth chapter presents the most prominent anti-footbinding society and its American leader Alicia Little. Natural Foot Society was and still is considered to be one of the most influential organization in the fight against footbinding. After a short biographical introduction about Alicia Little and her role in founding the society, the chapter gives us an account of the activities and methods of the organization. There is a special focus on the publishing and the campaign tours given throughout China, since these activities were considered to be highly successful and helped to gain many members and supporters.

One of the main accomplishments of the foreign anti-footbinding movement was its influence on the Chinese male elite. This influence is the subject of the last chapter. I chose four particular Chinese men that encountered the work of American and British women and were positively influenced by their work. These men became the followers of anti-footbinding movement and the active advocates of its ideals. This chapter shows on the particular selected examples how much and in which ways the influence of western women manifested. Through this last chapter we can see how the efforts of the women missionaries and activists transformed into a voice of Chinese anti-footbinding movement.

2 Footbinding

2.1 Origin of the Practice

There are many legends about origin of the footbinding. Even an explanation for the term “golden lilies,” which was used for the bound feet, is unclear and until today has various versions. Already as early as in 12th and 13th century the Chinese scholars could not pinpoint the exact origin of the custom either.¹ What connects all the stories about the origin is belief that the fashion of small feet began with the ruling classes and then gradually spread to lower classes. We know for certain that during the reign of

¹ Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 111-118, PDF e-book.

Ming dynasty (1368-1644) the custom was already widely common and became a norm.²

There were however large groups living in China who did not engage in the practice. Most prominently the Manchus, who ruled the country in time of Qing dynasty (1644-1911), and another non-Han ethnicities such as Hakka people.

2.2 Process of the Binding

Professor Brent Whitefield in his scholarly note suggests that rather than footbinding “footbreaking might be a more accurate description of the procedure.”³ He is not wrong. The process of forming the young girls’ feet into the desired three inch long shape took a long time, strong bandages and even stronger hand. Not to mention the pain resulting into the sleepless nights and a near immobility.

The goal of the binding was to create a very small foot with a high arch, an instep should have been in a shape of bow. This was done by bending the toes (except the big one) under the sole which led to a more narrow shape of a foot. If the progress was too slow, the toes would be broken.⁴ The process would continue then by bringing the sole as close to the heel as possible which caused the shortening. In the end the sole was facing the heel and there was a narrow space between the two.⁵ All of this was done with help of the bandages which were regularly tightened.⁶ When walking, the weight of the body would be centered entirely on the heels and the pain was likely to last all life.⁷

The age of girls in which the binding started varied. Alison Drucker places the initial time of stopping the growth generally between the age of four and eight.⁸ This

² Alison R. Drucker, “The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement 1840-1911,” *Historical Reflections* 8, no. 3 (1981), 179, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41298767>.

³ Brent Whitefield, “The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society): Christian Women in China and the Fight against Footbinding,” *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 30, no. 1 (2008): 204, http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2008/25_Whitefield_2008.pdf.

⁴ Mrs. Archibald Little, *Intimate China: The Chinese as I Have Seen Them* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1899): 137, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/43456/43456-h/43456-h.htm>.

⁵ John F. Fairbank, *Dějiny Číny* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1998), 296.

⁶ Eliza J. Gillet Bridgman, *Daughters of China; or, sketches of domestic life in the Celestial Empire* (New York: Carter, 1853), 166, https://openlibrary.org/books/OL22865179M/Daughters_of_China.

⁷ Little, *Intimate China*, 143-144.

⁸ Drucker, “The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement,” 180.

time frame is consistent with the data in Alicia Little's memorials⁹ and also with notions of historian John F. Fairbank.¹⁰

The tightly bandaged feet were liable to diseases, ulceration, gangrene or even mortification. The binded feet required frequent care and high level of hygiene.¹¹ Despite the care, the girls would often lose their limbs or even die. Such cases were documented many times by the foreigners and the medics in 19th century. Losing the toes (they literally fell off) or an amputation below the ankles was not unusual.¹²

Unfortunately, the rate of death was also very high—Fairbank estimates it to be 10% of the girls.¹³ This number presumably comes from Alicia Little's memoir where she observes that "one girl out of ten dies of footbinding or its after-effects," she then adds that this number is probably even higher further inland.¹⁴

Apart from the health complications, the bound feet were impractical also in other aspects, especially in the daily life. The women were not able to move swiftly from place to place in time of a danger (be it a fire or a military attack) and they were not as productive in their work as they could be.

2.3 Why did the Custom Persist

Why did the harmful and impractical custom persist? Although, this question would deserve a far more complex answer, the main pro-binding arguments that the foreign anti-footbinding movement encountered in 19th century were connected to the traditional role of women in the Chinese society.

Chinese parents strongly favoured boys over girls, an infanticide of the newborn girls was quite common.¹⁵ The value of a girl laid in her ability to marry, bear sons and in her virtue. A Chinese girl would be in her life perceived either as a daughter, wife, mother or a widow. Those were her only roles in Chinese society. If a girl did not marry, she represented a financial burden to her family. This is a reason why every family wished to marry their daughter off.

To get such a marriage was question of the properly bounded feet. If a girl achieved really small feet thru the binding, she was more esteemed and more suitable

⁹ Little, *Intimate China*, 137.

¹⁰ Fairbank, *Dějiny Čín*, 296.

¹¹ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 233.

¹² Little, *Intimate China*, 141.

¹³ Fairbank, *Dějiny Číny*, 297.

¹⁴ Little, *Intimate China*, 140.

¹⁵ For further discussion of this problem, see Mungello, *Drowning Girls in China*, 9-12.

for a good marriage. If their foot was small enough, even the girls from the very poor families could marry into a wealthy family and rise into a better social standing.

The girls with natural feet were on the other hand treated as “slave-women,” and they could not be married nor dressed properly.¹⁶ Missionary Eliza J. Bridgman observed that a girl with natural feet “may be bought for a sum of money if she have a pretty face, for the second, third or fourth wife, but the large feet affect her rank seriously in domestic life, and hence the prevalence of the custom.”¹⁷

The Chinese women were caught in a vicious circle. If the mothers wanted a good life for their daughters, they had to bind their daughters’ feet. Also the expectations of the society coerced them to do so. The footbinding was practiced for several centuries and to step out of the custom was simply not in power of the practising women.

2.4 Downfall of the Practice

The Qing dynasty tried twice (in 1665 and in 1847) to prohibit the practice but always faced a defeat.¹⁸ There were other scarce voices opposing the custom throughout the centuries. One of them was, for example, a well known critic of the practice Li Ruzhen, an author of a famous novel *Flowers in the mirror*. Unfortunately, these rare efforts never gained any strong support from the public and did not bring out any results.

We can often read that it was fall of the Qing empire and national revolution that sparked the eradication of the footbinding. The truth is that the practice started to fall out of favour much earlier. At the time of the downfall of the empire in 1911 the whole anti-footbinding movement was already heavily started and largely successful. With rise of the nationalists, the movement just gained a final momentum. Also with progressing modernization and industrialization of China there were no reasonable arguments left for maintaining the custom that prevented otherwise healthy women from working. In the eyes of revolution footbinding became a sign of a feudal society.

Quite surprisingly the driving force behind the first stages of the eradication were the foreigners. As was indicated in a previous part, the Chinese themselves were so much accustomed to the footbinding that they have seen it as a natural part of their

¹⁶ John McGowan, *How England Saved China* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913), 26, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006574314>.

¹⁷ Bridgman, *Daughters of China*, 166-167.

¹⁸ Gerry Mackie, “Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account,” *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 6 (1996): 1001, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096305>.

lives. American missionary John McGowan describes this as “the intense conservatism of the people, who looked upon everything that had come down from past as too sacred ever to be touched with the finger of reform.”¹⁹ In the light of this statement we can realize that the change could not come from within the Chinese society. A nudge towards a social change was needed from the foreigners.

Brent Whitefield states that “the practice began to decline after 1890 and dropped off rapidly after 1900.”²⁰ This view is supported by Fairbank who in 1930s noticed that the women in Chinese countryside under thirty years of age had the natural feet.²¹ This timeline suggest that when the nationalists banned the practice in 1911, there already was a solid foundation for the restriction created by efforts of the foreigners in the previous decades. They also helped to generate the atmosphere of general acceptance for anti-footbinding movement. Dorothy Ko supports this notion further when she places “the height of the anti-footbinding agitation” into the years 1895-1898.²² It is no coincidence that the year 1895 is mentioned, since it was the year of founding Natural Foot Society (which will be discussed in the later chapters).

3 Women in the Missions

After 1840s there was an increased amount of the missionaries coming to China. This was caused by a result of the Opium Wars, which Great Britain and its allies won and in consequence China was forced to accept the unequal treaties in 1842. In the previous years, foreigners were not allowed to reside in China and trading was restricted only to Guangzhou city.²³ After the wars, the foreigners could get further into Chinese territory, trade in the treaty ports and easily import the western goods with a minimal tax. Moreover, part of the unequal treaties was extraterritoriality. Thanks to this exemption from Chinese law, all American and British citizens were not under Chinese jurisdiction and no action could be taken against them no matter what they did.²⁴

¹⁹ McGowan, *How England Saved China*, 30.

²⁰ Whitefield, “The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society),” 205.

²¹ Fairbank, *Dějiny Číny*, 296.

²² Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, 17.

²³ James Zheng Gao, introduction to *Historical Dictionary of Modern China 1800-1949* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

For these reasons the missionaries suddenly had free access to China and they fully used this opportunity. However, it should be noted that American missionaries would come to China mostly after the end of the Civil War in 1865.²⁵

The main aim of the women missionaries in China was to spread Christianity between the Chinese girls and teach them the values of the Christian life. The missionaries expected these girls promulgate the faith inside their families and to set an example by being the good wives and mothers. Professor Delia Davin argues that this initial goal changed into the need to do social reforms and to improve the lives of Chinese women and that consequently the missionaries “had laid the basis for the women’s rights movements in modern China.”²⁶

3.1 Married Couples

Since the Protestant priests, unlike the Catholic ones, could marry, we can divide the American and British women missionaries into two groups. Those who came with their husbands as a part of a married couple and those who came alone as a single woman.

Although, the primary role of a priest’s wife in China was to create a home and to support her husband, the wives soon began to realize themselves also in other activities. They were expected to help their husbands with their work and to teach young pupils. They gladly undertook this task and they “increasingly concentrated on girls’ education.”²⁷

3.2 The Heavenly Foot Society

One of the first remarkable couples in the field were Reverend John McGowan from London Mission Society and his wife. They were appalled by the footbinding custom and thought it to be barbarous and against God.²⁸ Their fight against this custom inside their Chinese Christian community in Xiamen started with the piercing cries of their neighbour’s little girl²⁹ and lasted for many years. It should be noted that Mrs. McGowan was not just a minor unthinking helper of her husband but an active and decisive individual who felt as deeply on the subject of footbinding as her husband

²⁵ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 170.

²⁶ Delia Davin, “British Women Missionaries In Nineteenth-Century China,” *Women's History Review* 1, no. 2 (1992): 258, doi:10.1080/0961202920010204.

²⁷ Davin, “British Women Missionaries In Nineteenth-Century China,” 262.

²⁸ McGowan, *How England Saved China*, 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

did.³⁰ On the basis of the previous events, they together decided to try and change the situation of the Chinese girls and they worked in this matter as partners.

In 1875, fifteen years after they arrival to China,³¹ they organized the first meeting for the women from Xiamen congregations. Since at that time it was unusual to make such a public meeting for the women, the couple was afraid of possible commotion and no attendance. However, their efforts to speak against the footbinding over the years finally brought the results. The attendance was not low, the Chinese women did show up and they discussed the problem of the footbinding openly. Some of them³² even made the pledges that they would not bind their daughters' feet and signed up their names for the cause. The assembly agreed upon meeting twice a year (in spring and in autumn) and set a goal of educating the public.³³ In this way, McGowans founded the first anti-footbinding group, called The Heavenly Foot Society, formed from the Chinese Christian women. It was a very progressive and revolutionary move.

The newly established society was successful in creating the public discussion via the medium of the meetings. Anyone could come and voice their opinions and many did so. Also more and more women registered and entered the society and the number of women with natural feet in the local Christian community increased.³⁴

Also the first pioneers of unbounding emerged from McGowans' society. Unbounding was previously considered to be very hard to achieve, if not impossible. It was a slow and difficult process, not always successful. The success depended "on many factors, such as regional differences in the manner of applying the bandages or the age in which the binding started."³⁵ Alicia Little describes the process as painful and adds that the women often had to lie down for several days. If the toes were broken in the childhood, the feet would never fully recover.³⁶

However, there were women in The Heavenly Foot Society who succeeded. What started as an experiment with an uncertain result became a necessary requirement

³⁰ McGowan, *How England Saved China*, 29.

³¹ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 14.

³² Only wealthy families could make such a pledge since a girl with natural feet would probably stay unmarried and represented a financial burden.

³³ McGowan, *How England Saved China*, 60-71.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-75.

³⁵ Little, *In the Land of the Blue Gown*, 281.

³⁶ Little, *Intimate China*, 162.

for every woman that wanted to enter the society.³⁷ To prove that the unbounded state of feet was possible was very important step for any future anti-footbinding activists.

The news about flourishing efforts against the footbinding in Xiamen spread between the missionaries and “missionary ladies in different parts of the Empire” would write to The Heavenly Foot Society and ask for help and information.³⁸ The idea of using an organization with registered members as a tool in the anti-footbinding efforts found its way to other regions of China, and the women missionaries were highly interested in the methods employed by McGowans and implemented them into their own work. In fact, the meetings of other anti-footbinding societies that were founded later in time would have very similar proceedings.

3.3 Single Missionaries

In 19th century a woman in western society was still expected to get married and most of all be a good wife and mother, a proverbial guardian of the hearth. The society certainly did not expect women to go on an adventure in Far East. Especially not the unmarried ones.

However, the charity and religious activities were the spheres that were recommended for women to engage in. Davin proposes that this was an important factor that allowed the women to become the missionaries and, albeit unmarried, to go to such exotic destinations as China.³⁹ They often had there more freedom and opportunities to express themselves than they had in their countries of origin.⁴⁰ Of course, there were voices within the missionary organizations that were against sending single women into China, but for example as soon as in 1843 the single women were already appointed as the teachers in the missionary schools.⁴¹

Why were the women missionaries needed? Chinese society was very strict in regard to the relationships between men and women and virtue was one of the girls’ most valued attribute. In many parts of China, this led to a seclusion. The Chinese women, especially those from higher classes, would not be seen in the streets and in the

³⁷ McGowan, *How England Saved China*, 77-86.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁹ Davin, “British Women Missionaries In Nineteenth-Century China,” 259.

⁴⁰ Lisa P. Spees, “Missionary Women in China: Changing China, Changing Themselves,” *Emory Endeavors in World History 2* (2008): 1, <http://history.emory.edu/home/documents/endeavors/volume2/LisaSpees.pdf>.

⁴¹ Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 239.

public places, they were secluded at their homes.⁴² These strict customs were the reason for building the boarding schools rather than the day schools and also the reason why these schools had to be led by the women teachers. The Chinese girls could not just go to and from a school—that would be highly inappropriate.⁴³

Therefore, the women were needed in every mission for closer communication with the Chinese women and for educating them. The Chinese customs would not have it otherwise. The wives of missionaries however did not have the sufficient time to fully attend to the mission's affairs. They often had their own children and household to take care of and so the single missionary girls were needed.⁴⁴

There was another beneficial factor in having the unmarried women in the missions. Chinese people had doubts about their propriety and sometimes due to the superstition may have been suspicious about their true intentions⁴⁵ but they would not suspect these women from an espionage or some political actions.⁴⁶ This was further supported by the fact that they worked mostly at home or in the schools and hospitals.⁴⁷ Many Chinese disliked the foreigners because of the unequal treaties but they would perceive the foreign women as less threatening and definitely not politically involved.

Since half of the 19th century number of the single women missionaries was rising steadily and by the end of the century most of the missionaries were women.⁴⁸ Ian Welch states that in the 1890s “nearly two-thirds of missionaries in China were single women.”⁴⁹

⁴² Helen S. C. Nevius, *Our Life in China* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1869), 58, <https://archive.org/details/ourlifeinchina00nevigooq>.

⁴³ Margaret E. Burton, *The Education of Women in China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911), 33, <https://archive.org/details/educationwomeni00burtgoog>.

⁴⁴ Davin, “British Women Missionaries In Nineteenth-Century China,” 262.

⁴⁵ Ethel Daniels Hubbard, *Under Marching Orders* (New York: Young People's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada, 1909), 38, <https://archive.org/details/undermarchingord00hubb>.

⁴⁶ Marshall Broomhall, *The jubilee story of the China Inland Mission* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1915), 181-182, <https://archive.org/stream/jubileechinamis00broouoft>.

⁴⁷ Spees, “Missionary Women in China,” 2.

⁴⁸ Davin, “British Women Missionaries In Nineteenth-Century China,” 257.

⁴⁹ Ian Welch, “Women's Work for Women: Women Missionaries in 19th Century China” (lecture, Eighth Women in Asia Conference Women's Caucus of the Asian Studies Association of Australia & The University of Technology, Sydney, 2005), 7, <http://anglicanhistory.org/asia/china/welch2005.pdf>.

We can see from the increasing numbers that the women missionaries overcame any doubts about their service and became a natural part of the missions. This is further illustrated by the following table showing increase in number of the women missionaries from the United Kingdom.

Table 1. Number of British unmarried women missionaries in China according to years

Year	Number of women
1866	14
1877	63
1890	316

Sources: Data from Broomhall (1915); Davin (1992).

3.4 Employed Strategies

The strategies employed by the women missionaries to discourage the Chinese from the footbinding can be specified as knowledge of the Chinese culture and the language which led to the publishing activities and system of taking vows, and matchmaking inside the Christian community. Another approach that showed up to be very important were the boarding schools for girls. They offered free lodgings and food in exchange for permission to keep the girls' feet in their natural state.

Lisa P. Spees points out that the missionaries stayed in China for long periods of time. They were not just the passing thru travellers and they often lived inland, far from the foreign concessions.⁵⁰ In this way, they could have a better insight into the Chinese culture and working of the Chinese minds and that was an unquestionable advantage.

Another advantage needed for influencing the natives was the ability to communicate. After they arrival to China, the missionaries would diligently try to learn the Chinese language. Many of them became fluent speakers⁵¹ either in Mandarin Chinese or in Cantonese. It was necessary for their work and for spreading their thoughts by publishing activities. The missionaries were using their knowledge of the language to voice their opinion of the footbinding in print as early as 1870 and were

⁵⁰ Spees, "Missionary Women in China," 3.

⁵¹ We can mention Mary P. Gamewell or Eliza J. Bridgman as one of them. See Hubbard, *Under Marching Orders*, 10; Bridgman, *Daughters of China*, 164-165.

“receiving mostly favorable responses.”⁵² Later, the pamphlets in Chinese were circulated. They were discouraging the Christians from the binding, the first of them published in 1894.⁵³

The missionaries would also advise against footbinding during the church services when they would appeal to the common sense. They presented “pragmatic objections” to the custom, such as woman’s physical inability to take proper care of her household and her children.⁵⁴

Any family that would not bind their daughter’s feet would be marked as the outcasts and would be ridiculed. A girl with unbound feet did not have a good prospects for marriage and only wealthy families could keep their daughters at home and unmarried. Given the circumstances, the missionaries had to come up with a solution for the families that would consider unbounding but were afraid of the social stigma and reprimands. This could be solved by intermarrying inside the Christian community. The system of taking vows can be traced to The Heavenly Foot Society. The members of the societies would pledge their allegiance to the cause by various promises. The parents would promise to keep the daughters’ feet unbound, and vice versa let their sons marry only the girls with natural feet.⁵⁵ It should be understood at this point that the Chinese marriages were always arranged by the parents, often in a very young age of the persons involved.

This is also where the role of acting as the matchmakers begins for the lady missionaries leading the girls’ schools. Since the girls in their care were often orphans, it was their responsibility to find the suitable husbands for their little wards with natural feet.⁵⁶ As an anonymous American lady missionary from a school in Zhangjiakou expressed in her correspondence: “Anti-footbinding seems to be very much entangled with match-making on my part.”⁵⁷ A girls’ school in Shanxi led by Mr. and Mrs. McKee also reported facing a matchmaking challenge because they were applying the natural feet rule in admitting the pupils.⁵⁸ On the other hand, since the missionaries led also the boys’ schools, there was always a source of young eligible Christian men to pair the girls up with.

⁵² Whitefield, “The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society),” 208.

⁵³ Drucker, “The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement,” 188.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁵ Drucker, “The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement,” 187.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Little, *Intimate China*, 147.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

3.5 Missionary Schools

As Dana L. Robert observes in her *American Women in Mission*, to open the christian schools for boys and girls and to influence the young pupils was a priority for the missions.⁵⁹

From the beginning, there was a special effort establish the girls' boarding schools.⁶⁰ This was a practical plan - the missionaries realized that having a christian wife and mother in a Chinese family was a great prospect for spreading the faith and getting the new believers. Unfortunately, the Chinese parents feared the foreigners and did not want to send the children into the missionary schools at first.⁶¹ In consequence, only the poorest families would let their children study in them and many of the pupils were orphans. Over the years, the situation changed and the schools gained a more favorable reputation.

Apart from the propagation of Christianity and preventing the footbinding, the schools brought yet another result. By educating the Chinese girls, the missionaries trained up a group of future Chinese teachers that did not existed previously. An educational system for the girls in China was virtually nonexistent before the missionaries came and so when the Chinese government wanted to build up the state girls' schools they could, and in fact had to, use these girls with natural feet as the teachers.⁶²

3.5.1 Peking Boarding School

After opening of China to the foreigners, Women's Foreign Missionary Society planned to organize a girls' boarding school and "to conduct evangelistic work among women."⁶³ Therefore, in 1871 two American missionaries were appointed in northern China: Mary Porter Gamewell and Maria Brown.

Mary Porter Gamewell (1848-1906), Porter was her maiden name, was sent to China under the flag of the Methodist Episcopal Church and spent there almost thirty

⁵⁹ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 171.

⁶⁰ Alice Henrietta Gregg, *China and educational autonomy: the changing role of the Protestant educational missionary in China, 1807-1937* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1946), 17, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006554538/Home>.

⁶¹ Hubbard, *Under Marching Orders*, 38.

⁶² Davin, "British Women Missionaries In Nineteenth-Century China," 267.

⁶³ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 173.

years in total as a missionary and a teacher.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, not many information is known about her companion Maria Brown other than that she came from Melrose, Massachusetts and was sent to China along with Mary by the same organisation.⁶⁵

In August 1872, these two young american women were ready to open a boarding school for girls in Beijing.⁶⁶ Together they decided that they would not admit the girls with bound feet. That was quite a revolutionary step even for the missionaries at that time. Other missionary schools also did not approve of the footbinding but they never forcefully applied their opinion in such a strict manner.

Most of the misisionary schools compromised because of the need to spread the gospel between the young and taught all girls. Gamewell and Brown were considering the rightness of their decision at first. If they admitted the girls with bound feet, they could educate more children and they were advised by other missionaries to do so, but they persisted in their decision. This determination came from their profound belief that the body is a gift from God and a man should not change God's creation and its natural form. As a result of this, their Peking Boarding School became the first one to set admitting only the girls with unbound feet as a rule.⁶⁷

Number of the girls visiting the school, especially in the first years of the school, was due to the rule very low and fluctuating. Parents still perceived unbounding as ruining the girls' future and were suspicious towards the foreigners. The pupils would often be taken out from the schooling just after receiving set of warm clothes.⁶⁸ This however does not change the fact that Gamewell and Brown were pioneers who set the path for others who came after them. Actually, the situation got better eventually and the school gained a good reputation.⁶⁹ Also, the rule not to admit the girls with bound feet started to spread and over time was applied not only in the missionary schools⁷⁰ but also in the state schools.

⁶⁴ Charles Yrigoyen and Susan E. Warrick, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Methodism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996): 163-164.

⁶⁵ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 173.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Hubbard, *Under Marching Orders*, 33-35.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁶⁹ A. H. Tuttle, *Mary Porter Gamewell And Her Story of the Siege in Peking* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1907), 55, <https://archive.org/details/maryportergamew00tuttgoog>.

⁷⁰ "By 1894, only one of the five Methodist girl's boarding schools had not yet made unbinding the feet a requirement for admission." Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 176.

One of the schools following the Gamewell's footsteps was Girls' School of Hangzhou founded after summer 1874 by Mary Louisa Horton Stuart from the Southern Presbyterian Mission. (Her husband John Linton Stuart opened a school for boys but it was later closed by the mission.) Horton had a previous experience with leading a girls' school from USA and became a principal of her Chinese school.⁷¹ The school required the girls to unbound their feet. Another condition for an admission was a promise from the parents that their girl will not be forced into an arranged marriage. Despite these rules, the school was after a few years very successful and there were more applicants than could be accommodated.⁷²

In 1905, thirty years after founding the Peking Boarding School, the imperial government banned footbinding in its schools and in 1910 made a resolution "that no bound-footed girls would be admitted into any government school."⁷³ Thirty years may seem as a long time but when we consider how long existed the practice of footbinding in China alive and undisturbed, it is surely an adequate time for such a rapid change of the conditions in the society.

The resolutions from the years 1905 and 1910 is one of several examples, how the Chinese adopted a strategy used by the American and British lady missionaries in the fight against footbinding.

3.6 The Conferences

Another women from the Methodist Episcopal Church felt need to clearly distance themselves from the footbinding practice - sisters Beulah and Sarah Woolston. They came to China in 1858 and a year later in Fuzhou established a first American Methodist girls' school in Asia.

In 1877 at Shanghai Missionary Conference, Sarah read her paper called "Feet Binding" and voiced her negative opinion on the practice.⁷⁴ More importantly, she "raised for the conference the question of the church's attitude toward the custom"⁷⁵

⁷¹ John Leighton Stuart, *Fifty Years in China* (New York: Random House, 1954), 12-14, <https://archive.org/details/fiftyyearsinchin012639mbp>.

⁷² Little, *Intimate China*, 145.

⁷³ Virginia Chui-tin Chau, "The Anti-footbinding Movement in China (1850-1912)" (master's essay, Columbia University, 1966), 148, quoted in Alison R. Drucker, "The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement 1840-1911," *Historical Reflections* 8, no. 3 (1981), 198, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41298767>.

⁷⁴ Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 748.

⁷⁵ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 175.

and presented a request that the missions should take a definite stand in this matter. Until that time “the male missionaries went on record opposing the custom but preferred to use moral suasion rather than discipline against it, for them it was less central to Christian practice than such issues as idolatry.”⁷⁶

The tendency to force other missionaries to more profound actions in regard to the anti-footbinding movement continued, and in 1885 the women missionaries held a conference in Suzhou where they urged their superiors to make a decisive statement about the footbinding in a form of a formal protest.⁷⁷ Once again, the ladies in the mission took an action and lobbied for improving lives of the Chinese women.

3.7 The Women Missionaries as the Pathfinders

The custom of footbinding was so much prevalent and strong in the Chinese minds that soon it became ordinary even to the eyes of the western missionaries and they reconciled with it. On the other hand, there was a small number of those who refused to give up and continued in the fight.

It was primarily the women missionaries who became involved in the anti-footbinding endeavour and did not concentrate so much on converting the Chinese to Christianity. Since the numbers of female missionaries were rising so did the number of the advocates of anti-footbinding movement. They would work not only in their local Christian communities but they would also repeatedly pressure other missionaries to make a clear public statement and clearly express their negative attitude towards the footbinding.

Although, the missionary anti-footbinding movement was centered mainly inside the Chinese Christian community, the movement itself and its ideals started to spread among the Chinese regardless their religion. The Chinese converts were definitely helpful in spreading the ideas of the movement between the other non-Christian Chinese.

It would also seem that the Chinese were more able to adapt to the idea of the unbound feet than to the idea of the foreign religion. The Christians would always remain a very small group and their numbers were never high in comparison with the other religions and beliefs of China. In 1920 the Christians of the Protestant churches constituted only 0,16% of the whole Chinese population.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the

⁷⁶ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 175.

⁷⁷ Drucker, “The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement,” 188.

⁷⁸ Spees, “Missionary Women in China,” 13.

studies, such as the one from Dingzhou city (place formerly known as Dingxian), shows a rapid decrease in footbinding after the year 1900 and near disappearance of the custom in some areas after the year 1919.⁷⁹ That is an evidence that the idea of the natural feet became accepted and widespread across people of all the beliefs unlike the Christianity.

The lady missionaries took the first radical steps in changing the situation of the women in China and can be marked as the pathfinders of the anti-footbinding movement. The civil and Chinese anti-footbinding societies learned from their early attempts and copied their methods of influencing the Chinese.

4 Alicia Little and Natural Foot Society

4.1 Alicia Little

Alicia Little (maiden name Alicia Bewicke) was born in 1845 in England. When she married Archibald Little in 1886 she was already publicly known as an author of several novels. Her husband was a businessman in China and an author too. They travelled to China in 1887. At first they lived in Chongqing and later moved to Shanghai.⁸⁰

She excessively wrote about China and captured her experiences in her writings. She wrote fiction inspired by an expatriate life and in 1896 was published her novel *A Marriage in China*. She also focused on writing her diaries and memoirs, these books (some of them full of photographs) are detailed and lively account of China at that time—an excellent source of information for the scholars even today. She had a chance to closely observe the life of the common Chinese people around her and their various traditional customs. She gave us a very precise account of 19th century China and had also noted the differences between the regions she visited (for example, the local differences in the age in which the footbinding starts).⁸¹

In her writings she draws attention to the problem of footbinding, especially by presenting the particular cases of the custom that caused an amputation of a leg or even the girls' death.⁸²

⁷⁹ Sidney D. Gamble, "The Disappearance of Foot-Binding in Tingsien," *American Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (1943): 181-183, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2770363>.

⁸⁰ Gao, *Historical Dictionary of Modern China*, 212.

⁸¹ Little, *Intimate China*, 137.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 141.

She fought against footbinding not only as a writer but also as an active leader of the anti-footbinding movement. In the memoirs *Gleanings from fifty years in China*, Little admits that her interest in footbinding was sparked and inspired by her husband.⁸³ Nevertheless, because of her role in founding and managing Natural Foot Society, she remains more famous and more remembered than her husband and is considered to be a leading person in the anti-footbinding movement before the fall of the Qing dynasty.

Moreover, her significance and contributions were recognized by the Chinese newspaper *Shanghai Star* in 2000.⁸⁴ Whitefield points out that “government-controlled newspaper in Shanghai even asserted that the Tian Zu Hui [Natural Foot Society] was the first society to decry footbinding in China.”⁸⁵ We know that The Heavenly Foot Society from Xiamen was actually the first one, but the article represents the Chinese opinion about importance of Natural Foot Society.

4.2 Natural Foot Society - Tianzuhui

Natural Foot Society is also widely known under its Chinese name Tianzuhui (天足会). The term *tianzu* (天足) was used by the English missionaries for describing a natural state of the feet. The whole word is a compound comprised of the character for heaven (*tian* 天) and the character for a foot (*zu* 足). This term reflected the missionaries’ opinion that body is a gift from God⁸⁶ and therefore can be translated for instance as heavenly feet.

Although, the term *tianzu* was not of a Chinese origin, it gradually spread from the missionary circles and began to be recognized and used.⁸⁷ Thus, Natural Foot Society started to call itself Tianzuhui in Chinese. Whitefield argues that “the adjective ‘heavenly’ in this case is used to denote that which is natural or in conformity to the way of nature.”⁸⁸

The suffix *hui* (会) stands here for groups and unions and is commonly used for various kinds of associations.

⁸³ Mrs. Archibald Little, editorial note to *Gleanings from Fifty Years in China*, by Archibald Little (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1910).

⁸⁴ Shi Hua, “Shanghai women put best feet forward,” *Shanghai Star*, July 4, 2000, <http://app1.chinadaily.com.cn/star/history/00-07-04/c13-best.html>.

⁸⁵ Whitefield, “The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society),” 211.

⁸⁶ Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, 16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁸ Whitefield, “The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society),” 207.

4.2.1 Founding Natural Foot Society

The society was founded in Shanghai in April 1895 by Alicia Little. She herself claims that:

Up till then foreigners who were not missionaries had done but little, if anything, to prevent footbinding. It was, therefore, quite a joyful surprise to find that pretty well all the Shanghai ladies whom I asked were willing and eager to serve upon the committee.⁸⁹

We can see that up until that point the main activists against footbinding were only the missionaries, no civil persons. Thus Mrs. Little should be marked as the first visibly acting person with no missionary intentions.

Her own precise personal opinion of missionary work is not known⁹⁰ but she was in contact with several women missionaries and she describes their correspondence in detail in her memoirs *Intimate China*. Some of the women from a mission worked as the local secretaries of the society.⁹¹ She also met with Reverend McGowan in Shanghai. He was enthralled by her work and her organizing ability and he became convinced that she was a decisive force in the anti-footbinding movement. During his visit, Mrs. Little arranged a public lecture for him to talk about his Heavenly Foot Society in Xiamen.⁹² She definitely could draw an inspiration from the work of her missionary predecessors and use their experience in her activities. This lively intercommunication leads us to the conclusion that they may not had the same reason for their fight but they shared the same goal and so both sides cooperated and helped each other.

She became the president and the main secretary of the society and actively created the committee of the society by asking expatriate ladies of different nationalities to join her.⁹³

Significant factor for the activities of the society was a language barrier. It was a big obstacle in promoting the society's ideas and arguments. For this reason, they worked together with the Christian Literature Society for China,⁹⁴ the missionaries from

⁸⁹ Little, *Intimate China*, 149.

⁹⁰ Whitefield, "The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society)," 206.

⁹¹ Drucker, "The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement," 189.

⁹² McGowan, *How England Saved China*, 88-91.

⁹³ Alicia Little, "Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui," *Chinese Recorder* 38 (1907): 32, <http://www.archive.org/details/chineserecorder08unkngoog>.

⁹⁴ Whitefield, "The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society)," 206.

this literary society were able to translate from and into Chinese and most of the published materials were translated or at least proofread by them.⁹⁵

The Chinese texts would be published in a traditional style of written Chinese, so called wenyan (文言). This literary form of the language was very different from the vernacular language and only educated people could read and understand it. As a result, only very few women could read these materials.⁹⁶ This was a reason why Natural Foot Society was primarily successful in addressing educated Chinese men.

4.2.2 Activities of the Society

One of the first actions of the society was drawing up a petition for the Dowager Cixi. The signatures were collected mainly from the foreign ladies residing in Far East and the petition was presented in golden letters on a sheet of white satin and enclosed into a silver basket. The basket and its content presumably never reached the Dowager and was kept in Zongli Yamen,⁹⁷ Chinese equivalent of Foreign Ministry.

It is interesting to note that later in time Mrs. Little became convinced that the petition in fact did reach the Dowager and she presented her reasons for this belief in her summary of Natural Feet Society's work for Chinese Recorder.⁹⁸

Whether the document was seen by the Dowager or not, despite this contradiction, the society still got a formal answer from the Zongli Yamen officials. Their statement clearly reflects the situation in Chinese society:

The binding of feet is a practice that has been in vogue for a very long time. Those who oppose the binding of their children's feet are not compelled to do so, while on the other hand, those who wish to carry out the practice cannot be prevented from doing so. Custom has made the practice. Those in high authority cannot but allow the people to do as they are inclined in the matter of binding the feet of their children; they cannot be restrained by law.⁹⁹

If there was a sufficient support for the change between people, then the imperial court could act without losing authority. However, in October 1896 when the society sent the petition, the conditions were still not right and it was too soon for dramatic changes in a

⁹⁵ Little, *Intimate China*, 149.

⁹⁶ Unfortunately, the literary reform did not take place until the May Fourth Movement in 1919.

⁹⁷ Little, *Intimate China*, 155.

⁹⁸ Little, "Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui," 32.

⁹⁹ "Diary of Events in the Far East," *Chinese Recorder* 27 (1896): 617, <https://archive.org/stream/chineserecorder27lodwuoft#page/n5/mode/2up>.

form of legislation and restrictions. Nevertheless, the reply from the Qing officials shows that they knew about the foreign anti-footbinding activities and approved of them.

From the reply to the petition Natural Foot Society could see that this was not a way how to change things in China. Firstly, they needed to address the Chinese people, slowly gain influence and change public opinion. The society employed several strategies how to do that.

One of the advantages in creating the society's programme and the strategies was fact that Mrs. Little lived in China already for seven years before founding the society. During her years in China she got to know Chinese people and their customs very well and her knowledge of the Chinese culture proved to be a big advantage.

When she came to China, she did not reside at a coastal area but further inland in Chongqing city. At that time most of the foreigners were centered into the cities on the east coast where the concessions were mainly located. She also lived in countryside at a Chinese farm for some time.¹⁰⁰ This allowed her to observe Chinese culture from within and not from an expat bubble. Apart from living at the farm, she was often invited as a guest into the Chinese families and could closely watch daily life of a household.¹⁰¹ We can assume that this profound knowledge of the relationships in the Chinese families and conditions in which the Chinese women lived, helped her immensely in managing programme and the arguments for her society.

She was also well aware of whom to influence and whom to reach out to with the campaigns and the speeches. For example, she was able to deduce when would be the best time to hand out the campaign materials. It can be illustrated by her plan to distribute the pamphlets in Chongqing city exactly at the same time when the thousands of young students were going to visit the city for an imperial examination.¹⁰²

4.2.3 Publishing

The society concentrated its efforts into two main spheres: publishing and the campaign tours. They published a wide variety of materials from pamphlets and educational writings to poems written by the Chinese women. They also hanged posters in some cities¹⁰³ and on the steamers so the travellers would see them.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ She wrote a diary about this experience and published it in 1894 as *My Diary in a Chinese Farm*.

¹⁰¹ Little, *Intimate China*, 174-176.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 156.

They distributed the printed materials in surprisingly big numbers. For example, Mrs. Little states that more than two thousands leaflets would be given away during her public speech¹⁰⁵ and more than one million prints all together during the society's activities over the years.¹⁰⁶ Not to mention the books that society published and distributed at the places frequented by students and various posts into the newspapers.¹⁰⁷

4.2.4 Campaign Tours and Public Lectures

The campaign tours can be divided into two groups. The first kind of tour was visiting the Chinese viceroys¹⁰⁸ and important officials; the second kind were the public lectures. Both of these activities were good for recruiting new supporters and gaining influence between nobility.

Alicia Little toured through a big portion of southern China and she visited many cities.¹⁰⁹ For a part of the tour she was accompanied by an american lady doctor and anti-footbinding activist Mary Fulton.¹¹⁰

An important aspect of her touring was influencing the high ranking officials. These men were a high standing class in the Chinese society and so the people would look up to them and quite possibly took an example from their behaviour. Similarly to the time when people started to imitate the fashion of footbinding that was popular amongst rich classes, now could people follow the nobility in the trend of the unbounding.

There would usually be one speech for the men and one for the women. (During the church service men and women also did not sit together and the seats were separated).¹¹¹ Some of the meetings would be organized in the open space since the number of listeners was very high. It is stated that some of the society's meetings were visited by the thousands of visitors.¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ Little, "Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui," 33.

¹⁰⁵ Mrs. Archibald Little, *In the Land of the Blue Gown* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 255, <https://archive.org/details/landbluegownchi01littgoog>.

¹⁰⁶ Little, "Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui," 33.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Viceroys served as governors of the provinces.

¹⁰⁹ For the full list of the cities she visited, see Little, "Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui," 32.

¹¹⁰ Little, *In the Land of the Blue Gown*, 259.

¹¹¹ Davin, "British Women Missionaries In Nineteenth-Century China," 266.

¹¹² Little, "Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui," 32.

At the end of every meeting the attendees could sign up as the members of the society and contribute with the financial gifts.¹¹³ There were also public pledges made. Especially by the women who would pledge to unbound their feet or to even show that they had done so already.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, during the public speeches the photographs of bound and unbound feet were shown along with X-ray images.¹¹⁵ Many men, who considered lotus feet as beautiful and adored the fashion, often in fact did not have the slightest idea how the actual feet looked like. In their imagination the little colourful shoes represented delicate femininity. The bound foot was an erotic symbol hidden in a silken wrapping that was never to be unwrapped and so the men did not know how the harsh reality of the deformed fingers looked like. Few women would show their feet without the bandages, not even to their husbands.¹¹⁶ Thus, the need to show the pictures in public as a part of education.¹¹⁷

Showing the photographs was a risky move, since showing the parts of a woman's body was a taboo,¹¹⁸ but this strategy - more the shock more the impact - could work. At least, some of the Chinese were ashamed to see such pictures in public or in the press and knew that images represented a damage for the reputation of China.

4.2.5 Change in the Leadership

In 1902 the society with help of the CLS distributed a massive amount of the propaganda.¹¹⁹ In the same year the Chinese imperial court headed by the Dowager Cixi "urged abolition of footbinding,"¹²⁰ and made it publicly clear that the government is not in favour of the practice. Although this voluntary edict did not mean a complete ban of the practice, it still represented a significant progress. Especially, in comparison with year 1896 when the petition from Natural Foot Society presumably did not even reach the Dowager Cixi and was declined by the officials from Zongli Yamen.

¹¹³ Little, *In the Land of the Blue Gown*, 275.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 261-262.

¹¹⁵ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 245.

¹¹⁶ McGowan, *How England Saved China*, 30.

¹¹⁷ Little in her memoir describes how even the medical students admired binded women feet and considered it to be a beautiful attribute. Mrs. Archibald Little, *In the Land of the Blue Gown* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 297, <https://archive.org/details/landbluegownchi01littgoog>.

¹¹⁸ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 41.

¹¹⁹ Whitefield, "The Tian Zu Hui (Natural Foot Society)," 210.

¹²⁰ Gao, *Historical Dictionary of Modern China*, 8.

After beginning of 20th century, the movement against footbinding was fairly in motion and work of Natural Foot Society undoubtedly contributed to the changes in public opinion. The society created many successful campaigns, inspired important figures and in consequence caused an anti-footbinding wave bigger than ever before.

Although, Mrs. Little knew that in certain regions the tradition of footbinding was still strong, she believed that the main part of the work has been done and in 1906 handed Natural Foot Society over to the Chinese leadership. She felt that the right course was set and in relation to that wrote about the Chinese women: “Now that they are becoming able to speak for themselves, we know that they can do it better than we can for them...”¹²¹ She obviously realized that now when the movement was solidly started and had many supporters among the Chinese people, the service of foreigners was no longer needed.

After she saw an assembly of the society in Shanghai in December 1906 she was even more convinced that it was the right move to hand the society over to the Chinese and felt assured.¹²² Shortly after the assembly she expressed her belief that “the work that the Tian Tsu Hui [Natural Foot Society] was formed to carry out has been done, public opinion has been changed and setting free of all the little girls of China from the bondage of a most cruel custom is merely a question of time.”¹²³

The new leadership remained active and continued in the publishing activities. They published literature written by “missionaries, physicians, and non-Christian Chinese reformers.”¹²⁴

Mrs. Little lived in China for twenty years and returned to Britain in 1907 because of her husband’s illness (he died a year later). She continued to live and write in Britain and died at the age of 81 in London in 1926.¹²⁵

4.2.6 Accomplishments

Natural Foot Society is until today the most recognized foreign anti-footbinding organization and can certainly be marked up as one of the most influential. Alicia Little is even by the Chinese considered to be a very prominent and leading figure of the anti-footbinding movement. She was along with her society written about in the Chinese

¹²¹ Little, “Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui,” 33.

¹²² Little, “Summary of Work done by the Tien Tsu Hui,” 34.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Drucker, “The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement,” 191.

¹²⁵ Gao, *Historical Dictionary of Modern China*, 212.

magazines of 19th century¹²⁶ and still is discussed in the Chinese newspaper even a century later.

Her Natural Foot Society gained many supporters and members. Its ability to attract large audiences and publish a big amount of the printed materials proved to be very effective in spreading the idea of the natural feet.

Alicia Little worked throughout Inner China and concentrated her campaigning on all the classes with a special focus on an elite and the officials. She would often meet high-ranking personas of the public life and try to sway their opinions. This stands in contrast with the way how the missionaries usually worked. They were active mostly inside their Christian communities and in the schools on a local scale. Therefore, the main difference between the Christian missionaries and work of Alicia Little was that the missionaries primarily influenced the groups of the Chinese Christians, while Natural Foot Society was able to influence wider spectrum of people and focused on the elite.

As will be shown in the following chapter, Little was very successful in persuading the important Chinese figures and reformers which led to another reinforcement of the whole anti-footbinding movement.

5 Influencing Chinese Male Elite

Whereas the missionaries would aim primarily at the Chinese Christian community and the schools, civil anti-footbinding societies focused on influencing the higher standing members of the Chinese society. This led to a successful persuasion of the Chinese scholars and officials who in consequence influenced other Chinese and expanded the scope of the whole movement. Those who would not listen to foreign ideas now could identify themselves with Chinese voices. In other words, Chinese male elite was inspired by this foreign movement, interpreted its arguments and transformed them into a Chinese anti-footbinding movement.

We will show this via concrete examples of the prominent anti-footbinding Chinese leaders who were directly influenced by the work of western women.

¹²⁶ Little, *In the Land of the Blue Gown*, 282.

5.1 Zhang Zhidong

Viceroy Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) was a high standing politician and reformer. He was commissioned to establish a girls' school for educating future women teachers and medics in Shanghai. In order to do so, in 1896 he requested help from Miss Howe who established missionary school for girls in Jiujiang city. They immediately agreed that footbinding, concubinage or slavery was not an option.¹²⁷ An year later Zhang published an essay condemning footbinding and the essay got many times republished.¹²⁸

5.2 Mr. Chou's Suifu Appeal

Suifu Appeal was a pamphlet written by Mr. Chou. He was a state examiner who came across one of the Natural Foot Society's published tracts and became convinced that footbinding is a bad custom. Under influence of the Natural Foot Society's thoughts, he ordered to unbound his daughter's feet. He decided to write his own work that would appeal to Chinese people. Undoubtedly, voice of an educated Chinese man had potential to reach many others. He made posters and stuck them over the walls of his hometown Suifu in Sichuan province, hence the name of the appeal. The pamphlet was later reproduced and distributed in others cities.¹²⁹

The writing combined the missionary arguments¹³⁰ and Chou's knowledge of Chinese religion and history. He emphasized the fact that Confucianism disapproved of harming the human body for any reason, he also stressed the importance of healthy and strong women for China's productivity. He used practical arguments just as the missionaries did. For example, in case of an attack "...those with unbound feet can carry heavy things or use weapons, and need not fear being left behind or killed."¹³¹

Alicia Little describes an impact that the pamphlet had as "an awakening influence over China."¹³² We should not forget that it was her work in the first place

¹²⁷ Margaret E. Burton, *Notable Women of Modern China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912), 131, <https://archive.org/details/notablewomenmod00burtgoog>.

¹²⁸ Drucker, "The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement," 192.

¹²⁹ Little, *Intimate China*, 154-155.

¹³⁰ Corinne A. A. Packer, *Using Human Rights to Change Tradition: Traditional Practices Harmful to Women's Reproductive Health in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Antwerpen: Intersentia, 2002), 161.

¹³¹ Little, *Intimate China*, 161.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 159.

that inspired Mr. Chou in writing the pamphlet and taking an action against the footbinding not only in his own family but on a national scale.

5.3 Kang Youwei

Kang Youwei was a reformer, leading figure of Hundred Days' Reform. He read missionary works and was exposed to the western ideas,¹³³ especially to Young Allen's Globe Magazine that ran a series of articles condemning the practice of footbinding between 1875 and 1878.¹³⁴ He was a progressive thinker and most of all wanted to modernize China.

In 1898, he send a memorial to Guangxu emperor in which he listed arguments against footbinding. Drucker states that "this memorial clearly revealed the direct impact of Western missionary thought on his formulations."¹³⁵ An important aspect of Chinese male initiative in anti-footbinding movement was the sense of shame induced by the foreigners and unwillingness of Chinese to lose face before the foreigners. West often ridiculed China for its barbarous footbinding custom and treatment of women. That was a source of a great humiliation for the Chinese who were aware of this criticism. Kang was especially concerned about the foreign views on China and knew that footbinding is harming Chinese reputation abroad.¹³⁶ He actively tried to change the situation by fighting footbinding.

He followed the example of establishing the anti-footbinding societies and helped co-found Chinese version of such societies in Guangdong and Shanghai.¹³⁷ He also did not allow his daughter's feet to be bound. His daughter later continued in his work and wrote articles against footbinding for Chinese newspaper, she also personally knew Alicia Little.¹³⁸

5.4 Gong Huizhong

Another Chinese man who recognized the efforts of western women in the anti-footbinding movement was duke Gong Huizhong. He was a public figure that held a big significance because he was a lineal descendant of Confucius.

¹³³ Gao, *Historical Dictionary of Modern China*, 5.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁵ Drucker, "The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement," 195.

¹³⁶ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 42.

¹³⁷ Drucker, "The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement," 194-195.

¹³⁸ Little, *Intimate China*, 553.

Gong's words are a contemporary testimony that the first impulse for an open anti-footbinding movement came from the foreigners and especially from the foreign women: "I have always had my unquiet thoughts about footbinding ... Yet I could not venture to say so publicly. Now there are ... virtuous daughters of ability, wise daughters from foreign lands, who have initiated a truly noble enterprise."¹³⁹ Alicia Little in her memoirs also states that Gong contacted Natural Foot Society and requested all its tracts with an intention to distribute them.¹⁴⁰

These words are a proof that thanks to the work of the women missionaries and civil activists a public discussion was opened and anti-footbinding movement started to be a well known ideology with more and more supporters.

6 Conclusion

The aim of the thesis is to explore the role of American and British women who were actively trying to stop the footbinding in China and to describe the scope of their influence and their achievements.

Since half of the 19th century there was more and more voices, especially those of the women missionaries, who succeeded in drawing attention to the problem of footbinding and developing successful strategies against it. The various data showed that the downfall of the practice began before the year 1900. This is in accordance with the years in which the campaigns of the western women living in China occurred. Therefore, their work is considered to be the initial spark that set the anti-footbinding movement into the motion.

The women missionaries (sometimes along with their husbands) were responsible for some of the most important milestones in the anti-footbinding movement. They also urged their male colleagues to take a stand and soon—in relation to the Chinese women—the missionary Christian agenda became the anti-footbinding agenda.

The anti-footbinding societies, such as The Heavenly Foot Society, were the first places where the successful styles of approach in this matter were tested. Those were also the places that opened a space for public discussion and an exchange of the

¹³⁹ Little, *Intimate China*, 156.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

arguments. Furthermore, the first pioneers who proved that unbounding of the feet in adult life was possible also came out of the McGowans' society.

The missionary women overcame the suspicions and the arguments of Chinese people and created an atmosphere of social acceptance for the girls with natural feet within the Chinese Christian community. They achieved this via the system of the public pledges and intermarrying inside the community and also by the matchmaking between the pupils of the missions.

Another reason why we consider the activities of the missionary women so important was Peking Boarding School, first school with the strict rules against accepting the girls with the bound feet. This school, led by the two young American girls, set an example for other missionary schools and later even for the government's state schools.

Other civil activists and also the newly forming Chinese anti-footbinding societies would draw their inspiration from the work of the missionary women and even cooperated with them.

Whereas the missionaries found their ways how to make a change inside the Christian Chinese community, others focused on influencing the Chinese elite and the campaigns throughout China that would reach as much people as possible.

Alicia Little and her founding women colleagues from Natural Foot Society were rewarded in their work by seeing that the society gained thousands of supporters and found its place inside the Chinese society. The place so stable that the foreign leadership was no longer needed and the Chinese ladies themselves overtook management of the society. That was a big shift in the Chinese society if we consider that a few decades ago, the Chinese women were living highly secluded life and would not even consider actively changing their own situation by participating in a social reform.

Natural Foot Society played a major part in influencing the Chinese scholars and officials. The society was exceptionally successful in spreading their ideas via various means of propaganda. As a result, the society was able to create a chain reaction of influencing, as illustrated for example by the case of Suifu Appeal or Gong Huizhong.

All those influenced educated men, that are described in the fifth chapter, were part of the driving force that created Chinese version of the anti-footbinding movement. They were able to transform the movement into a question of national pride and reform.

They became so much needed prominent Chinese voices within the movement and they were able to reach out where the foreign women could not.

American and British women made various steps towards eradication of the footbinding in China and in consequence created the anti-footbinding movement that was later reinforced and developed by the voices from Chinese male elite and supported from Qing government.

In other words, the American and British women fighting the footbinding were a first pebble thrown into water and thus creating the ripples all over the lake of China.

7 Resumé

Tato práce se zaměřuje na čínský zvyk svazování chodidel a jejím cílem je ukázat, jak důležitá byla role, kterou hrály americké a britské ženy v potlačení této tradice na území Číny. Byly to právě ženy z USA a Velké Británie, které podnikly nejzásadnější kroky v boji proti svazování chodidel a vytvořily základ hnutí, které vedlo k úspěšnému potlačení tohoto zvyku.

Nejdříve je představena samotná tradice svazování chodidel - její historie, průběh a následky. Tato část představuje důvody, proč cizinky žijící v Číně cítily povinnost proti svazování bojovat a s jakými hlavními argumenty pro svazování se v čínské společnosti setkávaly.

Tato část také zdůvodňuje časový rámec, do jakého je práce zasazena. Od poloviny 19. století přibývalo hlasů (především ze strany vzrůstajícího počtu misionářek), které na svazování chodidel upozorňovaly a bojovaly proti němu. Data ukazují, že odklon od tradice svazování lze pozorovat již před rokem národní revoluce (1911), což souhlasí s obdobím nejsilnějších kampaní ze strany misionářek a civilních aktivistek. Z toho důvodu můžeme jejich práci považovat za počáteční impuls, který uvedl odklon od do té doby silné tradice do pohybu.

Třetí kapitola se zaměřuje na činnost misionářek v rámci křesťanských misí v Číně. Vzhledem k rozsahu, v jakém jejich práci ovlivňoval sňatek, jsem rozdělila tyto ženy na vdané a svobodné.

Misionářky byly průkopnice, které položily základní kameny v hnutí proti svazování chodidel. Mimo jiné také naléhaly na ostatní misionáře, aby zaujaly vůči této čínské tradici jednoznačný postoj. Díky jejich úsilí se křesťanská misijní činnost zaměřená na čínské ženy brzy proměnila především v boj proti svazování. Byla založena první společnost proti svazování chodidel (The Heavenly Foot Society) a také první škola (Peking Boarding School), která nepřijímala dívky se svázanými chodidly. Činnost a vliv těchto dvou institucí jsou v druhé kapitole přiblíženy spolu s dalšími úspěchy a metodami boje proti svazování chodidel. Dále se kapitola věnuje konferencím, na kterých se misionářky problému svazování chodidel věnovaly.

Misionářky dokázaly v čínské křesťanské komunitě vytvořit prostředí, které akceptovalo dívky s nesvázanými chodidly. Toho bylo docíleno pomocí veřejně skládaných slibů, kdy se rodiče zavazovaly, že nechají chodidla dcer normálně růst a

své syny ožení pouze s dívkami, jejich chodidla jsou nesvázaná. Dále hrály misionářky roli dohazovaček, kdy domlouvaly sňatky mezi žáky misijních škol.

Zatímco misionářky úspěšně ovlivňovaly život uvnitř čínské křesťanské komunity a životy svých žaček v misijních školách, ostatní ženy se zaměřily na ovlivňování čínských učenců a vysoce postavených úředníků. Skrze působení na čínskou vzdělanou elitu, který byla tvořena muži, chtěly ovlivnit širší vrstvy obyvatelstva bez ohledu na vyznání.

Čtvrtá kapitola představuje nejvýznamnější společnost působící proti svazování chodidel Natural Foot Society a americkou zakladatelku této společnosti Aliciu Little. Kapitola se zabývá činností a úspěchy této společnosti. Zvláštním důrazem je kladen na její publikační činnost, kampaně a veřejné přednášky po celé Číně, protože tyto činnosti se ukázaly být jako zásadní a získaly hnutí mnoho příznivců.

Alicia Little a spoluzakladatelky společnosti se dočkaly výsledků svého úsilí, když Natural Foot Society získala tisíce stoupenců a stala se pevnou součástí čínské společnosti. Společnost se stala natolik úspěšnou, že její vedení mohly převzít čínské ženy.

Jedním z hlavních úspěchů Alicie Little bylo ovlivnění čínských vzdělanců a úředníků, které podrobněji ukazuje pátá kapitola. Vybrala jsem pro tuto kapitolu čtyři konkrétní muže, kteří se setkali s činností amerických a britských žen a kteří byli touto činností ovlivněni. Tito muži se přidali ke hnutí proti svazování chodidel a stali se jeho obhájci.

Poslední kapitola tedy na konkrétních příkladech ukazuje, že působení západních žen inspirovalo mnoho osobností, které se staly hlasem čínského hnutí proti svazování chodidel.

Americké a britské ženy vyvíjely nejrůznější činnosti ve snaze potlačit svazování chodidel. V rámci jejich snah vzniklo proti této tradici v Číně celé hnutí, které bylo nakonec rozvíjeno samotnými Číňany a podporováno i vládou.

Jinými slovy, tyto americké a britské ženy bojující proti svazování chodidel iniciovaly svými kroky lavinu, v jejímž důsledku byla nakonec tradice svazování postupem času vymazána.

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9 Anotace

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Název práce: Role of American and British Women in the Fight against Footbinding

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Matthew Sweney, Ph.D.

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Klíčová slova: svazování chodidel, Čína, hnutí proti svazování chodidel, americké misionářky, britské misionářky, Alicia Little, The Heavenly Foot Society, Natural Foot Society, Tianzuhui, Peking Boarding School

Práce se zabývá rolí amerických a britských žen v boji proti svazování chodidel v Číně a popisuje rozsah jejich vlivu a úspěchy jejich snažení. Práce ukazuje nejdůležitější kroky podniknuté proti tradici svazování a zaměřuje se na činnost misionářek a společností proti svazování chodidel. Práce také uvádí příklady vysoce postavených Číňanů, kteří byli činností těchto žen ovlivněni a přidali se k hnutí proti svazování chodidel.

Annotation

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The thesis explores role of American and British women who were actively trying to stop the footbinding in China and describes the scope of their influence and their achievements. It shows the most important steps taken against the practice and focuses on the work of the women missionaries and the anti-footbinding societies. It also gives the examples of Chinese elite men who were influenced by the activities of these women and who joined the anti-footbinding movement.