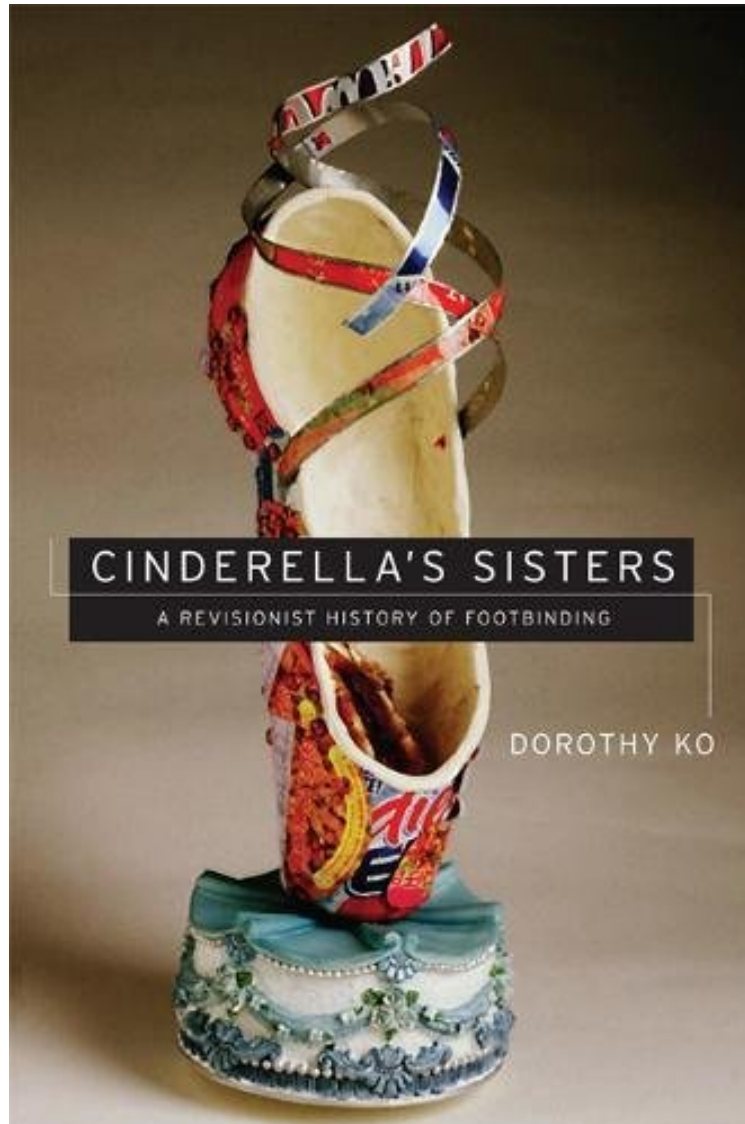


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Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding

Dorothy Ko

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Dorothy Ko : Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. this is a textbook style presentation By Kirsten M. Houseknecht I love this book, BUT... its not a "fun read" it doesn't have lots of color pictures, and honestly it could have used a bit better narrative structure. So, basically its a textbook. It primarily talks about how foot binding was viewed, by various people at various times...It is also organized from "more recent" to "further past" so each chapter has you going

backward in time. it takes a bit of getting used to. That said? primary source documentations are cited, lots of references i could never have found otherwise, and pretty accurate translations (and notations where the translation is unsure). IF you are looking for this kind of information.. this is your book otherwise? if you want lots of color pictures, and embroidery close ups, and a bit of the history, you will find *Splendid Slippers: A Thousand Years of an Erotic Tradition* more to your taste. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Insightful approach to a difficult topic. By Lilith1588 An insightful and extremely well-written book on a very difficult topic. Here, Dorothy Ko suggests that by merely condemning the practice of footbinding, we risk essentializing and ignoring that footbinding was a reality for many women over several centuries. Instead, she looks at footbinding as a varied and changing practice, using several angles and historical periods to examine how footbinding has been written about and understood in myriad ways. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not to My Liking. By Mindy Mao Too "academic" for me. Written too much like a textbook. Found it difficult to read. Personally found it boring and uninteresting. Already donated to local library. Wasted my money on this one. Sorry.

The history of footbinding is full of contradictions and unexpected turns. The practice originated in the dance culture of China's medieval court and spread to gentry families, brothels, maid's quarters, and peasant households. Conventional views of footbinding as patriarchal oppression often neglect its complex history and the incentives of the women involved. This revisionist history, elegantly written and meticulously researched, presents a fascinating new picture of the practice from its beginnings in the tenth century to its demise in the twentieth century. Neither condemning nor defending foot-binding, Dorothy Ko debunks many myths and misconceptions about its origins, development, and eventual end, exploring in the process the entanglements of male power and female desires during the practice's thousand-year history. *Cinderella's Sisters* argues that rather than stemming from sexual perversion, men's desire for bound feet was connected to larger concerns such as cultural nostalgia, regional rivalries, and claims of male privilege. Nor were women hapless victims, the author contends. Ko describes how women those who could afford it bound their own and their daughters' feet to signal their high status and self-respect. Femininity, like the binding of feet, was associated with bodily labor and domestic work, and properly bound feet and beautifully made shoes both required exquisite skills and technical knowledge passed from generation to generation. Throughout her narrative, Ko deftly wields methods of social history, literary criticism, material culture studies, and the history of the body and fashion to illustrate how a practice that began as embodied lyricism as a way to live as the poets imagined ended up being an exercise in excess and folly.

From *Publishers Weekly* "Slender, small, pointy, arched, fragrant, soft and straight." This mantra, allegedly muttered in the early 20th century by a male professor amongst friends, is said to summarize the mystery of bound feet. Meanwhile, sexual fetishism, oppression and godless contrivance are said to characterize the reality. Ko distrusts both, however, in this dense and impressive social history, best read as an expanded sibling to her previous work, *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet*. Readers are reminded that footbinding was "central to the mechanisms of Chinese society and gender relations" for roughly 1,000 years, and none of those years are adequately explained by "envy, cruelty, violence, objectification" and other accusations against the Chinese male. As a professor of history at Barnard College, Columbia University, Ko frets her contemporaries "are accustomed to viewing footbinding only from an anti-footbinding perspective." So she avoids those goggles, and reaches instead for the female perspective. Working backwards through time and drawing on women's diaries, poetry and material artifacts, she writes a complex history that respects the energy and self-esteem Chinese women invested in what, to outsiders, seems a senseless deformation. To be sure, Ko does not defend footbinding, nor does she make a case for cultural relativism; her concern is only to "understand the powerful forces that made binding feet a conventional practice." By her own account, she fails ("the history of footbinding does not add up"). But aside from some fibrous jargon ("multiple tonalities," "episteme of the functionalist body," "ontological status"), Ko's peerless work will be relished by scholars and enjoyed by lay readers interested in Chinese history. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Dorothy Ko's daring in taking on the difficult subject of footbinding has resulted in a tour-de-force. In *Cinderella's Sisters* she rises above nationalist, feminist, and Orientalist polemic to place footbinding clearly in the domain of the history of fashion. Her ingenious narrative strategy - putting the modern story of footbinding's disappearance at the beginning - sets up her historical account of its premodern heyday as a story of concealment - of hidden sources, hidden bodies, and hidden meanings. As illusion, footbinding reveals women's sisterhood in responses to being objects of desire." - Charlotte Furth, author of *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History: 960-1665* "From the Inside Flap" Dorothy Ko's daring in taking on the difficult subject of footbinding has resulted in a tour-de-force. In *Cinderella's Sisters* she rises above nationalist, feminist, and Orientalist polemic to place footbinding clearly in the domain of the history of fashion. Her ingenious narrative strategy putting the modern story of footbinding's disappearance at the beginning sets up her historical account of its premodern heyday as a story of concealment of hidden sources, hidden bodies, and hidden meanings. As illusion, footbinding reveals women's sisterhood in responses to being objects of desire." Charlotte Furth, author of *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's*

Medical History: 9601665 "Cinderella's Sister's is the long-awaited, definitive work on Chinese footbinding in English. The work also plugs into current concerns with the history of the body and of fashion. But it also does much more: at every turn it tells us something new about late imperial and republican-era Chinese society and history. It is remarkably rich in fascinating detail. A great read." William T. Rowe, author of *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China*