

ABSTRACT

Nineteenth Century Representations
of Footbinding to the English Reading Public
by
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The nineteenth century saw society in China in a state of frequent rebellion internally and ruled by a decaying Manchu dynasty. At the same time, foreign powers were pursuing aggressive trading policies which led them to military involvement in China's affairs and armed conflict on their own account, notably during the Taiping and Boxer uprisings. In addition to traders, diplomats and even tourists or travellers, the Protestant Church had launched a massive campaign to convert the so-called heathen Chinese so that missionaries were sent over in large numbers, adding to a burgeoning foreign community greedy for domination.

As the century wore on, new and cheap printing methods made newspapers, journals, tracts and books available to satisfy an ever growing public demand at home. 'Improving' subjects such as history, biography and travel narratives were highly popular and the public was especially interested in information about China and the Chinese. Thus the westerners who came to China found an eager market for their writings. The Leal Senado Library houses a collection of their books in English which have been donated by various Macau families. This collection of some 700 books covers all aspects of China but the primary focus of this dissertation has been the representations of footbinding.

Variously perceived by the west as exotic, cultured, barbaric, heathen, uncivilised, the 'differentness' of the Chinese was epitomised by their unique custom of binding girls' feet. Over

40 of the China Collection books have comments of varying lengths on this custom, ranging from how it was done, to deaths resulting from mortification of the feet and the anti-footbinding campaigns which started in 1894. Supplemented by passages from other important works not found in the Collection, this study surveys and discusses the representations of China and Chinese women presented to the English reading public through their images of footbinding in books published in or shortly after the nineteenth century.