

CPS SOURCE bySunday

Shoes have been around for several thousands of years. In prehistoric times they would be made of woven plant fibers. Today, most shoes are made to be super comfortable and supportive using science, technology, and cutting-edge materials, so that the wearer can have healthy movement and bone structure. Of course, there are some exceptions: high heels for example are neither comfy nor supportive, but people still wear them because they are fashionable – uncomfortable but fashionable shoes are not a new idea.

Just over a thousand years ago, it became fashionable in China to have unnaturally small feet that could fit into little tiny shoes called “**lotus shoes**,” because of their lotus bud shape. In order to get the smallest foot, young girls would go to extreme lengths and wrap their feet with cloth to bend the toes under, break the bones, and make the front and back of the foot touch. The younger a girl started, the better the results, so some girls were as young as 4 years old when they began this practice called **foot binding**.

As the practice spread, bindings became progressively tighter until most women were permanently handicapped with limited mobility. Lotus shoes average in length between 9 - 13 centimeters (~ 4 inches). The lotus shoes pictured here are from the Qing Dynasty (ca. 1900 - 1910). They are made of silk and leather with embroidery.

Upper class entertainers were originally the only women with bound feet, but the practice eventually spread to all classes of China. It has been estimated that by the 19th century, 40–50% of all Chinese women may have had bound feet, and up to almost 100% of upper class Chinese women. Even though, during the Qing dynasty, the Emperor tried to ban foot binding but failed.

It was not until the early 20th century that foot binding began to die out as a result of anti-foot-binding campaigns. The practice was completely eradicated after the Communist Revolution in 1949. In some rural areas today, one can still see elderly women who had their feet bound when they were young.

EXPLORE

To see more artifacts, visit the MoA's online databases:
<https://anthromuseum.missouri.edu/?q=online-databases>

Database search words: China, lotus, shoe, binding



#1966-0391 Length = 9.5 cm



#1966-0392 Length = 15.6 cm



#1966-0394 Length = 12.5 cm



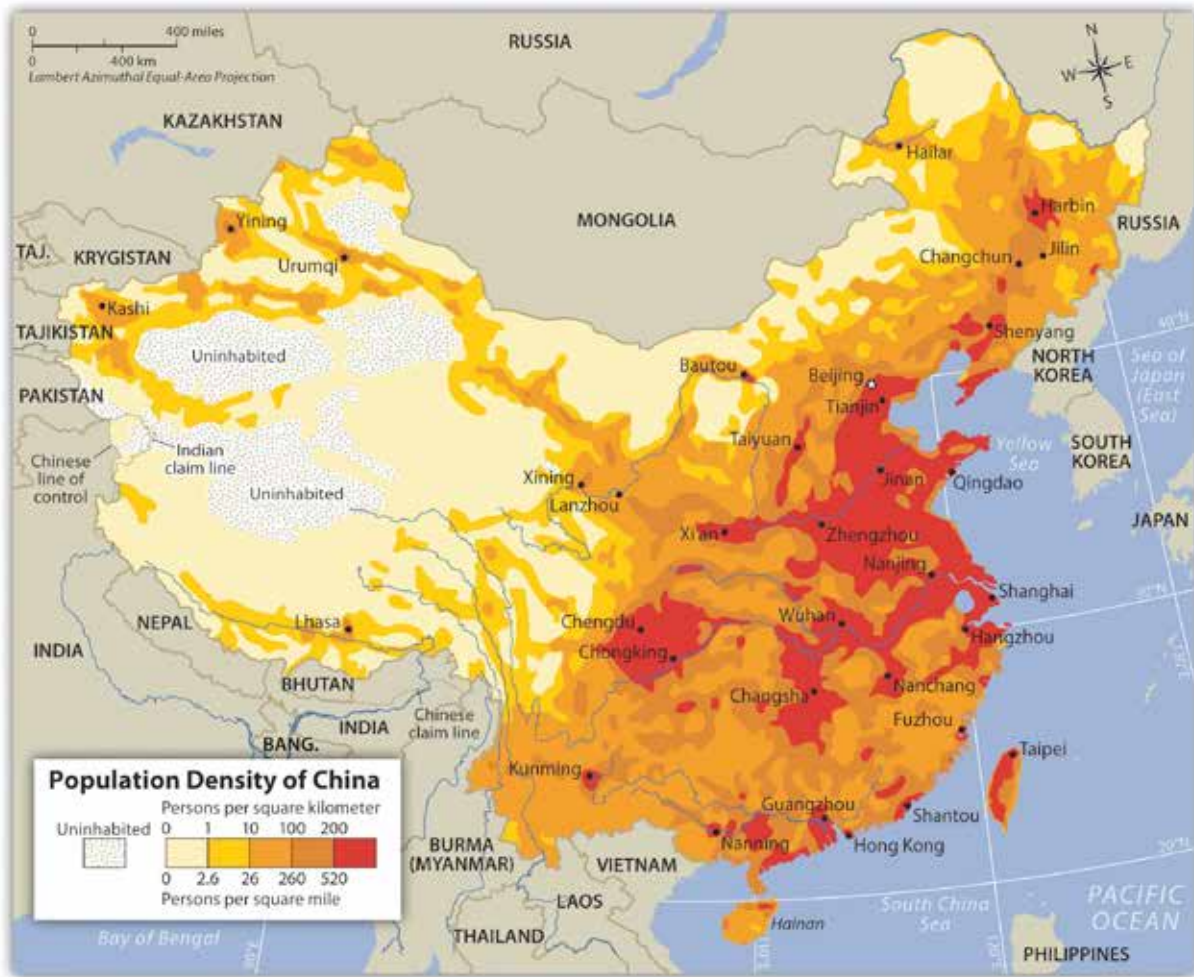
#1966-0113 Length = 10.5 cm

Lotus Shoes
China, Qing Dynasty
ca. 1900 -1910
silk and leather

Tips for Using the Museum Databases

- Log in as a “Guest.”
- Enter search terms into one or more fields and click the “Perform Find” button in the status area on the left-hand side of the screen.
- Use the book icon in the status area to move from one record to another in the found set.
- Click on the magnifying glass icon to return to find mode and perform additional searches.
- When finished working with a database, please be sure to click the “Log Out” button in the status area to close your session.

Population Density of China



Foot binding existed in rural areas until the mid-20th century. Identify the rural areas on this map - these are the areas you are most likely to meet an elderly woman who had her feet bound in her youth.

X-RAY: What does foot binding do to your bones?



Regular foot



After foot binding