

Anatomy Identity Magic: Shoes

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Our journey of life is often supplemented by footwear but more specifically, shoes. Wearing shoes has shown to have significant role in the human anatomy starting from birth. In modern day western culture, the common choices in footwear are sneakers, heels, flats, and boots. One would take their day into consideration before deciding on which type of shoe to wear. Humans may consciously or subconsciously think of their anatomy before choosing which shoe to wear for the day. In most cases a woman may wear heels to a party to compliment her outfit. Upon wearing the heels, the human anatomy changes immediately. The heels make a person stand up straight often times with proper posture. Whereas it is easier to be relaxed in sneakers and flats. Furthermore, walking in heels will create a sway in the hips. This brings attention to the persons hips and legs but particularly the calves, as it accentuates the muscles in the legs. Although this was not the case over a thousand years ago for women in the Qing Dynasty in China.

The making of lotus shoe was derived from the concept of having lotus feet. This practice may be seen as brutal, but it became a fundamental part of young Chinese women during the Qing Dynasty. The practice of achieving lotus feet would be accomplished by going through a foot-binding process. This required for young girls at the age of five or six years old to begin the binding journey. “The feet were massaged and oiled before all the toes, except the big toes, were broken and bound flat against the sole, making a triangle shape. Next, her arch was strained as the foot was bent double. Finally, the feet were bound in place using a silk strip measuring ten feet long and two inches wide” (Foreman, 2015). This became a significant element to Chinese women as it was equated to status. This drastic change to their anatomy was seen to be necessary for most regardless of the pain. This forceful change to the body brings attention to the feet as they were a maximum of five inches long. Since this involves breaking bones, it took over

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months to heal and nearly relearn how to walk, but they would never be able to walk normally. Although after the foot binding process has been done, one would have their custom lotus shoe made from various materials.

The colors incorporated in making the lotus shoe (Figure 1) are an important element to consider. One will see that the colors red, pink, and blue are used to configure the shoe. Each of these colors further support the idea of femininity. The bright red against the white background of the display represents love and often related to fertility. The velvety blue green fabric running along the front of the shoe represents loyalty and competence. Lastly, the light pink embroidery on the side represents femininity and innocence. The bright red and light pink are warmer tones whereas the blue green brings out a cool tone (Visual Merchandising Ch. 1-4 PPT). Although the tones may be on opposite spectrums, they complement each other well. The lotus shoe has a combination of complementary and adjacent colors to bring together the color story seamlessly.

When observing the lotus shoes, one will see elements such as line, rhythm, form, balance, contrast, juxtaposition, dominance, and proportion. These elements are formally known as the Elements of Design. This lotus shoes and many others have a curved line that one cannot miss. This curved line is a precipitous slope along the top of the shoe which may seem odd compared to shoes today. The slope allows the eyes to follow from the top of the shoe down to the toe cap. The curved line makes the eyes follow object to object and give a feminine feel (Visual Merchandising Ch. 1-4 PPT). During the Qing Dynasty the use of the curved line was intentional as they wanted to portray the women to be suitable brides.

Similar to the lines of the lotus shoes, the rhythm leads one's view along the dominant parts of the shoe. The significant slope naturally catches one's eye and leads it to the abnormally small toe cap and small sole. The rhythm continues to the light pink embroidery along top of the

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sole. This further emphasizes the dominant point of the lotus shoe which is the extremely small length of the sole. One's view will also be drawn to the winding of string used to close the opening of the shoes.

Following the rhythm, viewers are presented with the proportions of this abnormally small shoe. Proportion is the relationship of size, scale, and weight among elements (Visual Merchandising Ch.1-4 PPT). In relation to an average women's shoe, the lotus shoe would be seen as very petite as it is three to five inches in size. The material used to create the body of shoe is very lightweight, but the material used to create the sole is heavier than a normal sole. Often times the sole would be a wooden base which would not allow any flexibility to walk. Although the proportions are very small compared to the average women's shoe, the balance of a lotus shoe is very symmetrical. If one were to split the shoe in half it would look like a mirror image.

Finally, one will see the element of repetition throughout the display of the shoe. Repetition stands for the repeating of an idea or motif (Visual Merchandising Ch. 1-4 PPT). The idea of femininity and prospects of marriage are reiterated through each element. The lotus shoes were known to be a symbol of high status and favorable in girls' marriage prospects (*Lotus shoe and Foot Model 2022*). The use of colors like red and pink were representing fertility and love which are aspects related to marriage. The curved lines display an aspect of femininity as a form of repetition in motif. One can see how the use of colors and lines bring together the idea of status and ideal marriage standards for Chinese women during the Qing Dynasty.

The lotus shoe as a whole look to be a smooth shoe to touch as it has not visible rough areas. The dominating fabric would most likely be a dupioni silk as it has a subtle sheen. Dupioni silk is made of 100% silk and has dull shine compared to China silk and is smooth to the touch.

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Then there is a blue green velvet like patch of fabric that is lining the top of the shoe. This fabric is likely to be a velveteen made out of 100% cotton. Like velvet it is soft and smooth to touch but the fibers are not as long as velvet (Swatch 116, *The Textile Kit Eco Edition* 2013). The embroidery was most likely done with cotton thread that has been dyed various colors to make a delicate floral pattern. This allows there to be a raised texture along the side of the lotus shoe. Lastly, the supporting ankle straps are made of chino which is made of 100% cotton (Swatch 87, *The Textile Kit Eco Edition* 2013). Chino fabric is smooth but yet very durable as it is a steep twill.

The lotus shoe was a major reflection of dress for the Chinese women during the 19th century. As mentioned previously, the possession of lotus feet was a sign of high status and would improve prospects of marriage. It was also a major indicator of beauty; small feet were a reflection of female elegance. This concept is similar to the favorable small waist from the Victorian Age in England. The fabrics used to make the custom lotus shoes were also a marker of status. When purchasing the silk fabric to make the lotus shoe they would select the best quality that was affordable to them. Although this practice has lasted a millennium it had to come to an end as it was seen as unethical in 1644 and was banned. “During the late 19th century Chinese, Western and Muslim reformers challenged foot binding, but it was not until the early 20th century that foot binding began to die out” (Vogelsang, 2018). As westernization was taking over the practice was seen to be weakening women who may later give birth to weak sons. It was a process that was painful and making women vulnerable.

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Figures

Figure 1



Figure 2

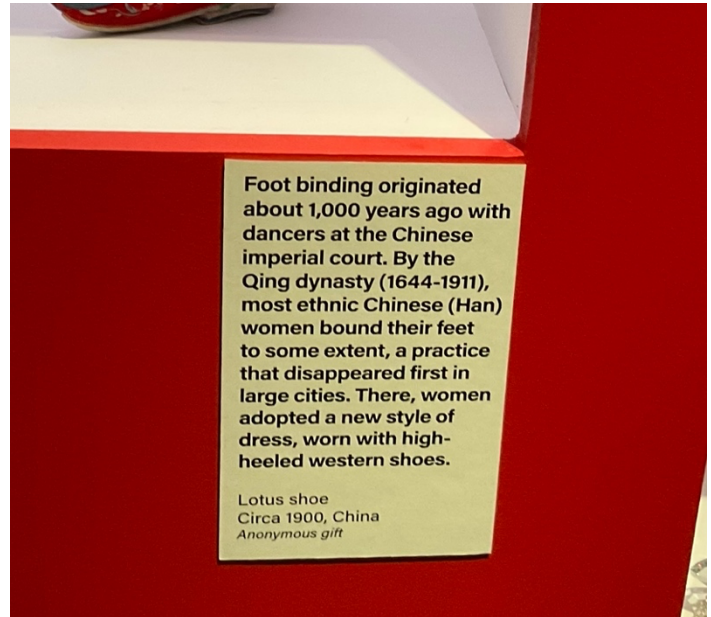


Figure 3



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