

**WEARING HIGH-HEELED SHOES:
THE DISCUSSION OF MODERN “FOOTBINDING” IN REPUBLICAN CHINA**

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**A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in the Department
of History.**

**Chapel Hill
2015**

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ABSTRACT

**YUE LIANG: Wearing High-Heeled Shoes: The Discussion of Modern “Footbinding” in
Republican China
(Under the direction of Michael Tsin)**

This thesis focuses on the discussion of women wearing high-heeled shoes in the Republican period (1912-1949), particularly the analogy drawn by Chinese intellectuals between footbinding and the wearing of high-heeled shoes. From the late 1910s onward, Chinese women appreciated having high-heeled shoes as part of their everyday wardrobes, not just as imported commercial objects, but more importantly, as signs of modern feminine beauty and a new fashionable lifestyle. The popularity of high-heeled shoes between the 1920s and the 1940s, however, sparked great debate over their impact on women’s health. Some intellectuals compared the wearing of high-heeled shoes to footbinding, based upon the assumption that both inflicted harmful effects on women’s bodies, and social lives, which in turn led to the ‘failure’ of the nation. Dissenters in this debate, on the other hand, considered such comparisons unfounded and ridiculous. They believed that women’s feelings, demands, and daily practice of wearing high-heeled shoes deserved more attention from intellectuals. This thesis argues that these different voices reflect the anxiety that Chinese intellectuals shared in the face of the changing world around them during the Republican period.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines perceptions during the Republican period (1912-1949) with regard to the wearing of high-heeled shoes as an everyday practice of modern life in the Western world that was imported to China, and how this practice was linked to footbinding as embodied in the experience of many Han Chinese women from the twelfth to twentieth centuries. This thesis also examines ways that such a linkage was questioned and challenged at the same time. As the popularity of wearing high-heeled shoes grew in China from the late 1910s onward, criticism of this fashion trend appeared in newspapers, magazines, and other publications. Many of the criticisms compared the wearing of high heels to footbinding on the basis of the similar terrible effects they both had on women's feet. Meanwhile, dissenters disapproved of this comparison, arguing that the similarities between footbinding and wearing high heels were unfounded and ridiculous. These opposing voices indicate the varying degrees to which Chinese intellectuals understood the new wave of fashion and the rapidly changing world around them between the 1920s and the 1940s.

In the late nineteenth century, discussions about women's feet and shoes were accompanied by the simultaneous growth of nationalism. The Qing government's defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 particularly heightened the sense of *wangguo* 亡国 ("lost country"), which narrated the 'failure' of the Chinese state and people to recognize the problems of both foreign assault and internal strife. National salvation, for reformers and revolutionaries of the

time, was a matter of first importance. In addition to the *xinzheng* 新政 (“New Policies”) in the late Qing period, one of the changes that common people recognized and/or experienced was the anti-footbinding movement. This period was the moment when footbinding, as a sign of the Han civilization and a form of feminine beauty, started to be doubted and criticized by male intellectuals under the pressure of critical Western eyes. Women’s bound feet, footbinding cloth, and shoes in turn became emblems of national humiliation and failure. From the early rhetoric of *tianzu* 天足 (“natural feet”) to the government ban on binding feet, the practice of *fangzu* 放足 (anti-footbinding movement) had almost come to an end by the late 1920s and early 1930s (except for the few lotus lovers who insisted on the beauty of women’s bounded feet of the recently dated).¹ However, the conversation about women’s feet and shoes simply did not leave public focus.

From the late 1920s on, the Western impact on Chinese society had become more and more obvious. With the expansion of foreign trade, cultural interactions, and personal exchanges, large quantities of foreign goods entered the Chinese market and affected the daily lives of millions of Chinese people. Imported products, such as motor vehicles, electric lamps, radios, washing machines, electric fans, sofas, cigars, beer, soda, Swiss watches, Parisian dresses, perfume, and high-heeled shoes, presented a new world that symbolized the modernization process in China.² Permed wavy hair, a dab of lipstick, the latest *qipao* 旗袍 (“female long gown”), and a pair of new high heels made up the main fashion interests of modern women of the day. The discussion of women’s feet and shoes at this time shifted from footbinding to the wearing of high-heeled

¹ Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters: a Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005), 10-85.

² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: the Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3-51.

shoes. Popular publications, as an efficient information channel, provided one of the most important public spaces for intellectuals to express their opinions.

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the term ‘high-heeled shoes’ referred to a wide range of styles, colors, and patterns of shoes shown in newspapers, magazines, and other publications. In short, there was not a precise definition of high heels at that time. Firstly, high-heeled shoes were made of different fabrics, such as leather, silk, and cloth. Some shoe uppers were even decorated with embroidered flowers. In addition, high-heeled shoes had a variety of shapes, including wedged shoes, slender-toed shoes, round-toed shoes, sling-back shoes, spiked-heel shoes, and so forth. Furthermore, high-heeled shoes did not necessarily mean shoes worn only by women in everyday life. The term also was used to signify Beijing opera singers’ shoes and height-increasing platform shoes favored by men.³

Thus, it is important to clarify here that this thesis focuses on the high-heeled shoes designed particularly for women. However, as the title indicates, the main concern of this study is not so much on the shoes *per se*, but on the fact that women wore high-heeled shoes as a daily experience and that wearing high heels was a reality in the Republican period. In other words, this thesis does not present research into high-heeled shoes as objects, but in terms of their social impact, relationship with women’s health, and as a metaphor for current national anxiety.

During the Republican period, Chinese intellectuals approached the concept of footbinding and the wearing of high-heeled shoes was strikingly similar. First of all, wearing high heels was considered by some to be the modern version of binding feet. As Western medical science replaced male literary imagination to reveal the cruel aspects of footbinding, a huge supply of

³ Tan Fei 谭飞, “Bing wu qi shi” 并无其事 (“This is not the Case”), *Shenbao* 申报 [Shanghai Daily] August 3, 1923; Xiang Piquan 橡皮圈, “Meiguo nan shi zu chuan gao gen xie” 美国男士足穿高跟鞋 (“American Men Wear High-Heeled Shoes”), *Dong ya sheng* 东亚声 [The Voice of East Asia] 14 (1947), 6.

medical knowledge was cited to prove that wearing high heels caused the deformation of women's feet and other possible bodily injuries. The resultant unhealthy condition of women's bodies was further used as a metaphor for the weakness of the nation.⁴

The discussion of footbinding and high-heeled shoes implied Chinese intellectuals' anxiety about the relationship between China and the West. Male intellectuals often cited Western women's natural feet in their criticism of footbinding. The shapes of Chinese and Western women's feet represented opposite poles of the global spectrum, in which the former usually signified the barbarianism, backwardness, and inferiority of the nation. In this sense, Chinese women were required to learn from their foreign sisters to release their feet not only for personal health but also for national salvation. Although wearing high-heeled shoes was a common trend shared by women around the world, Chinese intellectuals portrayed Western women as rational and knowledgeable, who either knew to abandon the wearing of high heels or knew how to wear them properly and to apply scientific methods to protect their feet from physical harm. Chinese women, by contrast, were described as unintelligent and blind lovers of high-heeled shoes who needed to be educated. Western women were still the role models for Chinese women.

Women's personal experiences and inner feelings about binding feet and/or wearing high heels were usually not the main concerns in the discussion held by intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In order to make those weak voices heard, this thesis attempts to search in detail the small number of magazine articles that recorded female intellectuals' attitudes to the wearing of high-heeled shoes. More importantly, the popularity of

⁴ For the development and origins of the medical rhetoric and iconography that linked an image of China as sick or diseased – the “Sick Man of Asia” – with bodily pathology at the onset of modernity, see Larissa Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 15-37.

photography in the Republican period offered an alternative way to ‘see’ women’s voices. Photos in popular publications exhibited a visual fact, which is that women in most cases did not wear the types of high-heeled shoes that were fiercely attacked at the time. In other words, the criticism of high heels and the reality of women wearing high heels did not always match, creating tension between the intelligentsia and everyday reality and between women’s personal practice and the nationalist discourse proposed mostly by male intellectuals.

This thesis consists of five chapters. In addition to the introductory Chapter I, Chapter II, *Not the Main Actor: Wearing High-Heeled Shoes in the Late Qing*, explores women’s lukewarm responses to the imported high-heeled shoes in late Qing society. Except for the ‘flowerpot’ shoes worn by Manchu women of the upper classes, flat shoes were well received by women of the day with both bound and unbound feet. It was not until the late 1910s that women from rich families began to wear high-heeled shoes. In the following decades, high-heeled shoes were greatly appreciated by almost all women as one of the key elements required for them to enter modern social life in the Republican period. However, the popularity of high-heeled shoes was paralleled by many criticisms.

Chapter III, *The Modern Golden Lotus: Wearing High-Heeled Shoes in the Republican Period*, addresses the most prevailing criticism of wearing high-heeled shoes at the time, that the practice was the modern version of footbinding. Western medical knowledge had become a powerful weapon to reveal the negative side of wearing high heels, such as the deformation of the feet, feelings of fatigue, restrictions in activities, all of which led to the weakness of the nation. It is worthwhile to note that not all critics were opposed to women wearing high-heeled shoes. Some critics proposed the concept of ‘ideal high-heeled shoes’ that emphasized two necessary standards to judge high heels: the height of the heels and the shape of the toe.

Chapter IV, *Beneficial Experience: the Exaltation of Wearing High-Heeled Shoes*, examines other intellectuals' defenses of women wearing high-heeled shoes. These passionate defenders used Western doctors' statements and their own experience to convince readers that wearing high heels was good for building muscles, keeping a good sense of balance, and accentuating the beauty of women's legs and feet.

Chapter V is the conclusion that provides a summary of the viewpoints presented in the previous chapters as well as some additional ideas for further study.

CHAPTER II

NOT THE MAIN ACTOR: WEARING HIGH-HEELED SHOES IN THE LATE QING

On August 29, 1842, Qing imperial commissioners Qiying 耆英, Yilibu 伊里布, and Sir Henry Pottinger signed the Treaty of Nanjing on the British warship Cornwallis, which marked the end of the First Opium War of 1840-1842. One of the clauses in the treaty entitled British consuls to live and manage foreign trade in five Chinese ports: Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Ningbo, and Shanghai. In the following half century, the number of treaty ports increased as a result of the serial Qing military defeats. Modern industrial technology and products were introduced to China through these ports and greatly changed the life of Chinese people. The first company to provide running water in Shanghai was established in 1881. In 1900, the installation of streetlights in Beijing was completed. In 1903, people in Shanghai saw motor vehicles for the first time and named them ‘four-wheeled monsters’.⁵ Cameras, electric lamps, telephones, the phonograph, and other imported items quickly captured people’s attention, including the Manchu and Han nobility. In 1903, the 68-year-old Empress Dowager Cixi became obsessed with Western photography and invited Western photographers to take her photograph in the

⁵ Leo Lee, 6-7.

Forbidden City.⁶ For common Chinese people, running water, electric lights, matches, and machine-woven cloth gradually became their daily necessities.

People's mode of attire also changed around the same time. The growing population of foreigners in China, particularly in the treaty ports, brought popular items to Chinese society and created new demands for dress. In the settlements, foreign merchants opened tailor shops and boutiques one after the other to meet the needs of not only foreigners but also local people. Western brands were considered the height of fashion, leading to a new set of cultural values based on a desire to emulate the West. Chinese merchants also seized this business opportunity. They invested and even became partners in joint ventures.⁷ As early as the 1870s, several workshops in Shanghai were making Western style shoes, including high heels. Some of the most famous shoe stores were *Bajia* 拔佳, *Meizuishi* 美最时, and *Huazao* 华草. Shoemakers at that time referenced European patterns and made shoes in leather, silk, and machine-woven shoes.⁸ Westerners, employees in the foreign firm industry, and returning students were their regular customers. Suits and ties, Parisian outfits, patent leather, and high-heeled shoes were beginning to compete with mandarin jackets, long gowns, waistcoats, and cotton shoes.

In the last decades of the Qing dynasty, women's high-heeled shoes were, at best, trendy foreign objects. They were neither a discussion point for the public nor a requisite fashion symbol for most Chinese women in their everyday lives. Pictorial magazines constitute an

⁶ Yuan Ze and Hu Yue, *Bai nian yi shang: 20 shi ji Zhongguo fu zhuang liu bian* 百年衣裳: 20 世纪中国服装流变 (A Hundred Year Clothing: the Change of Chinese Clothing in the Twentieth Century) (Xianggang: Xianggang zhong he chu ban you xian gong si, 2011), 37.

⁷ Ye Xiaoqing, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003), 117.

⁸ Yuan Ze and Hu Yue, 166.

important medium for better understanding the indifferent attitude to high heels in Chinese society. With the burgeoning of a print and visual culture, the number of pictorial magazines increased dramatically in the late Qing period. Especially after the abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905, more and more intellectuals began to find new ways to make a living. Some of them joined publishing companies, while others started magazines by themselves. They included fascinating pictures and commentaries in their publications to present a society that was undergoing dramatic changes. Although few pictorial magazines continued for a long time, their cheap price, easy-to-read informal language, and vivid illustrations were the three main characteristics that attracted a much wider readership than the ordinary text media of the time. *Dianshizhai huabao* 点石斋画报 (Dianshizhai Pictorial, 1884-1898), for instance, had a multi-channel distribution system, which included individuals, companies, foreign firms, and private postal services.⁹ These pictorial magazines, in turn, had a significant effect on people's minds and way of life.

Images of women's high-heeled shoes occasionally appeared in illustrated news stories published by late Qing pictorial magazines. The wearers were nearly always foreign women dressing in Western style attire. In 1885, *Dianshizhai* pictorial carried the story of a Western woman doctor who performed a surgical operation to remove a patient's breast tumor. The doctor was called Li Ying and she was competent in general surgery and worked at Tongren Hospital in Hongkou. The Chinese patient came from Anhui. She was an aged woman who had suffered from the pain of the tumor for years. The operation process is described as follows: "The doctor took out a sharp knife, cut the tumor off, and then applied medicine to the patient." The effectiveness of Western surgery particularly was emphasized as the patient was reported to

⁹ Ye Xiaoqing, 5-6.

have been cured a few months after the surgery.¹⁰ Figure 2.1 shows the scene of the operation: the doctor is wearing high-heeled shoes, whereas the patient has bound feet.



Fig 2.1 A Surgical Operation to Remove a Tumor
(Dianshizhai huabao 1885)

The Western doctor's high heels and the shoes for the patient's bound feet constitute a sharp contrast rather than a similarity in this illustration. The pictorial paid no attention to the high heels, probably because the focus at the time was on women's footbinding as both a sign of Han civilization and femininity. Footbinding was a prevailing practice among the majority of Han Chinese women in the Qing dynasty. It was once a debated issue in the initial stage of Qing's rule. Different from their insistence on cutting men's queue, the Qing governors compromised by allowing Han women to bind their feet. Footbinding had thus become a symbol to distinguish between Manchu and Han women. Normally, Han women wore special shoes for their bound feet, whereas Manchu women wore 'flowerpot' shoes. This traditional distinction with regard to

¹⁰ Ye Xiaoqing, 139.

women's feet and shoes began to be blurred in the late Qing period. *Beijing bai hua hui tu ri bao* 北京白话画图日报 (Beijing Vernacular Pictorial Daily) reported the story of a woman who had run away from home and later was persuaded to return (see Figure 2.2).¹¹ The four women in the illustration all wear long gowns, one combs her hair in the Manchu style whereas the other three women have a Han hairstyle. The two women who are tussling with each other are wearing flowerpot shoes. The mixture of Manchu and Han hairstyles, attire, and shoes in the picture makes it difficult to distinguish the ethnicity of the two women.



Fig. 2.2 Women Returned Home
(*Beijing bai hua hui tu ri bao* 1909)

¹¹ The story is that family B has a row with family A because the child of family A hit the child of family B. Neighbors were persuading the mother of family A to return home. See in *Qing mo min chu bao kan tu hua ji cheng* 清末民初报刊图画集成 (The Collection of Pictorials in the Late Qing and Early Republican Periods), vol. 20 (Beijing: Quan guo tu shu guan wen xian wei suo fu zhi zhong xin, 2003), 8586.

Compared to the bound feet of the patient shown in the story of the surgical operation (Figure 2.1), the feet of two of the women on the left-hand side of this picture (Figure 2.2) are much bigger and appear to be ‘natural’ feet. The question is, why did they not bind their feet? One possible reason is that they are Manchu but do not have Manchu hairstyles. The other possibility is that they are Han women who have responded to the anti-footbinding movement of the day on the one hand, while on the other hand, they wear flowerpot shoes to make their feet look smaller. In the late Qing period, footbinding once again became a highly controversial topic among male intellectuals and represented the conflict between old and new ideas. In 1895, Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) established the first anti-footbinding group in Guangzhou. Since that time, intellectuals stepped up their demands that footbinding should be abolished. The process of setting women’s feet free, however, was never unidirectional from bound feet to natural feet, but was full of reversals and zigzags.¹²

The diverse styles of shoes that women wore in the late Qing period show that anti-footbinding had become acceptable. Around the early 1910s, women’s shoes could be separated into two main categories: one for bound feet and the other for natural feet. Many of the shoes were made of blue, black, purple, and stone blue satin, decorated with embroidery. Except for ‘flowerpot’ shoes, the soles of almost all other styles of women’s shoes were flat.¹³

At the same time, female students’ campus attire represented one of the most fashionable dress styles. Under the influence of Japanese apparel, campus wear included a high collared blouse, black skirt, and Western style leather shoes.¹⁴ A photo of Lin Huiyin 林徽因 (1904-

¹² Dorothy Ko, 6.

¹³ Yuan Ze and Hu Yue, 52-53.

¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

1955)¹⁵ and her classmates taken in 1916 (see Figure 2.3) shows the young women wearing school uniforms and shoes with heels. But the heights of the heels appear to be different, because the heels of Lin's shoes (Lin is the figure on the left) look slightly lower than those of her classmates.



Fig 2.3 Lin Huiyin and Her Classmates (1916)

¹⁵ Lin Huiyin 林徽因 was a famous Chinese architect and writer. Born in Hangzhou, she was able to receive a formal education due to being part of a wealthy family. She obtained her degrees both in England and the United States. She is known to be the first female architect in modern China.

CHAPTER III

THE MODERN GOLDEN LOTUS: WEARING HIGH-HEELED SHOES IN THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD

In the late 1910s, women from rich families began to wear high-heeled shoes, which forecast the coming golden age of wearing high heels in China between the 1920s and the 1940s. High heels were not only immensely popular with Chinese women but also designed in various styles to meet consumers' needs. Their popularity relied on the flood of imported high-heeled shoes that entered the Chinese market, which diversified women's choices. Pictorials, newspaper supplements, advertisements, and other mass media played a crucial role in introducing the latest styles and promoting new ideas about high-heeled shoes. Different from the sketches drawn in the late Qing pictorials, photographs were used extensively in Republican publications to display high heels in an accurate, current, and real way.

High-heeled shoes, together with perfume, permed wavy hair, lipstick, and silk stockings, became fashionable necessities for women during the Republican period. Shoe stores supplied high heels of various styles. In addition to the leather shoes worn during the day, multiple colors of satin high-heeled slippers were available for women to wear at home in the evening. If economic conditions permitted, almost all women who followed fashion at that time wished to own a pair of high heels. Even women who had just given up footbinding wanted to wear high-heeled shoes, so they put wads of cotton in the shoes to make them fit. As an article published in *Da gong bao* 大公报 in 1928 pointed out, high heels were an indispensable element of being

fashionable, even though the styles of the latest dress change over time.¹⁶ Fashion ideas quickly permeated Chinese social life and impacted the way people presented themselves. High-heeled shoes were not only objects for commercial sale, but also were requisites for realizing the fantasy of a modern social life. In urban areas, high heels were ‘must-haves’ for women walking in parks, going to coffee houses, shopping malls, dance halls, banks, and other public places. Wearing high-heeled shoes, to some extent, indicated Chinese women’s desire and gradual acceptance of Western modern social life.

Women, especially young women, who did not like wearing high-heeled shoes, were perceived as outdated and unfashionable. In 1933, the magazine *Kong Jun* 空军 published a story of an old-fashioned wife who is disliked by her husband. The wife comes from a rural area, is virtuous, nice, and shows deep affection for her husband and even cares for his parents. One night, the husband asked his wife to ‘doll herself up’ for a dinner party, which included that she must wear high-heeled shoes. After her repeated failure to walk normally, the wife gave up trying to wear high heels in despair. The husband was ashamed of his wife and went to the party alone. Other women’s delicate gestures and ability to walk gracefully at the party further added to his sense of shame. When he returned home, the husband asked his wife to leave the city and go back to the countryside.¹⁷

This story reveals the importance of women wearing high-heeled shoes as part of urban life in the Republican period. For typical social occasions, high heels were an integral part of the dress code. When most city women wore high heels to go to parties, wearing flat shoes seemed

¹⁶ Anonymity, “Ji zhong jiao shang de zhuang shi” 几种脚上的装饰 (“Several Feet Decorations”), *Da gong bao* 大公报, May 3, 1928.

¹⁷ Min Zi 敏子, “Gao gen xie” 高跟鞋 (“High-Heeled Shoes”), *Kong Jun* 空军 30 (1933), 45-46.

odd. The wife in the story even lost her opportunity to attend the party at all simply because she could not wear high heels. Meanwhile, the story presents the husband as the dominant character who must guide his wife to wear high-heeled shoes. Living in the city for several years, he was more familiar with the urban lifestyle than his wife. For him, the wearing of high heels to attend social activities was basic social decorum. He was dismayed at the thought that his wife could not accept high heels, which indicated the wife's inability to become accustomed to modern social life. His wife's adoration for him and care for his parents could not alleviate the husband's sense of shame.

The Modern Golden Lotus

During the Republican period, not all intellectuals (including both men and women) encouraged women to wear high-heeled shoes. As soon as high heels became popular in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the criticisms began to appear. In 1921, *Shenbao* 申报 (Shanghai Daily, 1872-1949) published an article about the problems associated with women's dress in general. High-heeled shoes were juxtaposed with short-sleeved garments, short pants, and revealing clothing as improper and undignified ways of dressing. If serious women wore high heels, they would then look like figures of sex and allure.¹⁸ In addition to the matter of public decency, women who liked to wear high heels in everyday life were often seen as unqualified housewives, passive men's playthings, and unsuitable female citizens.¹⁹

¹⁸ Lao Xiang 老芑, "Fu nü de yi fu wen ti" 妇女的衣服问题 ("The Issue of Women's Clothing"), *Shenbao* 申报 [Shanghai Daily] April 20, 1921.

¹⁹ Ding 鼎, "Ren jia xing bai de guan cha" 人家兴败的观察 ("The Observation of Household Fortune and Misfortune"), *Shenbao* 申报 [Shanghai Daily] May 26, 1923; Anonymity, "Jiu, Gao gen xie wu le ta" 酒, 高跟鞋误了她 ("Alcohol, High-Heeled Shoes Kill Her"), *Ling Long* 玲珑 30 (1953), 1994.

The criticisms of women wearing high heels between the 1920s and the 1940s were presented in different ways. Feng Yuxiang 冯玉祥 (1928-1930)²⁰ made his attitude clear in 1933 in the magazine *Xian dai fu mu* 现代父母 (Modern Parents). Feng considered that women who wore high-heeled shoes exhibited bad habits that promoted gender inequality in Chinese society. High heels denied women their right to be independent individuals and in turn sharpened the gap between men and women. From Feng's point of view, wearing high heels was far from civilized behavior that represented women's acceptance of modern social life; rather, it was a symbol of a barrier that stopped China from being transformed into a civilized nation.²¹

Although wearing high-heeled shoes was criticized on a number of grounds, these articles hardly used convincing evidence to explain the reasons that high heels made women appear frivolous, extravagant, or reactionary. In fact, many intellectuals at the time began to doubt the effectiveness of these 'impractical' critics and turned to find sound scientific evidence to support their points. In 1931, an article published in *Yi xue zhou kan ji* 医学周刊集 (The Collection of Medical Weekly Magazine) quoted a research report in the American magazine *Hygeia*. The researcher was an American doctor Du An 杜安 who organized a physical examination for senior students at Goucher College. His purpose was to determine to what extent wearing high-heeled shoes would affect people's health. Through analyzing statistical data, the doctor came to the conclusion that wearing high heels was potentially harmful to women's feet and would cause

²⁰ Feng Yuxiang 冯玉祥 was a warlord and leader in Republican China from Chaohu, Anhui. He joined forces with revolutionaries against the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Later, he joined the Nationalist Party and supported the Northern Expedition. In 1933, he broke with Chiang Kai-shek in resisting Japanese incursions in 1933.

²¹ Feng Yuxiang 冯玉祥, "Dui mo deng nü zi zhi gao gen xie hong zui chun you gan" 对摩登女子之高跟鞋红嘴唇有感 ("Some Feelings of Modern Women's High-Heeled Shoes and Red Lips"), *Xian dai fu mu* 现代父母 [Modern Parents], 1 (1933), 42.

a series of problems such as fatigue, aches, weakness, and menstrual cramps. The Chinese author of the article that discussed wearing high-heeled shoes in the 1930s quoted his research findings. Compared with the government's discouragement of wearing high heels and idle talk without evidence, the American doctor's medical studies seemed more persuasive in the eyes of the Chinese author.²²

In the mid-nineteenth century, missionaries introduced Western medical science to China through the treaty ports. For the first few years, medical knowledge, especially surgical operations, had often been demonized. It was not until the late nineteenth century that Western medical science was widely accepted by Chinese intellectuals. The report of the oncology surgery mentioned in the previous chapter is an example. At the high tide of the anti-footbinding movement in the late Qing, medical knowledge was used to explain foot deformity as a disastrous effect of binding women's feet.²³ Footbinding was criticized as one manifestation of traditional social abuse. It constricts the nerves in the feet and legs and in turn severely limited women's activities. At that time, Chinese women's bound feet and Western women's natural feet were seen as a binary mode. In the nationalist discourse, the binary mode was formed as a cognitive paradigm of the collective to represent the disparity between China and the West. In this process, Western medical science was deemed to be representative of Western civilization and progress.

In the golden age of wearing high-heeled shoes in China, Western medical knowledge was often seen in the writings of intellectuals as a way of argumentation. Similar to the disputes over

²² Ke Gang 克纲, "Gao gen xie you mei you hai chu" 高跟鞋有没有害处 ("Weather High-Heeled Shoes are Bad"), *Yi xue zhou kan ji* 医学周刊集 [The Collection of Medical Weekly Magazine], 4 (1931), 34.

²³ Dorothy Ko, 50-52.

footbinding in the late Qing, women's physical conditions, particularly foot deformity, were the main focus of discussions about women wearing high heels. An article published in *Yi yao xue* 医药学 (Medicine) in 1935 expounded the harmful effects of wearing high heels by elaborating the structure of people's feet (see Figure 3.1). Some knowledge of anatomy helped the author Yu Shaoji 余绍基 to explain that human feet are made up of twenty-six small delicate bones. The arches of the feet also play an important role in supporting the body's weight and being able to perform daily activities. Wearing high-heeled shoes would bring two changes to the shape of women's feet. The first change is the deformation of the pedal protractor muscle, which results in the inflexion of the feet. Even if women take off high heels, their horseshoe-shaped feet would not be able to return to their original position. The second change to women's feet is that they would become flat. To relieve the tiredness attributed to wearing high heels, women would bend their knees and increase pressure on their feet. The consequence would be the dislocation of the *dorsalis pedis* and in turn expand the contact area between the feet and the ground. Flat feet not only look unattractive but also make people feel tired easily.²⁴



Fig. 3.1 Horseshoe-Shaped Feet and Flat Feet
(*Yi yao xue* 1935)

²⁴ Yu Shao Ji 余绍基, "Gei shi mao de gao gen xie nü zi, bing tai jiao" 给时髦的高跟鞋女子, 病态脚 ("A Letter to Fashion Women Wearing High-Heeled Shoes, the Deformity of Feet"), *Yi yao xue* 医药学 [Medicine], 12 (1935), 1-13.

Many Chinese intellectuals in the Republican period attributed the deformity of women's feet that came as a result of wearing high-heeled shoes to the modern version of footbinding. Growing up in a time when the notion of footbinding was harshly attacked, these intellectuals were familiar with the rhetoric that was used to promote setting free the feet and managed to incorporate this same rhetoric tactfully in their discussion of high heels. For them, it was less about footbinding being wrong than wearing high-heeled shoes being right.²⁵ Intellectuals usually emphasized two similarities between footbinding and the wearing of high heels. The first common point is the unrecoverable deformity of women's feet. In 1941, *Jian kang sheng huo* 健康生活 (Healthy Life) published an article written by an American doctor, A. Owen Penney, who had more than forty years of experience of diagnosis and treatment of women's feet. One of the worst forms of damage caused by wearing high heels is, as is the same for footbinding, the malformation of the foot, toes, and ankle. Once the shape of the foot becomes fixed and unchangeable, Dr. Penney argued that it is very difficult to return it to normality.²⁶

The second common point between wearing high heels and footbinding is the effect of pain and movement restrictions. Zhao Zhuguang 赵竹光 recounted her sad experience of wearing high heels in an article published in *Dong fang za zhi* 东方杂志 (Eastern Miscellany, 1904-1948) in 1934. Zhao was an active participant of revolutionary demonstrations. One day, she wore a pair of high-heeled shoes and took part in a parade. After returning home, she lost all sensation in her feet through cramp. Her toes, carrying most of her weight in the pointed high-heeled shoes,

²⁵ Lü Chunnian 吕椿年, "Bai bu he wu shi bu" 百步和五十步 ("A Hundred Step and Fifty Steps"), *Liangyou huabao* 良友画报 [Liangyou Pictorial], 42 (1930), 34.

²⁶ Qiu Yan 秋燕, "Gao gen xie hai le ta" 高跟鞋害了她 ("High-Heeled Shoes Destroy Her"), *Jian kang sheng huo* 健康生活 [Healthy Life], 25 (1941), 3-4.

were killing her. The lack of circulation led to nerve compression and then to dizziness, backache, and lumbar acid.²⁷ The pain reminded the author of that associated with women's footbinding. Zhao's mother once had her feet bound as a form of beautification and had told the author about the miserable experience. From Ms. Zhao's point of view, wearing high-heeled shoes not only meant physical suffering but also turned out to be a major obstacle to women's participation in massive demonstrations and other outdoor activities. As Feng Yuxiang argued, the wearing of high heels, like footbinding, is a manifestation of gender inequality as well as the backwardness of the nation.

However, it is important to note that footbinding was a unique practice conducted by only a select group of Chinese women. From the mid-nineteenth century on, this practice had been continually jeered in interactions between China and foreign countries. Gradually, footbinding was standardized as the 'other' of Western civilization and modern society. Chinese intellectuals contrasted Chinese bound feet with Western natural feet and in turn used the difference to emphasize that China lagged behind other countries in the world. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the wearing of high-heeled shoes was associated with the future of the nation in the same way and was a common concern of both Chinese and Western intellectuals. Western women also experienced backache, menstrual pain, the sense of fatigue, and deformity of their feet due to high heels. But in their writings, Chinese intellectuals emphasized that Western women had a clearer sense of the harm of wearing high-heeled shoes. As Ms. Zhao mentioned in her article, most women in Western countries took good care of their feet. After wearing high heels, they typically soothed their aching feet in soda water, applied olive oil to their feet, and exercised

²⁷ Zhao Zuguang 赵竹光, "Gao gen xie dui yu fu nü jiang kang zhi ying xiang" 高跟鞋对于妇女健康之影响 ("The Impact of High-Heeled Shoes on Women's Health"), *Dong fang za zhi* 东方杂志 [Eastern Miscellany], 19 (1934), 207-209.

their feet for a few minutes on a daily basis. The purpose was to relax their muscles, relieve stress, and improve circulation.²⁸ In addition to foot care, some Western women began to abandon wearing high heels altogether. In 1937, the magazine *Ling Long* 玲珑 published an article that claimed that most Hollywood stars refused to wear high-heeled shoes. Carol Lombard's legs and feet were deemed the most beautiful among the Hollywood stars²⁹ because she hardly ever wore high heels in everyday life. The author also invoked Dr. Lai Ludun's 来路敦 words to affirm that wearing high-heeled shoes would have negative effects on the beauty of women's feet. When more and more Western women realized the disadvantages of wearing high heels, the author indicated regretfully that women in China were still obsessed with them.³⁰

The Ideal High-Heeled Shoes

The criticisms of women wearing high heels often contain two main understandings of the concept of 'high-heeled shoes'. In the broad sense, the term 'high-heeled shoes' referred to all women's shoes with heels, without detailed criteria. Intellectuals normally favored flat shoes and disapproved of any shoes designed for women with heels. For another group of intellectuals, however, high-heeled shoes meant shoes with pointed toes and with spiked heels higher than one and a half inches. Based on these ideas, these intellectuals proposed more targeted and focused criticisms of high heels. The point they argued against was not the fact that many Chinese

²⁸ Zhao Zuguang, *Dong fang za zhi* 东方杂志 [Eastern Miscellany], 19 (1934), 209.

²⁹ In the November issue of magazine *Screen Art*, an image of Carol Lombard was taken by Edwin Bower Hesser. Edwin argued that few screen actresses have legs and ankles as beautiful as those of Carol Lombard.

³⁰ Anonymity, "Zai mo luo zhong de gao gen xie" 在没落中的高跟鞋 ("The Decline of High-Heeled Shoes"), *Ling Long* 玲珑 292 (1937), 1926.

women in the Republican period wore high-heeled shoes; rather, it was the type of high heels that women wore in their everyday lives. Consequently, the concept ‘ideal high-heeled shoes’ became popular in public discussion.

Many writers appealed for scientific principles in the design and fabrication of high-heeled shoes, but very few of them provided a specific plan.³¹ In 1934, Zhao Zuguang argued that ideal high heels share three characteristics. The first includes both the height and quality of the heel, which should be less than one and a half inches and made of resilient rubber, respectively. The pressure on the feet would thus be relieved. The second characteristic refers to the shape of the toes. Wide-toed shoes were preferred because they would provide enough space for the toes. The third ideal characteristic is the shoe style. Each line of stitching needs to be straight and the shoes must be shaped like natural human feet. In order to make her views amply clear to readers, Ms. Zhao introduced four sketches of ideal high-heeled shoes that the Western medical community recommended (see Figure 3.2). The uppermost image shown in Figure 3.2 illustrates a shoe that should fit well at any time. The next one is designed for running. The third one could be used for participating in celebrations. For going out on business, the bottom one would be the best choice. Except for the top high-heeled shoe, all the rest have heels, but they are neither stilettos nor pointed-toe shoes. The toes are rounded and the heels do not appear to be high.

³¹ Yu Shaoji, *Yi yao xue* 医药学 [Medicine], 12 (1935), 1-13; Anonymity, “Gao gen xie de hai chu” 高跟鞋的害处 (“The Harm of High-Heeled Shoes”), *Ling Long* 玲珑 16 (1936), 1215.

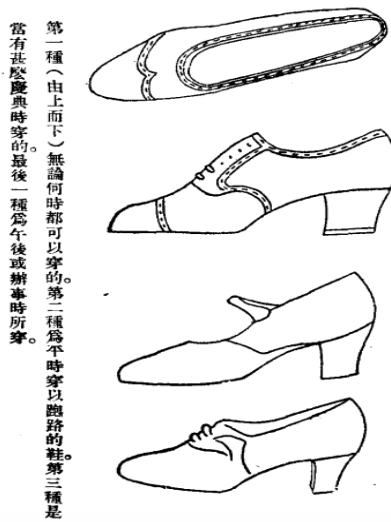


Fig. 3.2 Four Ideal High-Heeled Shoes
(Dong fang za zhi 1934)

Ms. Zhao's view of ideal high-heeled shoes was borrowed from Bernarr Macfadden, who was a well-known body-builder in American sports circles and editor-in-chief of *Physical Culture*. In general terms, Ms. Zhao agreed with Macfadden's idea that wearing high-heeled shoes, like wearing a corset, was a relic of barbarianism and needed to be taken seriously in the twentieth century as a health risk. Both writers highlighted the importance of choosing good high heels.³² An article about preventing and curing flat feet published in *Physical Culture* in 1917 offered some revelation and reference for Ms. Zhao to make suggestions to Chinese readers (see Figure 3.3). The article includes illustrations of three types of high-heeled shoes and particularly stresses the shoe toes and heels. The bottom image is a typical fashionable shoe with its foot-deforming tendencies. Its pointed toe and stiletto heel would tend to force the great toe over toward the other toes. Mr. Macfadden considered the middle shoe to be fairly satisfactory for dress, but the upper two are corrective in design because they have straight inner lines, rounded

³² Zhao Zuguang, *Dong fang za zhi* 东方杂志 [Eastern Miscellany], 19 (1934), 207-209.

toes, and stable heels compared to the bottom shoe. These characteristics are the same as those that Ms. Zhao mentioned in her article.³³ Different from the issue of footbinding, the wearing of high-heeled shoes was not completely opposed by both Chinese and Western intellectuals. The emphasis was on whether the shoes would cause deformity. In this regard, the shape of the toe and the height and form of the heel were two of the most important judging criteria.

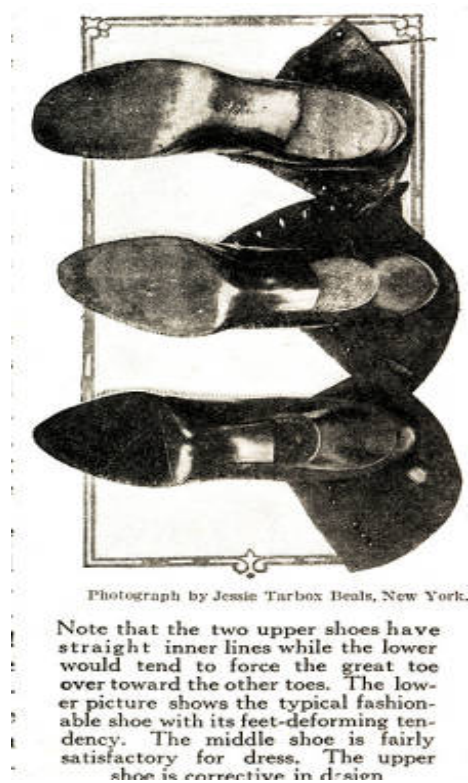


Fig. 3.3 Three Types of High-Heeled Shoes
(Physical Culture 1917)

The next question is to what extent did the criticism of high-heeled shoes and the promotion of ideal high heels influence women's choices of the time? This question is difficult to answer because there are two variable factors. The first factor is the definition of 'ideal' high-heeled

³³ Bernarr Macfadden, "Preventing and Curing Flat Feet," *Physical Culture* 4 (1917), 45.

shoes. How rounded should the toe cap be in order to leave adequate space for the toes? If the height of a pair of shoes is slightly more than one and a half inches, for example, 1.6 inches, could the shoes still be called ‘ideal’ high heels? What about pointed shoes with heels less than one and a half inches? The various fabrics, styles, and patterns of high-heeled shoes further complicated the definition of ideal high heels. The second factor refers to the different shapes of women’s feet and women’s various degrees of pain perception. For instance, some women’s feet are broader than other women’s feet. Even if they wear the same pair of ideal high-heeled shoes, their feelings and attitudes toward the shoes would be widely varied. Meanwhile, women from rich families usually travel by car and seldom walked. The degree of comfort of their shoes might not be her primary consideration in selecting high heels.³⁴

One way to observe women’s shoes in the Republican period is to look at pictures in popular publications. Photography was introduced to China in the late Qing period. At first only high officials, the rich and powerful, and famous courtesans could afford to have their photographs taken. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, taking photographs had become part of everyday life. Many newspapers and periodicals chose to use photos to record joys and sorrows, happiness and sufferings of the world, including government activities, military training, campus life, backstage stories, and personal experience. Photos of women engaging in public affairs and private gatherings became important components of popular publications (see Figure 3.4 and 3.5). High-heeled shoes as an everyday fashion necessity are frequently seen in these photos, and most of the shoes look like the ideal high heels recommended by Chinese intellectuals. In other words, the heel height and toe shape of the shoes in these photos do not match the shoes with stiletto heels and pointed toes that critics described in their writings.

³⁴ Hu Lanqi 胡兰畦, “Chang qipao he gao gen xie” 长旗袍和高跟鞋 (“Long Qipao and High-Heeled Shoes”), *Ling Long* 玲珑, 21 (1937), 1623.



Fig. 3.4 Students Graduated from Senior High Fudan University
(Liangyou huabao 1928)



Fig. 3.5 Hong Kong Famous Celebrities
(Liangyou huabao 1928)

The next question is, who were the real targets of the bitter criticisms during the Republican period? Take *Liangyou huabao* as an example. Most women who wore non-ideal high heels were film stars and dancing girls. The backgrounds of the photographs were mostly their working places, such as film studios, public places, and dance halls. Readers would have no idea what shoes these women wore off-stage and for private occasions. Interestingly, the style of the high

heels that was heavily criticized was often shown in sketches rather than in life photos (see Figures 3.6 and 5.7). *Liangyou huabao* has a column about the latest women's fashion in every issue. Editors always made sketches of models to illustrate clothes, and the models are shown wearing shoes with pointed toes and stiletto heels. These shoes are almost identical to the ones intellectuals criticized in their writings. In this regard, the degree to which literary criticisms of women's high-heeled shoes reflect social reality needs to be further elucidated. Perhaps the criticism derived from intellectuals' growing sense of unease that more and more ordinary Chinese women would blindly follow the new wave of beauty fashion came from abroad. Under such circumstances, the memories and experiences of footbinding and anti-footbinding came just at the right moment. Recognizing same terrible results of binding feet and wearing high-heeled shoes, critics attempted to convince readers of the serious social and national harm caused by the popularity of high heels.



Fig. 3.6 New Outfits in the Fall
(*Liangyou huabao* 1931)



Fig. 3.7 New Outfits in the Winter
(Liangyou huabao 1932)

CHAPTER IV

BENEFICIAL EXPERIENCE: THE EXALTATION OF WEARING HIGH-HEELED SHOES

The promotion of ideal high-heeled shoes was based on an assumption shared by many Chinese intellectuals between the 1920s and the 1940s. That is, only a few styles of high heels actually met the health standards provided by women's shoes. Pointed shoes with stiletto heels would not only cause deformity of the feet but also body aches and pains. As mentioned previously, critics described at great length how the wearing of non-ideal high-heeled shoes would cause physical and mental deterioration. All these conclusions came from Western medical knowledge. However, Western medical theories and doctors' attitudes toward the wearing of high-heeled shoes did not form a coherent view at that time. Some medical voices in support of wearing high heels were also introduced to the public discussion.

Shortly after the critical article about women's high-heeled shoes was published in *Shenbao*, the magazine *Zi lan hua pian* 紫兰华片 carried a defensive article in 1924. At the beginning of the article, the author stated clearly that the purpose of the article was to console those women who were worried about the bad results of wearing high heels. Instead of praising the wearer of high-heeled shoes according to his/her personal taste, the author quoted the opinions of a British doctor and a French doctor who believed that wearing high heels was beneficial to women's health. From the French doctor's point of view, wearing high heels was a good toe exercise. As opposed to wearing flat shoes, wearing high heels would keep weight on the feet, which would

force the toes to grip the ground and in turn exercise the toe muscles.³⁵ His point contrasted sharply with the idea mentioned in the previous chapter that wearing high heels usually led to deformity of the toes. On the one hand, the French doctor did not consider the effects of the shape of shoes on women's feet. On the other hand, he insisted that the toes are able to bear the pressure of the body rather than grinding against each other, leading to pain and deformity.

Interestingly, the viewpoint of the British doctor made up most of the article. His approval of wearing high-heeled shoes focused less on arguing against the deformity of feet than on the health of the whole body. The doctor pointed out that the spine must remain perpendicular and erect in order to support the upper body and keep muscles relatively fixed. Women wearing high heels would unconsciously lean forward. To straighten the body, back muscles and the spine needed to maintain the body's balance and in turn would get some exercise. In this sense, wearing high-heeled shoes helps women build body muscles. However, any connection between strong muscles and feet was not elaborated in the article.³⁶

In fact, most articles that used Western medical science to support women wearing high-heeled shoes kept silent about the potential for deformity of the feet. The focus was instead on maintaining balance and muscle development. In 1939, *Ke xue huabao* 科学画报 (Science Pictorial) reprinted a body balance test published in the American magazine *Popular Science* of that year. A Boston doctor, Walter Mendenhall, invited two women to join in the experiment and asked one of them to wear high-heeled shoes. Both women placed a metal pencil on their heads to record their wavering graphs on smoked paper while walking a line. Dr. Mendenhall found

³⁵ Anonymity, "Wei nǚ zǐ gāo gēn xié biān hù" 为女子高跟鞋辩护 ("The Defense of Women's High-Heeled Shoes"), *Zi lan hua pian* 紫兰华片, 17 (1924), 69-72.

³⁶ Anonymity, *Zi lan hua pian* 紫兰华片, 17 (1924), 69.

that the woman who wore high heels could often stand and walk more steadily than the barefoot woman.³⁷ Another article published in *Xian dai jia ting* 现代家庭 (Modern Family) in 1940 focuses on the positive effect of wearing high-heeled shoes on the growth of muscles. The author Yan Ran 言然 argued that women who wore high heels would exercise every major muscle group of the lower body, which not only maintains their bodily curves but also enhances their sexual desire. He disagreed with the idea that wearing high heels might damage the visceral structure; rather, it is effective in curing the retroversion of the uterus.³⁸ In this regard, the virtues of wearing high heels seemed more important than the bad results it might cause.

However, not every supporter of wearing high-heeled shoes avoided the subject of feet. Women's feelings and demands for wearing high heels engaged the attention of a few intellectuals, although these voices were barely audible. The discussion can be broadly split into two basic types. The first type challenged the linkage between the wearing of high heels and footbinding. In 1932, Ms. Li Fei 丽菲 published an article in the journal *Ling Long* opposing hygienists' criticism of women wearing high heels. At the beginning of the article, she admits that she is a keen supporter of high heels and always wear them. According to her everyday experience, Ms. Li Fei did not think that wearing high heels would lead to feet deformity. Western medical theories, in her mind, do not always fit the facts. She particularly regarded the analogy between footbinding and wearing high-heeled shoes as ridiculous and outdated. Instead

³⁷ P. A. W., "Gao gen xie wei ke hou fei" 高跟鞋未可厚非 ("High-Heeled Shoes are not All Bad"), *Ke xue huabao* 科学画报 [Science Pictorial], 3 (1939), 33.

³⁸ Yan Ran 言然, "Guan yu zhuo gao gen xie zhi wo jian" 关于着高跟鞋之我见 ("Some Thoughts on Wearing High-Heeled Shoes"), *Xian dai jia ting* 现代家庭 [Modern Family], 8 (1940), 33.

of reading and writing theoretical articles at home, Ms. Li Fei appealed to the critics to look at women's feet and see whether their feet are as deformed as bound feet in the past.³⁹

In fact, most critics failed to confirm the common consequence of binding feet and wearing high-heeled shoes. First, critical articles used sketches rather than medical photos to illustrate the deformity of women's feet as a result of wearing high heels. Compared with intellectuals' passion for revealing the "truth" of footbinding through X-ray cameras, critics of high-heeled shoes usually made their arguments via plain words and/or sketches. Thus, the reliability of these articles might be questionable. In addition, the wearing of high heels, unlike footbinding, is not an ongoing continuous practice. It is impossible for women to wear high heels all day long or wear them on a daily basis. Women were free to choose not only whether or not to wear high heels but also what style of high heels to wear. If one pair of shoes caused blisters, she could take them off after arriving at home and wear flat shoes or shoes with low heels the next day. Furthermore, as illustrated in the photos published in newspapers and journals, the majority of Chinese women did not wear pointed shoes with high heels in everyday life. The above three points indicate that the criticisms of wearing high heels focused less on the rectification of women's severely deformed feet, which would be similar to the anti-footbinding movement, than on the prevention of abnormalities of women's feet.

The second type of discussion of women's feelings and demands for wearing high-heeled shoes affirms the positive effects of high heels that include allowing women to feel more attractive. High heels make women's feet look delicate and tiny, especially the beautiful curve of the insteps. Also, every step a woman takes in high heels modifies her leg muscles and provides a long leg line. Especially for small Asian women with short legs, high heels cover up their

³⁹ Li Fei 丽菲, "Wei shen me yao chuan gao gen xie" 为什么要穿高跟鞋 ("Why Wearing High-Heeled Shoes"), *Ling Long* 玲珑 73 (1932), 1061.

physical imperfections.⁴⁰ The enhancement of women's physical beauty in turn increases self-confidence and their courage to participate actively in social works and activities. Wearing high-heeled shoes, instead of blocking women's career paths, can inspire more and more women to seek a more public life.⁴¹ In the eyes of critics, these weak voices that defend high heels might either be misinterpreting Western medical knowledge or might be relying too much on personal emotion and experience. However, it is these voices that reflected and contributed to the diversity of the discourse about women wearing high-heeled shoes in the Republican period. When critics were anxious about the popularity of high heels, which represented the importation of a new wave of fashion trend dominated by the West, supporters attempted to find another way to make use of the new trend and meet the demands of Chinese women for their everyday lives.

⁴⁰ Xue Liying 薛丽英, "Nan zi ye yao chuan gao gen xie" 男子也要穿高跟鞋 ("Men Also Need to Wear High-Heeled Shoes"), *Ling Long* 玲珑 47 (1932), 1897.

⁴¹ Li Fei, *Ling Long* 玲珑 73 (1932), 1061.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis focuses on discussions of women wearing high-heeled shoes in the Republican period. These discussions represent contention over the fashion of the time and the accompanying changes in Chinese society. The issue of footbinding and its relationship to the wearing of high heels became a key concern of both critics and supporters of high heels. The linkage between footbinding and the wearing of high heels was not accidental. As the anti-footbinding movement progressed, the understanding of female beauty and fashion began its modern turn. From the twelfth to the late nineteenth centuries, women's bound feet were seen as a symbol of beauty, created by male intellectuals in their literary works. However, in the late Qing period, the aesthetic appreciation of footbinding had lost its legitimacy and footbinding was considered a brutal practice that catered to patriarchy. Natural feet became the new standard of female beauty in the years of the anti-footbinding movement. Wearing flat shoes accordingly came into fashion.

The popularity of high-heeled shoes between the 1920s and the 1940s, however, gave rise to the paradoxical anxiety of many Chinese intellectuals. On the one hand, wearing high-heeled shoes was an important component of modern social life. Different from footbinding, the popularity of high heels represented the successful importation of Western ideas about beauty and fashion into China. On the other hand, wearing high heels seemed to be as cruel as footbinding because it too caused women's feet to become abnormal in shape and form. Using

Western medical science, a group of intellectuals argued that the deformity of feet was a highly possible consequence of wearing high heels. This deformity in turn carried over to pain in the whole body, the restriction of women's activities, and manifestation of the nation's backwardness and barbarism. Such paradoxical attitudes towards the wearing of high heels led to the emergence of the concept of ideal high-heeled shoes. Special requirements for the shape of the toe of the shoe and the height of the heel temporarily alleviated intellectuals' anxious feelings. It seemed that they had found a path of compromise in understanding the popularity of high heels in Chinese society of the time.

Nevertheless, not all intellectuals accepted this path of reconciliation at that time. Dissenters believed that the linkage between footbinding and the wearing of high-heeled shoes was unfounded. Instead of sounding the death-knell of women's health, these intellectuals used Western medical knowledge to prove that wearing high heels would effectively strengthen muscles and increase a sense of balance. From this perspective, intellectuals' anxiety about high heels was unnecessary. In addition, they regarded the connection between the wearing of high heels and the discourse on the nation's failure as simply the intellectuals' imagination. To answer the question of whether wearing high-heeled shoes is a good or bad practice, the focus needs to be women's personal feelings and demands in their everyday lives. Individuals had the opportunity to choose the style of high heels they would like to wear. Furthermore, photos in popular publications provided other unheard voices that reflected the social conditions of the time. Critics of high heels seemed to build their arguments on assumptions without solid evidence. Not all Chinese women in the Republican period wore the pointed high heels that some intellectuals criticized. Moreover, almost no medical photos were published to prove that wearing high heels would cause deformities in women's feet.

Hidden beneath the discussion about high-heeled shoes throughout the 1920s and the 1940s is the contention over ways to define female beauty and fashion. This battle encompassed intellectuals' various opinions about whether high heels could fit into the construction of modern beauty and the cult of fashion in China. Meanwhile, the battle reflected an ambivalent attitude to women's wearing of high heels in Western countries. On the one hand, high-heeled shoes were introduced to shopping malls in China not only as commercial goods but also as symbols of modern culture. Foreign companies used Hollywood film stars and all kinds of advertisements for shoes to persuade more and more Chinese women to wear high heels and in turn accept a modern lifestyle. On the other hand, Western medicine did not provide common ground with respect to the possible outcomes of wearing high heels. The diversified opinions held by Western doctors offered an opportunity for Chinese intellectuals to use and even rewrite them as grounds of argument. In this sense, the discussion of wearing high-heeled shoes in Republican China is a cross-border and dynamic process, which shows the non-taken-for-granted contours of its practice and meaning and the variety of Chinese intellectuals' active responses to the ever-changing world around them.

After 1949, the topic of wearing high-heeled shoes gradually entered a cold period. Even though high heels did not disappear in everyday life, they ceased to be a symbol of female beauty and fashion, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Not until the early 1980s did Chinese people once again pay attention to the wearing of high heels. In the first two decades of the post-Mao period (1978 to present), the discussion included popular styles of high heels abroad, the 'dos and don'ts' of wearing high heels, and a new national self-examination with regard to high heels. The golden age of wearing high-heeled shoes throughout the 1920s and the 1940s had not been

forgotten. On the contrary, it became an important part of the history of high heels and female fashion in modern China.

The following questions are: how and why did intellectuals in the post-Mao era mention the discussion of wearing high heels in the Republican period? What are the similarities and differences when talking about high heels in these two periods? Had the piece of Republican history about wearing high-heeled shoes changed people's understanding of the refashioning of high heels after the Cultural Revolution? What are the demands in the discussion of wearing high heels within the new historical background? These are questions that need to be researched in the future.

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