

The dilemma of women's bodies and spirits in an absolute patriarchal society by comparing FGM and Foot-Binding

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Abstract. FGM and Foot binding has existed for a long time in the history of the West and China respectively, which has severely damaged the physical and mental health of women in the West and China. Through a cross-cultural comparative study of FGM globally and Foot Binding in China's Qing Dynasty, this essay examined the dilemmas that women faced both physically and spiritually in the absolute patriarchy society. This paper was written based on previous papers, books and historical documents to find that human behavior was shaped by society and social environment. This article finds that in an absolute patriarchal society, genital mutilation and foot binding have brought difficulties to women's body and spirit. The conclusion is that under the influence of social, psychological and economic factors, women have to accept this immoral custom. It provided readers with a better understanding of patriarchal women's status, as well as the cruelty of Western and Eastern customs such as FGM and foot binding.

Keywords: Dilemma; Patriarchy; FGM; Foot Binding.

1. Introduction

As the name implies, the patriarchal society is a male dominated social system, in which the male is the highest authority and has the primary and greatest power.[1] Literally, absolute patriarchal society means the ruling power of men is much higher than that of women. In such society, there are lots of unreasonable customs that were formed historically, such as FGM and Foot Binding. According to World Health Organization(WHO), FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is defined as all operations involving partial or total removal of female external genitalia or other injuries to female genital organs due to non-medical reasons.[2] Based on the dictionary, Foot Binding is the act or practice of binding a baby girl's feet as small as possible.[3] Represented by Talcott Parsons, the theory of structural functionalism emphasizes that every part of society is organically linked and plays a role in the whole. If a certain aspect of social life does not contribute to the stability and existence of society or can not promote the consensus of social values, this social aspect will soon be eliminated.

Experts and scholars have published detailed and numerous related articles and monographs on the study of FGM and ancient Chinese foot-binding customs. For example:Walk's fifth long novel Possessing the secret of joy reveals the African FGM costume by documenting a real person's story to reflect her deep understanding on African society's traditions. Xu Haiyan's Chinese Foot binding Culture- -A Long Thousand Years of a Golden Lotus this book mainly studies the problem of foot-binding from the perspective of history and discusses foot-binding as a cultural phenomenon. The above research are characterized by truthfully recording stories or analyzing historical reasons, but there is to a lesser extent paper to compare the difficulties brought by the customs of two different regions to women in detail, so this paper will explain the physical and mental dilemma of women in the absolute patriarchal society by comparing FGM and Foot-Binding in terms of social prejudice, female psychology and economic status.

These two acts are a double physical and psychological destruction of women: not only physical genital damage and deprivation of sexual rights, but also will cause a permanent psychological shadow. This essay will be divided in to two main parts. The first section will go over the body dilemma caused by FGM and Foot-Binding. The second section will go over the mental damage

caused by FGM and Foot-Binding, which consists of three sub themes: society, psychology and economics.

2. Literature reviews on women's body dilemma

Some famous people and official organization pointed out that the FGM is a very harmful behavior to the body. Lisa pointed that currently, more than 100 million living women in the world still suffer from the great pain of this destructive surgery, with no less than two million teenage girls each year "knocked down, crying, cut off all or part of the vulva without any anesthesia. The appliances used were rough and unhygienic, often leading to death." [4] As World Health Organization (WHO) stated, FGM only brings harm, which means there is no health benefits. WHO defines four types of female circumcision according to their severity. Type I refers to partial or total excision of the clitoris and clitoris foreskin. Type II refers to partial or total excision of clitoris and labia minora, and sometimes labia majora. Type III refers to the method of cutting, moving and sewing the large and small labia to make a covering cover to narrow the vaginal opening, and sometimes remove the clitoris. This is the most devastating female circumcision, accounting for about 10% of all female circumcisions in Africa. All other female circumcision is classified as type IV, and some do not necessarily remove meat tissue. Regardless of the type, the four types of female circumcision defined by who refer to "all other operations that damage the female genitalia without medical purposes." [5]

There are some people who experience either one of the FGM. For example, Tashi, the protagonist of the secret, is from Olinka in Africa. She is the one who suffers from circumcision which causes great pain to her body. [6] Because the vaginal opening is too small, the menstrual blood cannot be completely discharged from the body when she comes to menstruation. As a result, the menstrual period is prolonged and there is always a strange smell on her body. As the ligament was injured during circumcision, she could not recover her normal walking posture and could only drag her legs. After marriage, she could not even live a normal married life with her husband Adam. Because of a man-woman relationship, Tashi's wound would be torn and bleeding. Another example is the main character in Desert Flower. Born in the desolate Somali desert, Wallis diri was forced to undergo female circumcision when she was five years old. Cut the wound without anesthesia and make a simple suture, leaving only a small gap to drain the urine and menstrual blood, in order to reduce her sexual pleasure and keep her chastity. She dragged her bleeding leg from her vagina to desperately escape from this hell-like place. It can be seen that circumcision brings irreparable harm to women. It usually causes health problems such as female genital infection and infertility, and the circumcised may even die of excessive blood loss during the operation.

For a pair of three-inch gold lotus, to know what hardships a woman's body experiences, it is necessary to know what the little feet are like. According to Gao Hongxing's history of foot-binding, after foot wear shoes, the length is about ten centimeters, toe is very sharp, and go upturned, sole looks a bit like the shape of melon seeds, but according to the ancient so-called three inch golden lotus, is about sixteen centimeters, according to us now, is four or five children normal the length of the foot, that girls should be from this age, and the smaller women wrapped the more beautiful. [7]

However, not all entangled feet can be called gold lotus, according to the different size of the foot and different levels, three inches or three inches within that is gold lotus, but not wrapped, more than three inches is called silver lotus, more than four inches called iron lotus. The damage brought by Foot-Binding was so terrible. Women are half disabled because their feet are small and difficult to walk. When they walk, they must support the wall and stick to hold the pole. If they can, they are supported by maids. Even if they can only walk in the atrium, they can only rely on others to hold their backs. If they are helpless, it is difficult to move from one room to the next. As for the way out, even if women hold a staff to help women's servant, women can't go far. From time to time, women will lean on the shoulder of women's servant, lean on the pillar, breathe, and touch the lotus hook to relieve pain and fatigue.

What's more, if the shoe is too small, they will cut off their part of the feet to match the size of the shoe, the pain that FGM cutting off a piece of flesh near women's reproductive organs. In order to make the small feet easy to wrap, there are often acts of deliberately eroding the muscles. Some people deliberately put gravel, rubble and porcelain scraps into the foot wrapping cloth, and some people broke the skin by cutting with a needle knife. If women want to wrap a pair of golden lotus, women have to break women's tendons and bones. It is also common for one or two little toes to fall off. Women are bound by their feet, restless, unable to walk steadily, and unable to sleep at night. They have gone through extreme suffering and suffered extreme torture. Because women with foot-binding do not move their legs normally, their gait becomes tilted, and the muscles of the lower legs will become weaker and weaker, leading to leg atrophy. Because the calves are weak, foot-bound women can hardly squat. Studies of older women with lotus feet showed decreased BMD levels, especially in the lower hip and spine, which lead to an increased risk of fractures.[8] For any girl with bound feet, the worst-case scenario is death. Therefore, in China, the pain of foot-binding to a little girl's body can be terrible, because it makes women fidget, hard to walk, especially in the early stages of pain, sleepless nights, crying. That is the reason why there was often a "small feet a pair of a cylinder of tears" saying.

3. Study about one of the spirit dilemma - society

Foot-binding not only destroys the physical development of young girls, it also brings great pain to the woman's mind, or it is also the spiritual yoke of women. In the earliest times, the adult males of the nomadic people often went out for a year or two to look for water because of grazing. However, when they returned home, they found that their wife was pregnant. Therefore, the angry husband asked his wife to remove the clitoris and labia to prohibit sexual pleasure. At the same time, she sewed up the vulva until the husband came home. After being handed down from generation to generation, circumcision has become their traditional custom. The traditional values of African society hold that no Maasai man will marry a woman who has not undergone circumcision, and women who were not circumcised should not marry; those women were considered dirty, indulgent, and unmarried. Locals thought circumcision was a good investment or their daughter would not be able to enter the marriage market smoothly. That is why Tashi conducted the FGM.

In China, when the prevailing aesthetic concept of the society requires women to be petite and delicate, thin waist and small feet, women have to wronged themselves to cater to the man's appetite, in order to win their favor. It is not that women willing to pursue beauty with a three-inch golden lotus, but in order to seek a source of life, they have to please men. Because of this, foot-binding is popular. In the Qing Dynasty, Li Empress Lord ordered the empress to make foot-binding small and flood women with foot-binding, which itself shows that foot-binding is a reaction of men's hobby and a kind of abnormal psychology of men's foot love for women. A man's abnormal psychology also leads to a woman's abnormal psychology, which is proud of their own foot-binding, feet the smaller the more in line with the norms. In some areas, there will even be small feet assembly that is the foot-binding people together. It can be seen from this, in a male-dominated society, men often use their own voice to change the cultural customs of some persecuted women, and force women to remain silent about these customs, so that women maintain animal ignorance and disobedience, and lose the ability to think and act.

Moreover, because the Chinese feudal ethics emphasized women's "three obedience and four virtues". Men can marry a wife and take concubines, while women must "marry chicken with chicken, marry dog with dog" and "die forever". Foot-binding is considered to ensure the universal realization of the highest moral "chastity and integrity" of women in feudal society. Because of this, women are forced to be ignorant, not out of the house, not involved in society, and always under the bondage of feudal ethics. Just as Andrea does. Dvorkin said: "Foot-binding is not emphasized, but it creates differences between men and women, and then they can last forever in the name of morality. Foot-binding is like the three dogs guarding the underworld who are the patron gods of morality, ensuring

the chastity of women in a country where women cannot 'run around'." [9] It seems that foot-binding should play an "important" role in maintaining the feudal order of men and women, and foot-binding is the "best" way to make women's spirit subject to Chinese ethics.

4. Study about one of the spirit dilemma - psychology

Social prejudice is the fundamental "hotbed" of this bad habit, and the subtle female psychology acts as the "accomplice". Conformity mentality is an important spiritual reason why more and more women suffer from FGM and foot-binding mutilation. Consistency means that individuals tend to align their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors with those of others around them. Conformity can take the form of public social pressure or subtle unconscious influence. [10] For example, in Possessing the secret of joy's book, even though Tashi was begged and dissuaded by her good friend Olivia, she witnessed many girls contracted AIDS for being circumcision without disinfection surgery, and even her sister Dura died after bleeding during the circumcision, she accepted FGM without hesitation. [11] This is because she thinks that many girls of her own clan have done FGM, and as a clan member, she should also do FGM. Tashi is personally influenced by the behavior of outside people, and shows his own perception, judgment and understanding of his behavior in line with public opinion or the judgment of most people. Her conformity reaction means that native African customs have become deeply rooted, and that many women, even if they want to resist, will do it because others do it. Thus, these customs often serve the patriarchal society, and have long been internalized into a value with "collective unconsciousness", and most women suffer without knowing it.

At the same time, as the foot-binding custom became a habit, the conformity mentality is another dilemma for women who are reluctant to accept these customs. The women's worship of foot-binding custom in the Qing Dynasty was very similar to the women's psychology of chasing fashion in modern society, which was a conformity mentality. Women, rich and poor, noble and humble, all demanded foot-binding. At the same time, the vast number of women competed to imitate it. In the feudal period of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it was shown that the upper and lower levels followed suit. First, the nobles and then the ordinary people became more and more crazy, competing to follow suit, and reached the situation of the same foot-binding in the whole China. After the foot-binding of women in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it directly led to the limitation of their space of action. Except for a very small number of intellectual women from noble families, most women could not participate in public affairs. Women had to depend on their families. The goal of life was to focus on family work and take serving their husbands and parents-in-law as their own responsibilities. These factors derived from the foot-binding custom have seriously affected the shaping of women's psychology. The inevitable choice of women's mentality is a closed and conservative mentality, so that they can survive well. On the other hand, this kind of mentality of women is actually required by a patriarchal society which forces the majority of women to be attached to the society without complaint. Under the influence of the foot-binding custom, women who have long lost the consciousness of women's rights are still appendages of a absolute patriarchy society. Their roles are single and gloomy, and they will eventually not be able to have social roles. With the continuous popularization and deepening of the foot-binding custom, women's psychology is becoming more and more closed.

5. Study about one of the spirit dilemma - economics

Last but not least, the key to determining women's social status is the "economic foundation". The more women participate in the economy and society, the more social respect they will gain, and the lower and vice versa. This argument is universal, not only in the countryside, but even in the cities. Similarly, it is of common use, both in Africa and in China. When work and life conflict, the socioeconomic requirements, and it can also be said, are that men require women to put down their work and take full care of their families. There is not any criticism of women's family model here, but the mindset that society requires women to finish their work and force them to balance their family

is a critical. From this point of view, African women face great pressure, want to get rid of this situation, can only rely on their own knowledge to change the future, but in fact, women can really have time to read or a few, most of the time to be used to take care of men in the family, and lack of time to learning can always be inefficient. In such a vicious circle, women in Burkina Faso can hardly find a way out.[12] As a result, they were soon reduced to male wealth enrichment tools, and women without social experience often failed to match the "wisdom" of men.

In Chinese feudal society, men were the main supporters of a family's economic life. It is men's responsibility to earn money and support their families from outside China. Therefore, the economic power of the family is in the hands of the male parents, and everything should be transferred by his will. Women generally do housework at home, do not need to go out to engage in other heavy labor. Women from rich families don't even have to do the housework. So foot-binding has found a market among women.

However, in Chinese history, Hakka women did not bind their feet, because they often had to engage in some heavy outdoor work. Most of the Hakka ancestors lived in areas with high mountains and deep forests. Their production was backward, the traffic was blocked, and the population density was low. If they want to live here, they must pay more hard than when they lived in the Central Plains. Therefore, adult men and women of a family should be put into production as labor force together. It is hard to imagine how a woman with her feet wrapped could go up the mountain to cut a reed dustpan. The woman of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom did not bind her feet because of the harsh natural environment, women in Guangxi have to participate in various kinds of production and labor since childhood. Apart from being engaged in textile and other basic work, they also go up the mountain to cut firewood and graze, go down to the fields to plough, and play a major role in market trade.

Because of the needs of the war, the vast number of women participated extensively in the military combat, production labor, and logistical material support work of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. According to historical records, their main military tasks include siege, combat, defense, city building, transportation and construction. The production labor and logistics work mainly include: digging ditches, splitting bamboo sticks, carrying bricks, soil, coal, and so on.[13] In the face of heavy military tasks and arduous production labor, the women of the two lakes and Jiangsu who are walking the "three inch Golden Lotus" are unable to bear the hardships, and obviously do not have the physical conditions and psychological endurance to be competent for these jobs. However, the "natural feet" and long-term labor of women in Guangxi have brought them strong bodies and excellent labor ability, which have enabled them to show great talents in military combat and production labor. Thus, women in other parts of China are naturally dependent and subordinate to men because they are determined to depend on men's economic status.

All in all, men, with their deep social resources, will bring their funds and women into their control to become the biggest beneficiaries. Men will make up some "emotional illusion" to defraud women into marriage and force them to FGM or Foot-Binding.

6. Conclusion

FGM and Foot-Binding has been a big pain for women for a long time. This essay analyzed the dilemmas that women faced both physically and spiritually in the absolute patriarchy society through a cross-cultural comparative study of FGM globally and Foot-Binding in China's Qing Dynasty.

The first part not only reveals how terrible the body harm is on women by enumerating Tashi, the protagonist of the secret and Wallis diri, the main character in Desert Flower, who suffered from the FGM from they were very young and some real description of the harm brought by FGM, but also tells how terrifying the foot-binding is by discussing the History of foot-binding written by Gao, H. and studies of older women with lotus feet. The second part is about the spiritual dilemma which is divided in to three aspects. They are society, psychology and economics. For society, by analyzing the Masai people's social concept and the reasons for Tashi's female genital mutilation, it is found that the traditional values of African society believe that women who have not been circumcised

should not marry, because these women are considered dirty. At the same time, through understanding the event that Empress Li of the Qing Dynasty ordered Empress Li to tie her feet small, it is found when the prevailing aesthetic concept required women to have small feet, many women had to go against their own requirements to win their favor, even if they were unwilling. For psychology, by comparing Tashi's event and Chinese women's circumstance, there is one thing in common. Every woman who accepts an FGM or a foot-binding has a herd mentality. For economics, by analyzing the low economic status of Burkina Faso women and the more foot-bound aristocratic women and rural women who are doing farm work and war without binding their feet, it is found that many women have to cling to them because of their naturally superior economic status, so they have to do such customs. Above all apply to the Talcott Parson's theory that every structure of society has their meaning, if not, it will disappear. Though FGM and Foot-Binding has not completely disappeared yet, they're on their way to disappear.

All in all, this essay provides people with scientific social knowledge about what FGM and Foot-Binding are, why they exists, and how women suffered in the absolute patriarchal society. Therefore, it helps readers have a deeper understanding of patriarchal women's status, and also helps people understand the cruelty of West and Eastern customs: FGM and Foot-binding.

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