

Footbinding

by Jingyi Dong, 2018

I

Footbinding, it is said, was first adopted by palace ladies. That is not too much beyond imagination, since the abnormal life style in palaces tended to bred whims. What is so difficult to understand is that it spread to working classes, to rural areas, where people had to do heavy manual work. Why did this happen?

One of the few researchers who has studied the topic of footbinding is Hongxing Gao (1995). Gao gives several reasons for this custom, including aesthetic taste, psychological metamorphosis, etiquette and convention, marriage, rulers' promotion, and intellectuals' promotion. Ultimately, the author pins down gender inequality as the underlying cause.

The above listed reasons can serve as a good starting point for Gao to address the phenomenon. However, first, it seems that these reasons may be merged into fewer categories, namely, subjective and objective reasons: subjective reasons (aesthetic taste, psychological metamorphosis), objective reasons (etiquette and convention, marriage), and, not least, objective reasons closely related to subjective reasons (rulers' promotion, intellectuals' promotion).

The underlying cause, gender inequality, clearly, is not a phenomenon of China alone, but existed in most part of the world. And various kinds of harmful practices existed in many places of the world. But gender inequality rarely manifested in such a horrible form as footbinding; often harmful practices remained more limited in scope. For example, the harmful practice of female genital mutilation was spread to the working classes, but it did not deprive women the ability to do manual work. What was then the force that drove the parents in working-class families when they disabled their daughters, or married their sons to disabled girls, who could hardly do heavy manual work?

Subjective reasons and objective reasons are often causes and effects of each other at the same time; therefore, it sounds logical to list etiquette and convention as one of the reasons that resulted in the psychological metamorphosis; yet, it also sounds logical to think the other way round and list the psychological metamorphosis as one of the reasons that resulted in such

etiquette and convention. This looks like an egg-and-hen game that could go in circle forever. Therefore it is notable that footbinding was not part of the etiquette and convention at the very beginning. Rather, the psychological metamorphosis went before the etiquette and convention. Whenever the subjective aspect reflects the objective context, the search should go beyond the psychological metamorphosis, and the etiquette and convention. I would therefore like to search in the very history of the Han people, the majority of the Chinese populations dwelling in the central area of China, and also the major practitioners of footbinding.

Let's review the evolution of footbinding at different periods of time in Chinese history. Since Chinese history was divided by different dynasties, Gao (1995) divides the evolution of footbinding accordingly by different dynasties: Stage 1: 10-12 Century; Stage 2: 12-13 Century; Stage 3: 13-14 Century; Stage 4: 14-17 Century; Stage 5: 17-20 Century. He identifies a clear trend: chronologically, the practice became more and more intensified, and geographically, it spread from the North to the South. I would like to point out another trend during the same periods of time: nomadic peoples who dwelled in the northern part of the country pushed southward. As winners in the battle fields, they treated Han people with increasingly more cruelty; as their cruelty met with resistance from Han people, their ruling strategies became progressively more sophisticated. Han people who dwelled in the North and who could not afford to migrate to the South were more directly exposed to their cruelty. Referring to the trend of footbinding, we may therefore identify the following trend: the more humiliation from the rulers, the smaller the foot; the more closely exposed to the rulers, the more voluntary the footbinding.

Let's examine the different stages respectively. Footbinding was widely advocated since Stage 2 (12-13 Century). This was also the time when the Han suffered the first climax of humiliation in history. Earlier, when the northern conquerors invaded the central area, their most important aim was to rob wealth and labor power, or to seize the crown. At Stage 2, when the North had been seized by the Manchu people, the conquerors' most striking tool of oppression was to impose humiliation on the Han people. As can be imagined, the Han people kept their feet small not only to meet their aesthetic taste: small feet were also the feature which distinguished them from the "barbaric" invaders!

In Stage 3 (13-14 Century), the Mongolian invaders conquered the whole country. Han people endured another round of humiliation, including a caste system which reduced Han people to the bottom of society. The Han people adopted very strict family rules as a way to conserve

Han culture, and the custom of footbinding became more widely appreciated. It must be noted that footbinding was sharply different from what was practiced at later stages: the foot was made long and narrow, rather than twisted into a short bow with a pointed tip.

The climax of humiliation under the two northern conquerors must have left ever-lasting trauma in Han people. This may explain the fact that footbinding was more widely appreciated in State 4 (14-17 Century), after the Manchu and Mongolian dynasties were gone. Appreciation of women's small foot is to be found in many literature works. Interestingly enough, however, in spite of that, there has been no archaeological discovery of footbinding. This means that the practice was far from being prevalent until Stage 5.

In Stage 5 (17-20 Century), Han people were once again conquered by an ally of the Manchu and Mongolian. This time, the conquerors drew a lesson from their ancestors in Stage 2 and 3. Instead of openly imposing humiliation upon the Han people, they "learned from" the Han people. Bands of aristocrat youths were sent out across the country to propagate family morals. Han people paid great attention to family morals, because that was the basis of the grass-root's autonomy. Han intellectuals preached family morals to the emperor, to set a limit to the monarch's power. Now, the representatives of the emperor became the preachers, the teachers, the guidance. The population was smoldering with hatred, as so many of them were being killed, but the propagators used a language that had such a close affinity to them that they could turn off the fire in their hearts. State bureaucracy was reopened to intellectuals, giving them opportunities to climb up the ladder. In the meantime, the emperor focused his oppression on the intellectuals, the minority of the population. For example, during the peak of the Manchu reign (around 1735–1799), there were more than 130 penalty cases targeting intellectuals. While intellectuals were still participants in state management, now they were servants more than teachers to the emperor; while family morals still dominated the substructure of society, they had been converted into a prison rather than a fortress for the population. Han people must have felt desperately lost in a state of misery, humiliation, and bewilderment, in lack of enlightenment and imagination.

The foundation of Han civilization was patriarchy. One of the most important classical Confucian works taught youths how to become dutiful children. It laid down that a child must value and carefully protect his or her physical body, including the hair, because this was a gift from the parents. Manchu conquerors forced Han people to adopt Manchu costumes in order to deprive Han people of their national identity, that is, males had to shave off their hair. To

Han people, this was a profound betrayal of their parents, constituting an intolerable humiliation. Therefore, this emperor order was met with strong resistance. At the same time, there was another order that prohibited female footbinding. In the end, males were subdued, lest they would lose their heads. But they looked for some way to conserve their traditions within their families, and unfortunately, they chose footbinding – for all women. They abandoned the Confucian doctrine that one’s physical body should be valued and carefully protected; they betrayed their parents who gifted their lives. The Manchu emperor repeatedly banned footbinding, while Han people adhered to this painful practice as a symbol of dignity. To be exact, widespread footbinding began with the Manchu emperor’s order to prohibit the practice. Thus, footbinding, as well as the traditional costumes of Han women, lasted for nearly three centuries.

There was a specific subgroup among the Manchu people who also adopted footbinding. They were decedents of Han who had become slaves of Manchu masters. Their slavery status to Manchu lords had lasted until the very end of the Manchu Dynasty, while being superior to Han people. Even when they became high ranking officials in the court, they still remained subdued to their former masters, even if their masters now were poor and had no official status. This group of Manchu people strove to differentiate themselves from their masters in a bitter manner, namely, footbinding, as a way to highlight the fact that they used to enjoy equality before they were enslaved. Even though footbinding was more strictly prohibited among Manchu people by the emperor, Gao’s (1995) research reveals that among a certain subgroup of Manchu people this practice lasted until the very end of the dynasty.

Under the impact from the Western world, however, people’s perspective began to change. Footbinding, while it used to be considered “civilized” and elegant, began to be seen to be “barbaric” and ugly. Almost overnight, intellectuals became the advocators for natural feet, as an effect of Western influence. Interestingly, Han women adopted the Manchu gown and abandoned their own traditional costumes – almost overnight, and that was not the effect of Western influence. In other words, at the very beginning, Han women were determined to wear traditional costumes and bind feet, despite of state bans. At the end, when the Manchu Dynasty was coming to an end, Han women adopted exactly the style of Manchu women: natural feet and Manchu gown.



Traditional Han costume, shirt and skirt



Paintings of Stage 4. Shirt and skirt, with the length of the shirt varying from time to time

Costume of Stage 5. Still shirt, skirt and wide sleeves, but the style is already influenced by Manchu costume



After the Manchu Dynasty came to an end: the wife of the last Manchu emperor and the wife of the first president of the republic state, both in Manchu gown



Fashion based on the Manchu gown

Of the several reasons that led to footbinding, Gao (1995) listed “rulers’ promotion.” At all five stages, although the emperors’ ethnic status varied from Han to Manchu and Mongolian, small-footed women were the favorites in the palace. This was the case even at State 5, when the emperor issued laws to ban footbinding and also banned marriage between Manchu and Han. In contrast to Gao, I prefer to define this trend as “bottom-up.” In the state structure, the Manchu emperor and Manchu aristocrats were indeed sitting on top of the pyramid, yet, in culture, they were despised as inferior. Palace life style rarely influenced the whole society; in fact, it was the other way round.

Gao (1995) also listed intellectuals’ promotion as one of the reasons for footbinding. There is no doubt that Han intellectuals played a critical role in promoting the practice to the grassroots. As stated above, footbinding was first initiated by palace ladies. These ladies certainly had more than just small feet. They received a very good education and were versed in various arts, such as poetry writing or dancing. The beauty of palace ladies might therefore have been attractive to intellectuals. But it is notable that a strong affinity existed between the emperor and the intellectuals at Stage 1, when the emperor treated intellectuals very well, politically and economically, much better than during previous and later times. Apparently, intellectuals willingly accepted the culture of the palace, including footbinding. And as intellectuals, they were able to provide justifications for what they promoted. Han intellectuals were not aristocrats nor clergymen and as such were the elites in rural

communities, solidly rooted in the substructure of society. Working-class people respected them because their discourse set limits to the power of the monarch. Apparently, the population willingly embraced them as representatives in the political area, accepting of ways of life if they were told that this would maintain their dignity. More than that, they pushed the practice to most horrible extremes. At Stage 5, footbinding meant even twist of the limbs. This was sharply more harmful than what it had been at the very beginning when small-footed palace ladies could still dance. It constitutes such a paradox that mutual respect between the emperor, the intellectuals and the working-class people functioned as a bridge to channel humiliation when the macro context was permeated with humiliation.

Chinese intellectuals began to advocate for natural foot when China was under the impact of the West. The series of military defeats following the Opium War made intellectuals reflect. The trend of enlightenment also owed a great deal to the Christian Church. They were different from foreign army men and opinion dealers who came to the land to impose humiliation upon the people; they treated the Chinese people as equals before God, regardless of race, and they carried out projects to educate and empower women. Meanwhile, the power of the state was gradually shifted from Manchu emperor to Han officials. Manchu aristocrats also gradually lost their privileged position in the field of economy. Especially the Regent, the father of the last Manchu emperor, was a wise man and greatly devoted himself to reconciliation. Instead of conflicts between the two ethnic groups, the Regent saw Han people, both male and female, wearing the Manchu gown as a national costume, except that males no longer shaved their hair, but had short hair like westerners.

To summarize, what this story tells is that resistance to humiliation is part of human nature, whereas it is not easy to devise a proper form of resistance. Sometimes people resist humiliation in a way that might bring about more humiliation. While humiliation may lead to voluntary humiliation, dignity is the best path to eliminate humiliation.

II

The intellectuals were the ones who finally brought the tradition of foot-binding to an end, paradoxically so, as they were precisely the same people who had introduced the practice to the populace in the first place. Initially, both reformist officials and the royal court called for an end to foot-binding. Yet, since these calls came from the top down, even though they were the beginning of the emancipation, they failed to profoundly influence the grassroots. Success

would come from the efforts of twentieth century intellectuals who were deeply rooted in the societal substructure.

The Christian Church gave much support to the emancipation movement. It is noteworthy that the humble and measured attitude of the Church won over the Chinese intellectuals, who remarked as follows: while foreigners worked for our emancipation cause, we Chinese had every reason to pursue self-improvement; as soon as we knew that foot-binding was a sin, we wanted to stop it immediately or we would have been ashamed before those who made such an effort on our behalf. While the Chinese intellectuals had stubbornly resisted when the Manchu conquerors prohibited foot-binding, their stone-hard hearts were softened when they encountered love and respect. Their different attitudes to foot-binding come into sharp contrast.

When the Manchu Dynasty was overthrown, the democratic government that followed made it their official project to terminate foot-binding. Time limits and target age groups were specified and officials were sent out to inspect the implementation of the policy. The rate at which foot-binding was being eliminated was used as an index to evaluate the performance of local officials. On the whole, upper-class families with better school education were more active in this movement, while those who were from poor families, illiterate or living in remote rural areas tended to be conservative. Some girls wore big shoes and pretended that they had removed their foot-binding footwear. The inspecting officials examined everything carefully and imposed penalties on anyone continuing with the foot-binding practice.

The institution that played the most important role was the school system. For instance, some schools for girls were open only to those who had removed foot-binding footwear. Advocates of natural feet made their way into textbooks for primary school students. Traditionally, however, a man did not wish to marry a girl with natural feet and old habits were hard to shake. Advocates for natural feet had trouble getting their message across until they finally discovered that the most toughest resistance to foot unbinding was marriage. In some areas where the practice of foot-binding was persistent, girls were afraid that natural feet were just a transient trend, a popular fashion that would pass. If, in the future, small feet became the fashionable style again, they worried that they would have trouble finding a husband. Some school girls had already removed their foot-binding footwear, but when they left school, they had to resume the old practice due to pressure from their social environment. A major breakthrough was made when the people working with the problem decided to heed that

marriage was the key to a solution. Primary schools asked their students to wear armbands that read “refuse to marry small-footed women”, or asked students to swear that they would never marry small-footed women. This method turned out to be very effective.

It is apparent that the emancipation movement was dominated by educated males. When the government stepped in, the movement became to resemble a top-down manipulation mechanism. In some cases, the officials took a very harsh approach, with rules in some areas indicating that small-footed women were not permitted to walk on public roads and foot-binding footwear that was confiscated from those who refused to follow the government rules was hung up in public and became the object of ridicule and shaming. Some officials stopped girls, forced them to remove their shoes and examined their bare feet before they would release them. Exposing their bare feet to males was a deeply humiliating experience for women, to the point that some even committed suicide. Such tragedies could have been avoided if female officials had been sent out to do this job.

While male fashions could change overnight, the bone structures of adult females could not be changed anymore. Small feet suddenly became a symbol of ignorance and backwardness; “small-footed beauties” were abandoned and even despised by their husbands, especially if their husbands had received a modern school education. It was not at all rare that people who received a modern education divorced their small-footed wives. The period after the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty and before the full-scale Japanese invasion (1911-1937) was a golden time for those who excelled in the academic field. They were no longer restricted by the rule of the emperor, they could speak their minds and still enjoyed respect from the masses. Fields such as modern education, public media, and industry developed rapidly, many more job opportunities were created for them, their income was very high in comparison to the large population of manual laborers, and they could easily divorce their small-footed wives and marry young modern ladies, or simply live in illegitimate relations with them. All this was considered a revolution.

An autobiographical memoir recalls such a divorce. A young husband went to Europe to study and came back an excellent scholar. He swore that he would never divorce his small-footed, plain-looking and illiterate wife because their marriage was based on true love. After he worked in China for a while, he found himself under great pressure. In the end, he decided to divorce his wife and marry a young lady who was considered – by his colleagues and friends – to be “suitable” for him. His wife, who had a strong sense of self-respect, accepted the

divorce calmly and with dignity. When signing the divorce document, however, she suddenly burst into tears.

Another story that deserves mentioning is that of very famous scholar Hu Shih (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hu_Shih). He was considered by some to be a “contradictory” person because he strongly advocated for natural feet on the one hand, while on the other, he married a small-footed woman. But Hu Shih was from a poor family. When he was still a child, he was engaged to the girl who, at that time, was considered suitable for him in every respect. Had the husband not risen to a higher social and economic status, the couple would not have been considered unsuitable.

Why was it that foot-binding had to be terminated? Because it was an inhuman practice. But was it not also an inhuman act to abandon one’s wife who had been disabled with small feet? Was it not inhuman to leave one’s children in a broken home? In most cases, abandoned small-footed wives continued to live in the old homes of their ex-husbands, especially if they had children. Traditionally, a woman became deeply rooted in her husband’s family after marriage. Even after divorce, she was still entitled to stay in the family and receive financial support if the husband could not give any legitimate reason for the divorce. What is more, they had no other resources that would give them mobility, as they were not only disabled physically, but also lacked sufficient education and financial means for an independent life. Traditionally, boys and girls were engaged from childhood and married at a very young age, around 18 years of age. Hu Shih was raised by his widowed mother. He loved his mother and consequently accepted the marriage that she had arranged for him. When he was away from his mother in pursuit of an education, his wife took care of her. His wife also gave birth to sons which continued his family bloodline. By the traditional standard, this was a perfect wife in every respect. By the new, “civilized” standard, however, his wife represented “feudalism” and should be divorced. In fact, Hu Shih did eventually fall in love with a woman who was “suitable” for him and decided to divorce his wife. His wife, having devoted the best part of her life to his family, threatened that she would kill their sons before killing herself. It was this threat that made him change his mind and saved their marriage. Hu Shih was exceptional, or as others said, “contradictory”. Many other intellectuals who received a modern education adopted a brief “non-contradictory” manner: the husband simply divorced the wife who had devoted the best part of her life to his family and left their children in a broken home. When the husband had found a chance to enter a new marriage with a “suitable” wife, the abandoned wife would remain in the family to take care of the parents-in-law and the children. In other

words, abandoned small-footed wives were already buried in a grave when they were divorced by their husbands.

When “feudalism” was abandoned, the victim of “feudalism” – small-footed woman – were also abandoned. But “feudalism” did not only leave China with small-footed women. Female dependency on males, for instance, was equally a part of traditional society. As China was transitioning into a modern society, advocates for women’s independence prevailed, even though, in practice, women remained dependent on men as they were victimized by the old traditions. Men began to rid themselves of women simply for having become boring and for chaining them down through their dependency, in the same way they rid themselves of small-footed woman. Why should not the latter be possible if the first was? Famous writer Lu Xun (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lu_Xun) told the story of a young man and woman who fell in love and chose to live together in an illegitimate relation. Later, when the couple was faced with social discrimination and financial problems, the man lost interest. He began to despise the woman for being dependent and becoming a burden. This betrayal, of course, was lethal for the woman in a conservative society. Yet, apparently, as much as it was justified to lump “feudalism” and its victims – small-footed women – together and eliminate both in the same ruthless manner, it was also justifiable to abandon a woman who failed to become sophisticated overnight and remained dependent. The latter is no less justifiable than abandoning small-footed women.

The first half of the twentieth century was a time of drastic conflicts and dramatic changes in China. Unfortunately, such changes were mostly dominated by males and intellectuals, while females and the illiterate masses in most cases were simply followers. When everything suddenly changed overnight, women had to change accordingly, lest they would become worthless. This is not only a typical black-and-white thinking, but also inhuman. To peasants who were mostly illiterate, intellectuals represented reason and enlightenment. When inhuman thinking prevailed among the intellectual community, it was to be expected that it would not be long before the rural community became poisoned. Ultimately, it would not be long before a poisoned society ushered in the Communist movement.

Traditionally, there were conflicts between land lessors and those who sold their labor to land lessors. The Communists wanted to wipe out the “landlord class” through a violent revolution with bloody slaughter. Yan Xishan (1883—1960), a provincial governor before Mao took over China, expressed his anti-Communist opinion. He distinguished between the notion of wiping

out the landlord class and the act of destroying their physical lives. He admitted that there were conflicts between those who owned more land and those who did not own or owned less land, but these conflicts could be solved through government mediation. With sufficient government policies, the landlord class would gradually pass into history; the landlords did not have to be wiped out physically. Interestingly, the Communists and the Modernists were to a considerable extent following the same logic. To the Communists, the main foundation of “feudalism” was the landlord class. When, to the Modernists, small-footed women could be lumped together with “feudalism” and be abandoned physically, why should the Communists spare “landlords”? When a woman, with better education, more financial means and youth could take the husband from another woman, why was it any less justifiable when a class, armed with more military force and modern discourse, took private property from another class?

The heads of the Communist movement were intellectuals while peasants were followers. Yet, as soon as the Communist discourse was accepted by the peasant masses, the Chinese intellectuals suffered an unprecedented humiliation. They were treated as inherently lower in value than manual laborers because they did not produce what they consumed; they lived off manual laborers for life’s necessities. This was exactly in accordance with the otherwise prevailing inhuman black-and-white thinking: when “landlords” were considered lower in value simply because they lived off their economic capital and did not do any manual work, why should not intellectuals also be considered as lower in value when they lived off academic capital and did not do manual work?

Traditionally intellectuals had higher political status than the peasants because they could participate in state management and speak up for the masses in the political arena. Consequently, they had higher social status and, more often than not, enjoyed better economic conditions. Mencius (372 – 289 BC) was a humble person – he accepted differences in profession but rejected differences in human value. But in reality, unless institutions are intentionally designed to guarantee all individuals’ equal value, it will not be long before people begin to judge an individual’s value according to his or her profession. Mao proclaimed that manual workers had the purest soul while intellectuals should go through a thought-reform process that involved doing manual work. Through Mao’s words, the impoverished and illiterate masses suddenly found they had a new form of capital: political status. How could they resist such a temptation when historically they had had lower economic status than the rich and lower political status than the educated? When the working

classes accepted their newly “elevated” status and consequently opened their homes to the top ruler, the intellectual community lost its last protection --- because traditionally the working classes and intellectuals had a symbiotic relationship. And when intellectuals were silenced in the political arena, there was no voice to be heard when the working classes were deprived to the extreme.

Let us examine the chain of roles involved in this story: the emperor, intellectuals, the masses, male, female, Mao. At both the beginning and the end of the chain we find the top rulers. The emperor failed to thoroughly impose his wills upon the masses at the level of substructure of society, while Mao did. What are the differences between the two top rulers? Going back to the beginning of the role chain, we have the emperors of the tenth to twelfth centuries who were famous for being generous to intellectuals and giving respect to the morals for the masses. This close relationship between the rulers and the ruled masses made it easier for the rulers to influence the ruled. Traditionally, intellectuals were not privileged aristocrats but were rooted in the substructure of society and had vested interests there. The close relationship between the educated elites and the masses made it easier for the intellectuals to introduce foot-binding from the palace to the populace. Traditionally, there was a very tight bond between family members, increasingly emphasized throughout a long history of resisting external invasion. The close relationship between the two genders made it easier for males to impose their wills on females. Then, looking at the end of the chain we have Mao, the head of the Communist movement in the twentieth century. This was an era when Chinese intellectuals were looking forward to modernity, and communism was part of modernity. It could be expected that communist discourse would attract many intellectuals, especially those located at the lower level of the academic hierarchy and, consequently, with lower economic status. When the Communist organization began to spread into the substructure of the intellectual community, it would not be long before communism found its way into the communities of the masses.

A quick glance at the above chain might lead one to conclude that a close relationship in general may function as a channel to impose humiliation. On further examination, however, we may find that while each of the parties were bonded through a close relationship, they were still not equals. It goes without saying that the emperor and intellectuals, and males and females, were not equals. Intellectuals and the masses were far from being equals. In ancient time, intellectuals were a small group, a privileged elite entitled to participate in state affairs, while the masses were excluded. A close relationship between groups was not necessarily the

channel to impose humiliation; it was inequality that was the culprit, and close relations facilitated the culprit.

Due to the long history of civil state administration, modern intellectuals tended to inherit a privileged status and continued to play the role of people's representatives. As modern education developed in China and the intellectual community rapidly grew from a small group into a considerable class, it could pursue its own interests directly, rather than indirectly through its influence among the greater population. On the other hand, under the impact of modernity, traditional values and social relations were becoming outdated and devalued. Consequently, the masses were being reduced to a status that was inferior to intellectuals to a greater degree than ever before. Unfortunately, the masses, mostly illiterate and confined to small rural communities, continued to accept intellectuals as their representatives. When their "own people" imposed a new value system upon them, which would, sooner or later, dismantle their only protective mechanisms, they were far from being sufficiently alert.

Although traditional society assigned higher status to some of its members and thus humiliated others, it did have mechanisms that protected all members without regard for difference and thus to some extent was permeated with humanistic feelings. When the traditional protective mechanisms were removed while inequality continued, humiliation would escalate. When the humanistic feelings which had co-existed with the traditional mechanisms were gone, humiliation would manifest itself in the bloodiest of forms.

All in all, inequality was the underlying cause of foot-binding. Still, it demanded a sophisticated strategy before the victims would "voluntarily" accept such a humiliation. This strategy included the close relations between the privileged and the disadvantaged, which facilitated the former to impose their wills upon the latter. In the long run, the close relations would be undermined; eventually, traditional protective mechanisms would be dismantled and the symbiotic humanistic feelings would be eliminated. Modern oppressors must have a profound insight into this process. Mao's supporters refer to him as the father of the people, and his political party as the mother of the people. Today, in some popular media, the top ruler of the state of China is still referred to as "Dada" and his wife as "Mama". Apparently, it is a very effective strategy when the oppressors establishes a close relationship, while retaining the mechanisms that discriminate between different social categories.

Reference:

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