

On not becoming Chinese

The racialisation of compliance

Jana Cattien

As philosophy departments in the West come under greater pressure to provincialise themselves, calls to give ‘non-Western’ philosophical traditions their due have grown louder – and rightly so. But for all that is surely right about ‘diversifying the curriculum’ as a project driven by the relentless work of anti-racist and decolonial activists, the institutional co-optation of ‘diversity’ rhetoric continues to locate agency squarely within the ‘West’: ‘we’ must diversify what we teach, because ‘we’ have progressively come to understand the value of a diversified curriculum. This story suppresses an alternative reading, in which Western institutions ‘diversify’, not because they are progressively becoming better versions of themselves, but because they simply can no longer afford to ignore the economic, cultural and political importance of ‘non-Western’ nations, China and India in particular. Institutionalised ‘diversity’ discourse is, in this sense, not ‘progress’, but the attempt to recuperate as progress what is actually just *realpolitik*.

This reading might go some way to explaining why ‘Orientalism’ appears simultaneously as an obsolete and antiquated framework, at least in describing the current relationship between China and the West, and as timely as ever. Indeed, the growing incidence of racist violence against people of East Asian and Southeast Asian descent living in the West might be understood as a violent lashing out in defence of the very entitlement to Orientalism that is perceived as being undermined by China’s new superpower status. Similarly, the repeated labelling of East Asians as carriers of the ‘Chinese virus’ can be read not only as a forceful renewal of ‘yellow peril’ tropes that associate East Asians with disease and bodily weakness, but also as a defence mechanism allowing Western governments to remain in denial about their own failures in

caring for public health during the pandemic.

Ritualistic references to the anti-democratic and authoritarian nature of ‘East Asian culture’ are, as Shan-Jan Sarah Liu observes, an effective way of discrediting the relative success that East Asian countries have had in controlling the initial outbreak of Covid-19:¹

Many people have ... said to me that Asia succeeds because Asians are just more collective and more obedient. The discourse is not about how Asians are unselfish; instead, it’s about how we obey rules. ‘Asian governments can make Asians do anything because they are not democratic’, so to speak.²

However successful China and other East Asian countries may have been in the initial waves of the pandemic, this success will always be tainted by the ‘evilness’ of the culture that produced it.

The Covid-19 pandemic has only further intensified the need to emphasise the evil as a means of disavowing East Asia’s relatively successful public health record. Alongside being hailed by the WHO as an ‘exemplar of public health’,³ China was accused of having fabricated the coronavirus as an act of biological warfare against the West. Even where the spectre of Chinese ‘evil’ was not explicitly conjured as a threat to pandemic Europe and the United States, libertarian critics of community-based, low-tech public health measures such as lockdowns and universal mask-wearing were able to rely on a well-established association between ‘Chineseness’ on the one hand, and authoritarianism and compliance on the other. Lockdowns and face masks were not only said to generate an outward appearance of ‘unfreedom’ within otherwise liberal societies, but were also seen to betray an unfree and uncritical orientation of compliance pre-

sumed to eat away at liberal freedom *from the inside*. Where the racialisation of this compliance was not made explicit, as for example by using images of East Asians wearing face masks in pandemic reporting, it could instead be implicit, as in this critique of lockdowns and face masks:

Sometimes, it can feel as though one's interlocutors live in another world, a place where different rules and standards apply, where different things seem obvious, and where certain facts are not up for debate at all ... When the gulf seems somehow too vast for critical debate to get off the ground, when you are struck by the uncanny feeling of encountering a perspective that is quite alien, maybe that's because they really are from another world.⁴

Here, the authors' opposition to lockdowns and face masks is given rhetorical weight by making the proponents of such measures appear through an already racialised imaginary of compliance as otherness. Those who agree with the measures are portrayed as inhabitants of a 'foreign' place in which authoritarianism rules, not democracy. Compliance is therefore not merely an undesirable trait ascribed to racialised Others, but a racialised threat that somehow lurks *within* the white liberal self as the possibility of its own demise. To comply might not mean to 'be Chinese', but it raises, even for white people, the terrifying possibility of becoming more and more *like* the Chinese.

'Yellow peril' and other diseases

We can find a precedent for this libertarian worry about compliance with Covid-19 measures in John Stuart Mill's classic liberal text *On Liberty*. Mill was worried that Europe was on the way to 'becoming another China' if Europeans did not cease to exhibit a desire for conformity and compliance otherwise found only in the 'East'. Like present-day libertarians, Mill diagnosed his own time with a worrying tendency towards compliance and sameness: 'There is one characteristic of the present direction of public opinion, peculiarly calculated to make it intolerant of any marked demonstration of individuality'.⁵ 'These tendencies of the times', Mill went on to say, 'cause the public to be more disposed than at most former periods to prescribe general rules of conduct, and endeavour to make everyone conform to the approved standard'. Although Mill was not writing in the context

of a global pandemic that is sometimes alleged to have originated in China, he was preoccupied with an 'Oriental virus' of a different sort: an epidemic of 'despotism' that had allegedly befallen 'the whole East'.⁶ Deploying what Mel Y. Chen has called a 'master toxicity narrative' about China,⁷ Mill evoked the racialised language of 'toxicity' to draw the contours of this 'Oriental despotism': 'Custom is there, in all things, the final appeal; justice and right mean conformity to custom; the argument of custom no one, unless some tyrant *intoxicated* with power, thinks of resisting'.⁸

The Orientalist image of a Chinese despot who is 'intoxicated with power' served to delineate Western conceptions of legitimate authority from the delirious tyranny that, in Mill's eyes, characterised the 'whole East'. According to David Porter, the rendering of Chineseness as a crazed culture of delirium is the product of a mid-eighteenth-century paradigm shift in European representations of China; a shift whereby China was no longer depicted as the 'home of ancient and universal truths', but instead as a 'site of capriciousness, folly and illusion'. The image of Mill's intoxicated tyrant is already foreshadowed in earlier European representations of Chinese emperors, such as the well-known 'Audience of the Emperor' tapestry from the 'Story of the Emperor of China' series.⁹



Manufactured in France in the early eighteenth century, this tapestry depicts the sumptuous menagerie of the Chinese Emperor, giving the impression not of a legitimate state authority, but of a crazed gathering of all manners of people and animals – including peacocks, dragons, exotic birds and an elephant. Although the 'Emperor seated amidst all this clutter still strikes an impressive pose', the 'overwhelming decadence of the decor ultimately distracts from his own glory'.¹⁰ Just as

the various animals and people depicted in the tapestry seem rather unfazed by the Emperor's presence, so too the viewer's gaze is invited to roam around the menagerie. Despite being at the centre, the Emperor can hold neither our gaze, nor the attention of those around him: he is reduced to 'the status of just another curio in the pastiche of exotic splendour that the scene presents'.¹¹

Against the background of the tapestry, Mill's image of the 'intoxicated despot' evokes not just an authority that is, metaphorically speaking, 'poisoned' by tyranny, but an authority that is, literally, 'intoxicated' in the sense of delirious. Unlike the notion of 'toxicity' that Chen examines as a label repeatedly ascribed to China in general and Chinese consumer goods in particular – toxicity in the sense of 'contamination' – Mill's idea of 'intoxication' conjures a state of delirium invoked by various kinds of excess, both excessive behaviours and excessive states of minds. This association of Chineseness with delirium and excess is well-established: white residents and policy makers alike have long imaged Chinese communities in the West as hotbeds for the contraction and transmission of 'syphilis and leprosy, which was imagined to happen in direct contact with the Chinese, whether this contact was sexual or sensual in nature'.¹² A major cause for concern was the transmission of disease through the 'passing of opium pipes, from "lip to lip"', which was seen as a common pastime for residents of Chinatowns across the West.

The fact that East Asian people with face masks have been seen as *carriers* of Covid-19, rather than as making reasonable efforts to prevent its spread,¹³ reflects the persistence of Orientalist associations of Chineseness with compliance and conformity, on the one hand, and disease and bodily weakness, on the other. Indeed, for Mill, the individual can be healthy only if their individuality is allowed to thrive; the Chinese 'tyranny' of uniformity and custom leads 'already energetic characters' to become 'merely traditional',¹⁴ which he equates to weakness: 'Instead of great energies guided by *vigorous* reason, and *strong* feelings *strongly* controlled by a conscientious will, its result is *weak* feelings and *weak* energies, which therefore can be kept in outward conformity to rule without any *strength* either of will or of reason'.¹⁵

Read in this vein, the term 'yellow peril' emerges as a tautology: as a racialised marker of East Asianness,

yellowness is associated with disease even before adding the word 'peril'. For eighteenth-century natural scientist Carl Linnaeus, the colour yellow was already 'more of a sickly yellow than a golden one. In both botany and medicine, his real areas of expertise, it was the colour of disease ...'.¹⁶ As Michael Keevak shows, this semiotic shift in the colour yellow was directly linked to a 'new eighteenth-century Sinophobia that saw the Chinese no longer as white, civilised, morally superior, and capable of Christian conversion, but instead as pale yellow, despotic, stagnant and forever mired in pagan superstition'.¹⁷ If, initially, the association of Chineseness with the colour yellow might have served to emphasise China's cultural proximity to Europe – when China was still, in Mill's words, 'a nation of much talent and, in some respects, even wisdom'¹⁸ – over time 'yellowness' 'was re-deployed as a term of complexional distance'.¹⁹ Thus, the emphasis on proximity based on racialised phenotype ('not all Chinese are dark') gave way to a new narrative of racial otherness ('no Chinese is white').

On (not) becoming Chinese

It is somewhat ironic, then, that the very nation that has long been associated with disease and delirium should have garnered so much international praise for the public health measures that it has taken to contain the initial waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. China's 2020 morphing into an 'exemplar' of public health, at least in the eyes of the WHO, presents us with a scenario in which the question of Europe 'becoming another China' has become newly pressing – albeit this time against the backdrop of systematic shifts in the global balance of power from West to East.

For Mill, China was the centrepiece in a dialectics of mirroring in which Europe is propelled forward by encountering a negative mirror image of itself in the Chinese example. The imminent proximity of China's racial and cultural otherness served to underline the urgency of re-asserting our difference from them. As Hagar Kotef puts it, 'the claim that "we" (or some of "us") are (or may become) "like China" is provoked to demonstrate the urgency of change: "we" must remain different, must re-establish our difference, re-draw the proper boundaries, since what "they" do is horrible'.²⁰ According to Mill, the full extent of the horror that would await Europe if it

ignored his warning could be gleaned in the Chinese custom of foot-binding. His worry that Europe might be on the path towards ‘becoming another China’ was framed as a concern over the increasing resemblance between the character of Europeans and ‘a Chinese lady’s foot’: ‘Its ideal of character is to be without any marked character; to maim, by compression, *like a Chinese lady’s foot*, every part of human nature which stands out prominently’.²¹

According to Kotef, Mill deploys the image of the bound Chinese foot almost literally – to emphasise the East’s *stagnation* as the negative mirror image of Europe’s ability to move humanity forward: the bound Chinese feet ‘came to signify ... the disfigurement that results from compression, from caging that which should be free to move or to serve as a vehicle of movement’.²² However, like the contemporary discourse around compliance, the image of the bound Chinese foot not only provides a tangible contrast to European freedom (of movement), but also marks the potential for unfreedom that lies within Europe itself. Rather than situating this unfreedom solely in the ‘East’, the circulation of the image of the bound Chinese foot in Western political thought allows the spectre of immobility and stagnation to permeate Europe itself. The image takes on a life of its own, reminding Europe of the uncanny possibility that it may become a stranger to itself. As Kotef points out, this means that the very contrast between ‘Eastern’ stagnation and ‘Western’ mobility already contains within itself the seeds for a reversal in the balance of power between Europe and the East. To the extent that China, a nation which has stagnated in Mill’s eyes, becomes the very motor that drives Europe to keep up with its own movement, the agency of locomotion is displaced from West to East: China is what is ‘pushing Europe forward and away in its never-ending attempt to secure its difference’.²³

China’s high rates of economic growth, advanced technological governance and community-oriented public health strategies have not only made this shift in agency more pronounced; they have also transformed its underlying dynamic. To the extent that China has already ‘caught up’ with Europe, at least in terms of its share of the global economy and technological governance, the prospect of Europe’s ‘becoming another China’ no longer makes sense as a warning about the future in the way that Mill deployed it. Rather than as an ominous prediction

about Europe’s future, the contemporary articulation of this narrative – that pandemic Europe risks becoming more and more compliant and uncritical (like China) – reads more nostalgically. It is nostalgia for an idealised past in which ‘our’ horror at the ‘alienness’ of compliance was still untroubled by the uncomfortable fact of ‘our’ waning superiority.

Discrediting China’s community-oriented approach to public health by labelling it as authoritarian and inhumane is one way of keeping the horror alive. More generally, the ongoing association of Chineseness with compliance, conformity and disease is a way to preserve the predictive force of Mill’s eighteenth-century warning, despite the inescapable reality of its growing obsolescence. Pointing at the ‘Chinese virus’ and at ‘Chinese authoritarianism’ allows Europe to hold onto the future that Mill once sketched – a future in which Europe progressively becomes a better version of itself, leaving behind both China and the version of itself that threatened to ‘become like China’. In this sense, contemporary anti-Chinese racism serves to *defend*, rather than simply continue, the liberal exceptionalist story that Mill’s eighteenth-century warning articulates: that the only way to be a flourishing, prosperous and powerful nation is to be like ‘us’.

What’s in a face?

But the point is not just to say that history has proven Mill wrong. In another sense, perhaps he was right: that no matter how much China and Europe resort to similar kinds of biopolitical and technological governance, ‘Europe can never fully become like China’.²⁴ Europeans may move in dangerous proximity to the compliant Chinese, but they will never be compliant in the same way: ‘A people, it appears, may be progressive for a certain length of time [the Chinese], and then stop: when does it stop? When it ceases to possess individuality. *If a similar change should befall the nations of Europe, it will not be in exactly the same shape ...*’.²⁵ The rhetoric that Mill deployed here is already a kind of insurance policy for the shift in the balance of power that we have seen in recent years. Even if Europe might have adopted compliance-oriented and authoritarian public health measures first adopted by China, there will always be an essential difference that prevents it from becoming as

compliant and authoritarian as the Chinese.

Another way, then, to make sense of the proliferation of 'evil' China rhetoric in recent years is as a way of cashing in, as it were, on the insurance policy that Mill offered his readers in *On Liberty*. Ritualistic references to China's authoritarian, anti-democratic and communist evilness reinscribe the idea that the essential difference between China and the West must lie on the 'inside', at some immutable inner core – outward similarities notwithstanding. In Mill, what prevents Europe from moulding into the 'exact same shape' as China is presumably some inner essence that remains unchangeable even as Europe is befallen by a 'similar' change as China. He shows us that it is precisely in those moments where the distance between self and other threatens to disappear that it becomes necessary for the self to turn *inwards* in order to re-establish that distance.

A telling example of this defensive turn to an inner difference is Donald Trump's attitude to the face mask during the Covid-19 pandemic. Having long resisted wearing a face mask in public, even when everyone else was telling him to do so, he finally decided to wear one. But this concession was only possible to the extent that it allowed him to perform a kind of retreat into his quintessential American self: 'I had a mask on. I sort of liked the way I looked. OK. I thought it was OK. It was a dark black mask, and I thought it looked OK. It looked like the Lone Ranger'.²⁶ Unlike the image of East Asians wearing face masks in public, which were liberally used across Western media news outlets to accompany their pandemic reporting,²⁷ Trump's face mask symbolises not authoritarianism and a general demise of individual freedoms, but precisely his unwavering allegiance to radical individualism, frontiership and 'American culture'. The difference in this case comes not from the action itself, but from some essential quality presumed to reside *inside* the subject.

Following Vanita Seth's genealogy of the liberal face,²⁸ it is no coincidence that Trump should look to his face, of all places, for traces of the inner American hero. Long before the pandemic, Islamophobic panics over hijab, niqab and burqa already understood how to mobilise the supposed universal importance of the (visible and exposed) human face for anti-Muslim racism. In 2010, Philip Hollobone, the Conservative MP for Kettering in England went as far as to refuse meeting with

constituents who do not want to remove their veil: 'God gave us faces to be expressible. It is not just the words we utter but whether we are smiling, sad, angry, or frustrated. You don't get any of that if your face is covered'.²⁹



More recently, but along similar lines, Tucker Carlson informed *Fox News* readers of his disdain for face masks:

What kind of person covers his face in public? Armed robbers do that sort of thing. So do Klansmen and radical Wahhabis. The rest of us don't do that. In fact, until recently, wearing a mask in public was illegal in many places. The assumption was if you're hiding who you are, you're up to something bad. It made people nervous. By our nature, we want to see each other. We need to see each other. Looking at another person's face is the beginning of connection. Eliminating that connection dehumanises us. That used to be obvious.³⁰

In both quotes, the human face is hailed as a privileged site for the expression of an individuality that resides at the inner core of the white liberal subject. Yet, as Seth points out, the face has also become the focus for surveillance and disciplining regimes that seek to classify human faces into different 'types': racial types, criminal types and 'terrorist' types. Aided by the increasing use of facial recognition software, which China is widely cri-

ticised for using, the face of typology produces precisely the kind of constrained and schematic subjectivity that the face of individuality eschews.³¹ In other words, the face of the criminal ‘type’ promises transparency and predictability where the face of individuality celebrates the expression of an ‘ineffable, intangible, interiorised subject’³² whose inner truth can only ever be gleaned through, but never reduced to, the face.

Echoing Mill’s concern over the imminent loss of European individuality through encroaching ideals of sameness and uniformity, contemporary liberal scholars and activists demand that the increasing presence of facial recognition technologies and physiognomic theories of character ‘types’ ‘must be countered through an assertion of individuality – the socially unencumbered, unique singularity, and complex interiority that is presumed foundational to our “human-ness”’.³³ Despite welcoming the political ethos of these liberal critiques, Seth nevertheless remains critical of the fact that liberal individualism is offered as the only legitimate alternative to typology:

Such well-intentioned interventions – by journalists, activists and scholars – seeks to confront and challenge the disabling effects of typologies that disempower and stigmatise already marginalised populations. They do so by offering in opposition to typology (identified as immutable, collective, and dehumanising) a defense of individual subjectivity that is singular, agential, fluid, and possessed of a complex and unique interiority that is co-extensive with a universal humanity.³⁴

Here too, the idea that there exists at the inner core of the liberal subject some unique essence works as a kind of defence mechanism against the increasing use of facial recognition technologies which posit the existence of ‘facial types’. The liberal activists that Seth criticises are drawing on the same escape route that Mill offered to his European readers: even when the West is deploying the same facial recognition technologies that it is labelling China as authoritarian for using, the white liberal subject can always retreat into itself, reassuring itself that it will always remain different at heart no matter the kind of change that might befall it.

Although Mill does not explicitly mention the face as a symbol of individuality, already in *On Liberty* we see the association of Chineseness with homogeneity – the racist idea that the Chinese have succeeded in ‘making

all people alike’.³⁵ Unlike the faces of white Europeans, their faces do not suggest the presence of an intangible interiorised individuality, but instead, a homogenising sameness that lives on the surface of their body. For Mill, one outcome of this suffocating sameness, the product of a society in which everyone already ‘resemble[s] one another’,³⁶ is the Chinese custom of footbinding.³⁷ Footbinding represents for him, not only a ‘barbaric’ cultural practice, but more generally, an undesirable economy of the body in which nothing ‘stands out prominently’³⁸ – *not even the face*. Thus, the ‘bound Chinese foot’ emerges as the product of a bodily schema in which compliance and conformity are imprinted on to the body in such a way that individuality cannot flourish inside – and thus also cannot manifest ‘outside’ – the subject. By contrast, the racially unmarked face can house individuality both on its body and, most crucially, inside itself.

Indeed, as Seth puts it, the liberal face of individuality is unique because it is able to transcend its own embodiedness, suggesting, without ever fully exposing, the presence of an ‘ineffable, intangible, interiorised subject’ – a subject without a body. In other words, the subject’s individuality finds its most intimate expression in the face, but it is not reducible to this expression: ‘This inner depth that fashions and grounds the individuality we call our own is precisely what the face is presumed to jealously guard, reluctantly betray or openly reveal ... The face secures the fact of our individuality by bearing witness to its expression’.³⁹ The face both is and is not the body; and that is precisely why it can guard an individuality that is outwardly expressed but ultimately resides at the ineffable inner core of the subject, where it remains protected from whatever threats lie either outside or within.

And so, if a similar change should befall the nations of Europe – increasing authoritarianism through the illiberal use of technological governance, widespread compliance with these increasingly authoritarian governments and a concomitant erosion of liberal individualist rights – still, it will never be exactly in the same shape as China.

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Notes

1. Since first writing this piece, the pandemic situation has changed significantly. Now, in March 2022, the Omicron variant is causing high numbers of infections across China, but the regime is still pursuing its zero-Covid strategy. This worked well at the beginning of the pandemic, but as the virus mutates to become more infectious and less dangerous, zero-Covid becomes harder to justify. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on the geopolitical implications of the early days of the pandemic, when China was – even if only for a brief period – widely praised for its public health strategy, and Western nations looked to imitate Chinese public health measures.
2. Nina Fang and Shan-Jan Sarah Liu, 'Critical Conversations: Being Yellow Women in the Time of Covid-19', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 23:3 (2021), 4.
3. James Meek, 'The Health Transformation Army', *London Review of Books* 42:13 (July 2020).
4. Ian James Kidd and Matthew Ratcliffe, 'Welcome to Covidworld', *The Critic* (November 2020), <https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/november-2020/welcome-to-covidworld>.
5. John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty', in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 912, 876.
6. *Ibid.*, 876, 911.
7. Mel Y. Chen, 'Racialized Toxins and Sovereign Fantasies', *Discourse* 29:2&3 (2007), 369.
8. Mill, 'On Liberty', 911.
9. David Porter, 'Chinoiserie and the Aesthetics of Illegitimacy', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 28 (1999), 33, 36.
10. *Ibid.*, 35.
11. *Ibid.*, 35.
12. *Ibid.*, 371.
13. See for instance the social media campaign 'I Am Not A Virus', which documents and resists the increased incidence of anti-Asian violence in the context of the pandemic. See also Fang and Liu (2021), 5: 'I was worried about wearing masks when I was out because it still wasn't a norm at that time. As an East Asian, I really didn't feel safe wearing a mask when I was out because there had already been incidents where East Asians had been beaten up for carrying the "Chinese virus" or the "Kung flu"'.
14. Mill, 'On Liberty', 910.
15. *Ibid.* (my emphases).
16. Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 36.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Mill, 'On Liberty', 911.
19. Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, 34.
20. Hagar Kotef, 'Little Chinese Feet Encased in Iron Shoes: Freedom, Movement, Gender, and Empire in Western Political Thought', *Political Theory* 43:3 (2015), 350.
21. Mill, 'On Liberty', 910.
22. Kotef, 'Little Chinese Feet', 349.
23. *Ibid.*, 350.
24. Mill, 'On Liberty', 912.
25. Mill, 'On Liberty', 911 (my emphasis).
26. Amer Madhani and Darlene Superville, 'Trump says he looks like Lone Ranger in a Mask and likes it', *The Washington Post* (July 2020). An enduring presence in mainstream American culture, the Lone Ranger is a fictional Texas Ranger, who fought outlaws in the American Old West to restore law and order.
27. For a good overview of instances of anti-Asian racism in Covid-19 news reporting, see this useful compilation by the Asian-German network *korientation*: <https://www.korientation.de/medienkritik/corona-rassismus-medien>.
28. Vanita Seth, 'Faces of the Self', *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 5:2 (2020).
29. Hollobone cited in Seth, 'Faces', 250.
30. Tucker Carlson, 'The cult of mask-wearing grows, with no evidence that they work', *Fox News* (October 2020).
31. This is a complex issue in its own right, which I cannot attend to here in the detail that it deserves. See Ruha Benjamin's *Race after Technology* (London: Polity Press, 2019) for an in-depth exploration of how these facial recognition technologies reproduce racist power relations. As she highlights, the face of the non-white other is a crucial site for the production of criminality: white faces are innocent; Black and brown faces signal violent and criminal intentions.
32. Seth, 'Faces of the Self', 257.
33. *Ibid.*, 268-269.
34. *Ibid.*, 270.
35. Mill, 'On Liberty', 912.
36. *Ibid.*
37. See Dorothy Ko's revisionist history of footbinding for reflections on the question of what it might mean to treat the feet as important sites for the generation of social and political meaning. For instance, Ko cites a woman in Shandong province who told her interviewer that 'Match-makers were not asked "Is she beautiful?" but "How small are her feet?" A plain face is given by heaven but poorly bound feet are a sign of laziness'. Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3.
38. Mill, 'On Liberty', 912.
39. Seth, 'Faces of the Self', 257.