

Constituent Assembly and unrest in the Paris trades, especially carpentry, in May-June 1791. He maintains that the law hurt employers and workers alike and that even subsequent labor legislation, notably the *livret* system, did not irretrievably tilt the legal system in favor of the capitalists. Thus, no "bourgeois revolution".

Sonenscher addresses still other topics — notably the development of political theory and its impact on the trades — that cannot be dealt with adequately in a short review. Suffice it to say that the book gives historians plenty to think about. For specialists in labor history, it provides a feast of new information and intriguing theses on how the artisanal economy of the eighteenth century actually worked. For non-specialists, a patient reading will yield challenging ideas on the nature of the French Revolution, the origins of socialism, and the transition (or lack of transition) from the "pre-modern" world of workshops and guilds to the industrial economy of modern times.

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Janice E. Stockard — *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860-1930*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989. Pp. ix, 221.

"Marriage resistance" in early twentieth-century China has fascinated feminist social scientists ever since Margorie Topley's pioneering article of 1975 called attention to communities of spinsters living in certain areas of the Canton delta, or as migrants to Hong Kong and Singapore. These women had either refused to marry or had failed to take up residence with their husbands, sometimes purchasing concubines as substitutes. Topley noted the distinctive ecological and social features of the regions producing "marriage resisters". In these sections of the delta fish farming combined with sericulture, adolescent girls' and boys' houses were an accepted part of the village culture, local Buddhist sects preached to a female audience, and there was little female infanticide and much male outmigration. Above all, silk filatures provided opportunities for women workers.

Topley's model of "marriage resistance" assumed that these practices emerged in opposition to a dominant Confucian norm of early and universal patrilocal marriage for women. While not rejecting the notion of an anti-marriage bias in the thinking of "marriage resisters", Janice Stockard's pathbreaking book explores their way of life as developing out of variant *customary* forms of marriage in the Canton delta having deep historical roots. Where Topley related the possibility of resisting Confucian marriage to the emergence of modern forms of economic opportunity for women in mechanized silk filatures, Stockard deepens our understanding of the historically-complex ecological and cultural context surrounding what she has named "delayed transfer marriage". This term is closer to the Chinese "pu lo chia" in Mandarin pronunciation, for "[women who] do not leave their natal home [on marriage]". Normally, in these parts of the Canton delta, a bride did not take up residence in her husband's household for around three years. This was supported socially by girls' houses which served as gathering places or even residences for both unmarried

adolescent girls and “bride daughters”. It was supported economically by sericulture, which even before mechanized silk reeling depended upon the labor of young women, married and unmarried, who had not yet become mothers.

In uncovering this culture complex, which she associates with unacknowledged South Chinese minority influences on Han society, Stockard has expanded our understanding of diversity in the Chinese family system well beyond Author Wolf’s theme of “variations” serving patriarchal and patrilineal family strategies. Her work suggests that strong affinal kinship structures and female-centred practices associated with them may constitute a large hitherto invisible aspect of family organization in many places (*see also* Ellen Judd, 1989, and Helen Siu, 1990). What emerges as remarkable is the power of the dominant Confucian family ideology to render such distinctive customary practices invisible to the outside world. Stockard notes that imperial magistrates and twentieth-century reformers, Nationalist and Communist alike, were either unaware of “delayed transfer marriage”, or when they encountered it, bracketed it as deviant. As an anthropological field worker in Hong Kong in the late 1970s, Stockard herself only gradually became clear about the systematic kinship patterns behind informants’ casual gossip about their girlhood lives.

Ironically, in light of this subtle contextualization, “marriage resistance” itself emerges as another externalist paradigm, imposed by Western feminists searching for a female culture of opposition to Confucian patriarchy. Stockard would claim that “marriage resistance” was indeed real, as an early twentieth-century development fostered by the economic changes Topley had noted. Beginning in the 1890s, lifelong spinsterhood was for the first time practised by “bride daughters” who used wage earnings to purchase concubines for their husbands, and girls’ houses in some places were supplemented by spinsters’ “vegetarian halls” where women lived together as sworn sisters. Nonetheless, the greatest contribution her works make to feminist analysis of Chinese society is to expose the complex cultural repertory of meanings assignable to “delayed transfer marriage” in the process revealing how women understood marriage and negotiated alternatives within tradition.

As a traditional system, “delayed transfer marriage” was the most prestigious form of union in the localities where it was known. Lower class secondary wives and concubines did not practice it. Anti-marriage sentiment could be cultivated as an aspect of a transitional adolescent culture fostered in girls’ houses, allowing elite girls social space to express their sense of ambivalence over this critical life passage from daughter to wife. Since pregnancy usually ended the period of delay, a girl who won her peers’ praise because she resisted consummation on the occasion of conjugal visits, or who was able to prolong the time in her natal home past three years, would be supporting her own and her family’s honor. Similarly, women who became spinsters not only used the idiom of sisterhood, but also identified themselves as Buddhists practising religious vows of chastity, or sometimes even served as symbolic “sons” to their natal families, whom they supported in old age. In sum, delayed transfer marriage may be seen as a culture complex understood in different ways over time by both women and men. It could play a role in competition for prestige between families, allow daughters to express filiality to natal families, or give rise to a socially condoned if not applauded alternative of sororal spinsterhood.

Finally, Stockard’s analysis has implications which she hints at, but does not fully articulate here: “delayed transfer marriage” and its radical extensions throw light on Chinese women’s construction of their identity as a gender. Most sworn sisters

were not unmarried “spinsters” in the Western sense, but women who had refused to cohabit with their husbands. The social and ritual identity gained through affiliation with a husband and his kingroup remained important to them, a fact underscored by the practice of bride-initiated “spirit marriage” among those who lacked a ritual and social place as non-resident wives. Like the Buddhist vows of celibacy taken by some, social marriage conferred a spiritual identity as a wife attached to an ancestral lineage, and also marked one vis-à-vis the male community at large as sexually unavailable.

“Resistance”, therefore, was sexual. Women told many stories about their ingenuity in avoiding conjugal relations during the delayed transfer period. In these stories, the sexual relationship is seen as a combat, consummation as a surrender. Moreover, surrender leads not to initiation into a domain of pleasure but to pregnancy and motherhood. The practice of compensation shows that women accepted that the production of children was an essential wifely task, but it appears here as an onerous and potentially dangerous duty rather than a fulfilment of womanhood. Precisely because the delayed transfer marriage system was not identified by Cantonese villagers themselves as a deviant oppositionist practice, these female constructions of sexual and social identity cast light on possible meanings of gender for Cantonese women at large.

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