

HISTORY

The Sex Deficit

THE SOURCE: "Sex, Breastfeeding, and Marital Fertility in Pretransition China" by William Lavery, in *Population and Development Review*, June 2007.

LONG BEFORE THE ADVENT OF compulsory birth control and sterilization measures, the typical Chinese married woman bore 35 percent fewer children than did her European counterpart. For more than 30 years, scholars have argued over why. William Lavery, a professor of international studies and sociology at the University of Washington, minimizes the usual scholarly speculation about faulty data, widespread malnutrition, or the practice of voluntary "sexual restraint." Traditional Chinese cultural and child-rearing practices explain the differences, he says.

Before modern birth control measures were developed, Chinese wives gave birth to between five and six children during their lifetime; their European counterparts, between eight and nine. Many scholars believe that, historically, Chinese couples simply had sex less often than couples in the West—a pattern that continues to the present day. The "average coital frequency of married women of reproductive age is between four and five times per month for China as compared to around seven or more times per month for European societies," Lavery writes, citing government surveys. Moreover, before the 20th century, a married couple would have their first child later in the East than in the West. The custom of arranged marriage in China bound together couples who were strangers on their wedding night and installed

the bride in the unfamiliar home of her mother-in-law. Traditional arranged marriages began with an "awkward, uncomfortable period and low levels of intercourse," according to sociologists Ronald R. Rindfuss and S. Philip Morgan.

Cultural practice and belief also served to lessen the number of children born during pre-modern times to Chinese women, nearly all of whom married, many at age 17 or 18. (By contrast, up to 25 percent of European women never married at all, and many of those who did waited until their early to mid-twenties, Lavery says.) Chinese Taoist cultural leaders historically considered sex potentially debilitating, particularly for men. The idea that "giving rein to passion will lead to illness and can impair longevity" is a centuries-old belief that is repeated in a Shanghai sex education manual in circulation today.

Despite their early start, and their near-universal participation in marriage, Chinese women's fertility rate was much lower than that of European women in part because of their child-rearing practices. Chinese mothers typically nursed their babies on demand for about two years, and such frequent breastfeeding tends to extend the periods of amenorrhea following childbirth. Solid food usually wasn't introduced for a year, while European babies might be fed gruel as soon as two months after they were born, a practice that led to earlier weaning and more frequent pregnancies.

Lavery says that the historic Chinese fertility rate was "probably fairly typical" of premodern agrarian societies, and that Europeans are likely the libido outliers.

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A Royalist Revolution

THE SOURCE: "A World of Kings" by Brendan McConville, in *Historically Speaking*, May–June 2007.

"MOST HISTORIANS STILL treat the years between 1688 and 1776 as somehow a long prologue to the revolutionary crisis," writes Brendan McConville, a historian at Boston University. In their examination of pre-Revolutionary War society, they look for and find the roots of capitalism and the democratic society that was to come—"in short, future Americans." They all but ignore evidence, from printed pamphlets to the knickknacks decorating colonial homes, showing that "an ever-growing number of provincials identified themselves as Britons" after 1688 and "proclaimed their love of Britain's Protestant monarchs and loathing for the kings' enemies, particularly papists of all stripes."

This royalist bent, McConville says, "has been gradually wiped from our national memory," partly because a land filled with "proto-republicans" makes the eventual revolution easier to explain. But in his view, it was the colonists' allegiance to the Crown that led to the explosions at Lexington and Concord in 1775.

In England, the Glorious Revolution in 1688 permanently established the primacy of the Parliament over the crown, but the Crown's dynastic struggles were far from over. The later Stuart kings became enmeshed in a series of wars and intrigues on the Continent, eventually leading to the ascension of the German-born

Hanoverian kings in 1714. The English felt “tepid at best” toward these new foreign-born royals, but their allegiance to their government was bolstered by the elaborate system of political patronage in England, the religious and social authority of the Protestant Church of England, and the “fixed and controlled land-tenure system.”

The distant Americans saw these events very differently. Parliament did not loom large in the colonists’ understanding; nor did any of these ties of allegiance hold sway. Far more important to them was the resolution of the long-simmering conflict between Protestants and Catholics that had existed since Henry VIII severed ties with Rome and established the Church of England in 1534. “They saw the national settlement,” McConville says, “as establishing the Protestant succession and a Protestant

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political culture built around a cult of benevolent monarchy.”

Colonial society was “married to royal political spectacles and a slavishly loyal print culture,” McConville writes, and “British North Americans championed their British king with emotional intensity.” For example, on Pope’s Day, observed in November, Bostonians annually reenacted the suppression of a Catholic uprising against the king in 1605. “The result was a polity sown together by passions rather than patronage,”

McConville observes.

In the decades immediately preceding the Revolution, as the colonial population exploded and settlers began pushing out into the frontier, everyone from yeoman farmers to Native Americans resisting the encroaching settlers invoked Britain’s kings in support of their cause. But beginning in the 1760s, Parliament attempted to exert its authority over the colonies and subsequently levied a series of unpopular taxes. The spell was broken, and the underlying incoherence of the colonists’ bonds with the mother country was revealed. By the time the statue of King George III in New York’s Bowling Green was pulled down on July 9, 1776, any remaining bonds with the king had been permanently severed, and, as McConville writes, “the long struggle to make a workable republican society began.”



The toppling of the statue of King George III on July 9, 1776, in New York’s Bowling Green confirmed the severing of colonists’ bonds to England.