



## Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China (A Philip E. Lilienthal Book)

By Francesca Bray

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In this feminist history of eight centuries of private life in China, Francesca Bray inserts women into the history of technology and adds technology to the history of women. Bray takes issue with the Orientalist image that traditional Chinese women were imprisoned in the inner quarters, deprived of freedom and dignity, and so physically and morally deformed by footbinding and the tyrannies of patriarchy that they were incapable of productive work. She proposes a concept of *gynotechnics*, a set of everyday technologies that define women's roles, as a creative new way to explore how societies translate moral and social principles into a web of material forms and bodily practices.

Bray examines three different aspects of domestic life in China, tracing their developments from 1000 to 1800 A.D. She begins with the shell of domesticity, the house, focusing on how domestic space embodied hierarchies of gender. She follows the shift in the textile industry from domestic production to commercial production. Despite increasing emphasis on women's reproductive roles, she argues, this cannot be reduced to childbearing. Female hierarchies within the family reinforced the power of wives, whose responsibilities included ritual activities and financial management as well as the education of children.

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#### Review

"Illuminating; [Bray's] investigation of the techniques by which cultures reproduce themselves over time also breathes new life into the history of technology."--"Times Literary Supplement

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"This elegant book embeds questions about gender in the history of material life, revealing still more of China's rich historical record on gender relations."—Susan Mann, author of *Local Merchants and the Chinese Bureaucracy, 1750-1950*

"Francesca Bray is exactly the kind of sinologist needed by cultural and social historians working throughout the world. Her book is both ambitious and accessible, making creative and discriminating use of cross-cultural comparison and social theory yet maintaining a sharp focus on concrete detail. For anyone interested in the history of everyday life or the history of material culture, this is *the* book on China to read."—Peter Burke, author of *Historical and Social Theory*

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