Patrilineal property rights can emerge locally, and then spread by contagion, and generate a situation where communities are locked into a gender-biased situation. Only a centralized top-down intervention could restore gender equality in property rights. This pattern is exemplified through a case study in the Italian Alps, where I tracked the institutional evolutions of inheritance systems on common property resources over six centuries (1200-1800). Through historical data and a model simulation, I uncover the motivations for this shift, show the gradual transition from and egalitarian to a patrilineal institutional regime and its impacts on marriage patterns and fertility.

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