

show that it was different from a previous birth control campaign (節育). Thus, family planning was regarded as a political task to be fulfilled with vigor.

During this period, the central government switched from the past policy of "late marriage and late childbearing" to a so-called "*wan-xi-shao* (晚,稀,少) policy," calling for the postponement of marriage, the spacing of births, and small family size. In order to reduce the birth rate, the number of children that each couple was urged to have was reduced from 3 in 1972 to 2 in 1973. Because of the strict demand of this policy during the 1970s, the average marriage age was 25-27 for men and 23-25 for women, about 5-7 years above the legal marriage age stipulated by the 1950 *Marriage Law*. The age of women bearing their first child after marriage was postponed to 24-30; this law greatly reduced the total number of children born from the groups of women aged 15-19 and 20-23. The spacing of births delayed the second childbirth among women of at least 4 to 5 age groups and led to the decline in the birth rate among women of comparatively advanced age. After 1973, the rate of second childbirth declined on the average by 0.3 annually, thus resulting in a relatively high ratio of "1-child families" during this period.

During the 1970s, the total fertility rate dropped rapidly from 5.8 in 1970 to 2.75 in 1979, declining at an average rate of 7.97% annually.² The crude fertility rate declined from 33.43 per 1000 to 17.82 per 1000 in 1979, while the natural growth rate of the population declined correspondingly from 25.83 per 1000 to 11.61 per 1000. The declining trend was conspicuous, indi-

cating an acceleration of a fertility transition (Fig. 1).

Many factors contributed to the rapid decline in the birth rate in the 1970s. The vigorous enforcement of a population control policy was of course an important reason. However, changes in social and economic structures also played a decisive role. The socialization and collectivization movements promoted by the central government after the founding of the PRC in 1949 greatly reduced the importance of family ties in traditions relating to economic production, raising and educating children, and individuals. Profound changes thus took place throughout mainland Chinese society. The patriarchal system, the foundation for the traditional reproduction culture, was abandoned, and the corresponding ethical system was also weakened. A proof of this was the falling trend of the fertility rate of women in the early 1950s, although the rate rose again when the birth-encouragement policy was introduced according to Chairman Mao Zedong's belief that "many people make work easy". However, the social and economic conditions leading to the changes in the reproduction culture in the early 1950s remained unchanged, forming an excellent background for implementation of population-control policy in the 1970s. Population-control propaganda in the 1970s speeded up changes in peoples attitudes about reproduction that had already sprouted in the hearts of the mainland people, thus affecting their childbearing behavior. The result was a large-scale decline in the fertility rate in the 1970s.

The PRC's practice of a socialist planned economy and rigorous organizational political control made

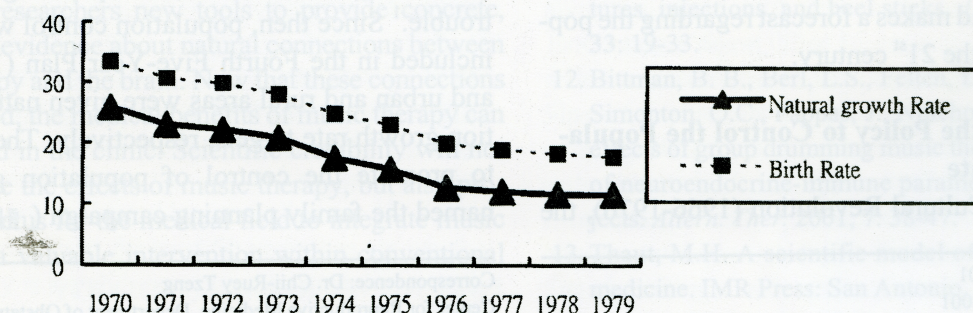


Fig. 1. The Trend of Fertility Changes in the 1970s