

Table 1. Farmers' Reproduction Wishes

	Reproduction wishes (%)					
	No child	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children	5 children and more
Total	0.24	3.76	50.59	30.82	10.59	4.0
Male	0.23	4.46	51.17	30.05	10.09	3.9
Female	0.24	3.07	50.00	31.60	11.08	4.0

the people's communes were abolished, and a system of contracted farm production to individual households in various forms was instituted. In urban areas, various responsibility systems, including the responsibility system for factory directors, were introduced and expanded to other economic spheres. As economic reforms and a relaxation of government controls over the people improved the people's livelihood, governmental political and economic punishments for out-of-plan births became less effective. Thus, the institutional factors that had contributed much to the success of the family planning policy in the 1970s were weakened.

Economic reforms led to a restoration of traditional concepts regarding births. Families became an independent production unit again as a household-contracted responsibility system was implemented in rural areas. Since the productivity level of that period did not require laborers to have a high standard of production technology, the total number of laborers in a family was the key to production increases and prosperity. This change revived the traditional concept that having more children means greater fortune for the family. At the same time, a family having no male laborers at all certainly had greater production difficulties. Thus, most rural families began to desire the birth of more sons. The revival of such traditional concepts and the patriarchal system helped bring about a retrogression of the reproduction culture. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, in 1988 most farmers desired to have more than 2 children, and more people wished to have baby boys than baby girls.⁶

The new *Marriage Law* passed in January 1981 contains some discrepancies toward population control. According to the new law, the minimum marriage age is 22 for men and 20 for women, which is higher

than the stipulations of the old law—20 for men and 18 for women. However, in the 1970s, under the "wan-xi-shao" policy, the minimum marriage age had already risen to 27 for men and 25 for women in cities and 25 for men and 23 for women in rural areas. The implementation of the new law, therefore, rendered the call for late marriage and late childbearing ineffective. A large number of women of childbearing age married earlier. The average marriage age for both men and women, which had been trending upwards for many years, began to decline. Statistics show that in 1987, more than 6.1 million mainland people married or cohabited illegally before the minimum marriage age.⁷ In addition, influenced by the tradition that a married couple should have offspring as early as possible, very few couples without children considered using contraceptive measures. Family planning began only after the birth of the first child, and contraceptive methods were usually adopted to extend the childbearing interval or to stop reproduction. Since about 75% of mainland couples had their first child in the year following their marriage, early marriage resulted in early childbearing.

A comparison between the age-specific fertility rates of 1980 and 1987 may provide a clear picture of the fertility trend in that period. In 1980, the fertility

Table 2. Farmers' Wishes about Having Male and Female Children

	Unit: person					Total
	No son	1 son	2 sons	3 sons	4 sons	
No daughter	2	30	48	3		83
1 daughter	2	381	28	6		417
2 daughters	1	40	80	16		137
3 daughters	1	4	11	3		19
4 daughters					3	3
Total	6	455	167	28	3	659