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# XXIII.16 On the legislator's views on the propagation of the species

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXIII. On laws in their relation to the number of inhabitants -

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## XXIII.16 On the legislator's views on the propagation of the species

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Statutes on the number of citizens depend greatly on circumstances. There are countries where nature has done everything ; thus the legislator has nothing to do. Why encourage people with laws to propagate, when the fertility of the climate yields enough people ? Sometimes the climate is more favorable than the terrain ; people proliferate, and famines destroy them ; China finds itself in this situation : hence a father sells his daughters and exposes his children. In Tonkin [1] the same causes bring about the same effects, and for that there is no need to go seek the opinion of metempsychosis, like the Arab travelers we are told about by Renaudot. [2]

For the same reasons, on the island of Formosa [3] religion does not allow women to bear children until they are thirty-five years of age ; earlier than that, the priestess bruises their womb and makes them abort.

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[1] Dampier's *Voyages*, vol. II, p. 41.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 167. ["It is because of this belief in metempsychosis that they often kill their children when they cannot feed them, and they even readily kill themselves." (Eusybe Renaudot, *Anciennes Relations des Indes et de la Chine [...] traduites d'arabe*, Paris : Coignard, 1718, p. 166-167.)]

[3] See *Recueil des voyages qui ont servi à l'établissement de la Compagnie des Indes*, vol. V, part I, p. 182 and 188.