



China's Population Policy - an update

Population policy is a hot topic in China. The huge population base and incredible annual population growth not only restrict socio-economic development but also impede improvement of quality of life. Such challenges and problems require draconian measures. In the 1970s China adopted family planning. In 1980 a one child policy was enforced.

Fig 1 China: provinces and regions



The basic facts

By the 1970s both the size of China's population and rate of population growth were causing grave concern.

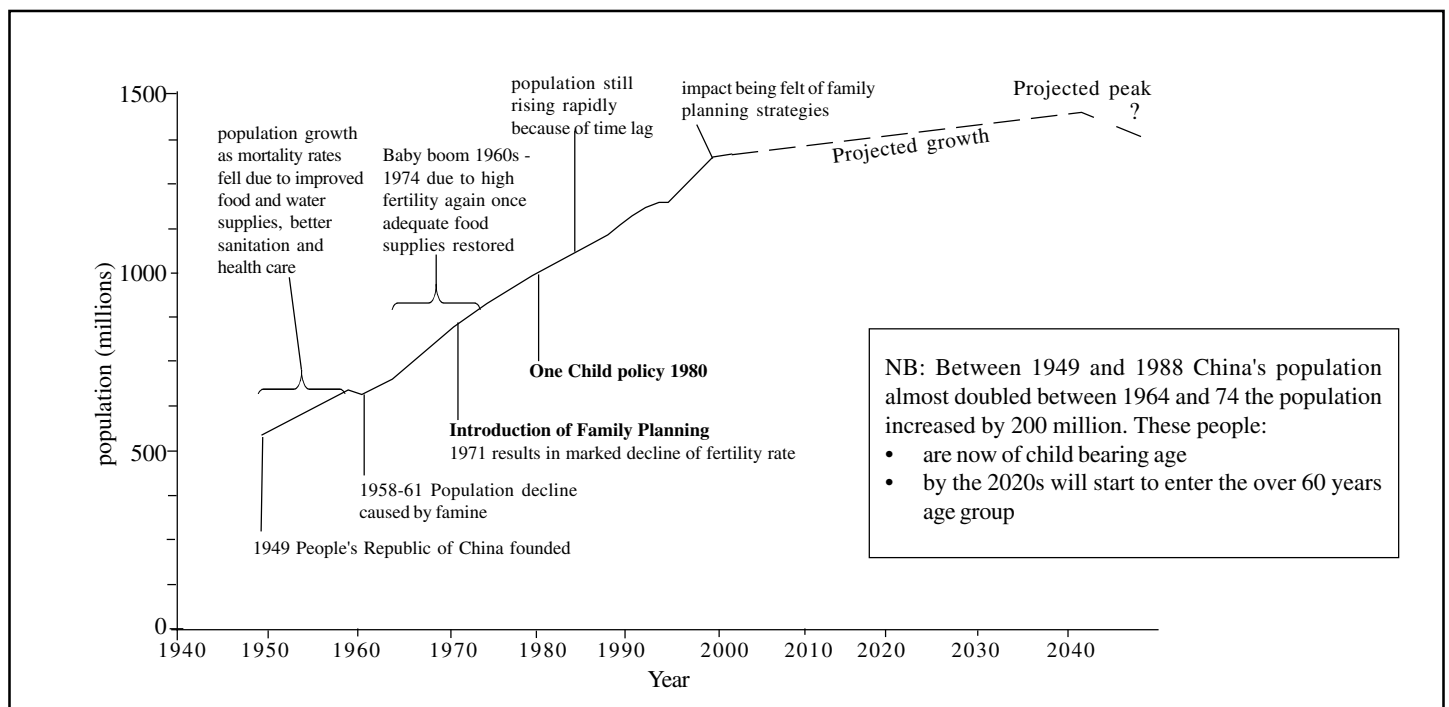
1. Population size is a national and global issue

The recently published 5th census confirmed that mainland China had a population of 1.266 billion. With the inclusion of the islands Hong Kong and Macau, the population totalled nearly 1.3 billion. China is thus the most populous country in the world and is home to 22% of the global population i.e. nearly one in every 4 people is Chinese. China's population is not only a national issue but also a global issue, a view shared by a Chinese demographer 'Any couple having more than one child is an enemy of China; any couple having more than two children is an enemy of the world.'

2. Population growth has been rapid since 1949

The population has more than doubled since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. That year marked the beginning of a phase of rapid growth. The decade from 1964 to 1974 witnessed a population explosion with the addition of 200 million people, approximately two-thirds of this increase being between 1964 and 1970. Since the fourth census, 1st July 1982, the population has increased by 11.66%, i.e. at a much slower annual growth rate of 1.07%. But with such a huge population base, the reality of this is an average increase of 13 million a year. Fig 2 summaries the key stages and influencing factors.

Fig 2 China population growth



3. Population growth is a major issue

The population increase uses up too much of the national income and puts natural resources under stress

- Despite the high rate of economic growth (China is classified as a NIC) 10% over latter years, such vast numbers of extra people mean that one quarter of the national income is used each year for coping with the additional population.
- China is faced with inadequate natural resources. Shortages of arable land and water pose problems for food security.

Arable land

- 7% of world's total area
- 0.078 ha/person (1/4 world average)
- average farm size 1/4 ha (50 m × 50m)

Freshwater Resources

- 2285 m³/person (1/4 of world's average)
- mismatch between supply and demand:
 - **North - water short:** less rainfall; Huang He much smaller catchment and run-off than Yangtze; falling water table beneath flat North China Plain - important agricultural and industrial region; densely populated Beijing in water crisis: per capita resources 335 m³; water use - 50% in agriculture, (heavily dependent on irrigation), 25% to industry.
 - **South - water rich,** favoured with rain and rivers. Water resources per capita in Yangtze Basin 2000m³, less than 1/3 utilised. Much of the south is too hilly for farming
- 44% of resources were being exploited in 2000; predicted to reach 60% by 2020
- by 2025 large parts of China will be water stressed, <1000m³ per person per year (1000 m³ are required to raise sufficient food for a person for a year)

4. Quality of life needs raising for many people especially for those in the Western Region. There is an east-west divide (See Factsheet 113 (Regional Inequalities))

5. Variations in regional development and differences between rural and urban areas are great. Statistical averages mask the realities of inequalities.

Exam Hint:- To help you get population size and growth into perspective, compare the total population of China with that of countries such as the US which has the same area, but only a fifth of the population. Note it is not the rapidity of the annual growth rate, but the size of the annual growth which is the problem.

Controlling numbers: China's population policy

The rapid population growth in the 1960s and relatively low living standards of the time prompted the adoption of **family planning** as a basic state policy in the 1970s.

By adopting a system of financial rewards and penalties, family planning encouraged a change in cultural practices: later marriage, and later and fewer births more widely spaced, were to become the norm. But despite the drop in the rate of population increase from 2.1% / year in 1973 to 1.17% in 1979 (Fig 2) these measures did not reduce the growth rate sufficiently. In 1980 China's **one child policy** came into force.

The adoption of the one child policy has not been uniform.

- 1. Each province** is allowed to adopt measures which take into account such factors as the existing population density, resources and level of economic development. In Sichuan for example, the one child policy is strictly adhered to in both rural and urban areas.
- 2. But generally** it is in the **urban areas** that the policy has been most widely accepted. The provision of education and health care facilitate the adoption of the practice of birth control.
- 3. In rural areas** enforcement varies. For example,
 - In some villages couples have to get the permission of the village council to have a child. This permission may even be displayed on a board bearing other information such as the amount of tax paid, for all to see.
 - In other, more remote areas it is more difficult for the authorities to check up and thus large numbers of births are not reported. With few schools and little medicare there is little to be lost if births are not registered.
 - In areas of great poverty, especially the western regions, the government is trying to encourage an integrated policy of birth control and poverty alleviation by improving the opportunity to generate income if couples comply. Birth rates are particularly high in rural areas where there is little education and where children working on the land help raise family incomes. Four or five children per family is not unusual.
- 4. Penalties** for infringement of the policy are generally imposed.
 - These may be cash or, in rural areas, they are sometimes in kind e.g. livestock. Village level fines can be as much as 10 000 yuan (roughly 13 yuan to £1).
 - Some benefits such as rice rations for children are not available for families with more than one child.
 - In some rural areas peasants are encouraged to have more than one child to increase the amount received from punishment fines! This money can be used for the benefit of the whole community.
 - Cash fines vary in amount from province to province. In Henan province fines are four times income: clearly a deterrent. However, with increasing affluence, some people are prepared to pay fines in order that they may have more children. The pursuit of a male heir is the driving force.
- 5. But there are some concessions to the one child policy.**
 - In urban areas if husband and wife are each from a one child family they are permitted to raise two children. This, however, is a temporary relaxation of the policy.
 - Where divorcees remarry in urban areas, the couple are permitted to have another child if the woman has no previous children.
 - Couples are also permitted to bear another child if their first child is mentally handicapped or dies.
 - In some rural areas where the tradition of favouring sons still holds, couples are permitted a second child if the first is a girl.
 - China's 55 ethnic minorities, which comprise 8% of the population, are exempt from the one child policy. Some minority groups are allowed two children, but very small groups are free to bear as many children as they wish. Many of the minority groups live in the sparsely populated western provinces but exemption is also seen as a measure to avoid conflict between the Han, comprising 92% of the population, and minorities.

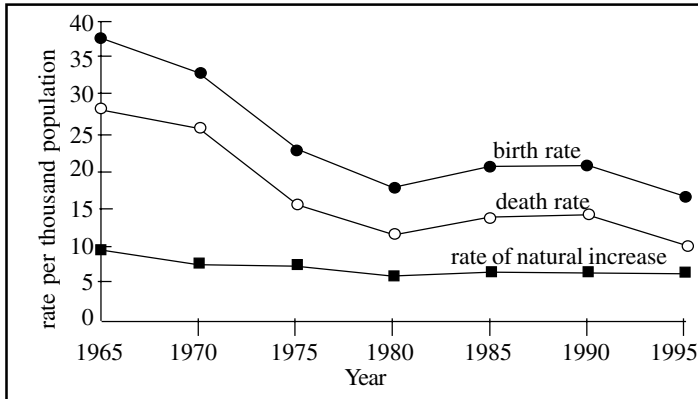
Success or Failure

Achievements

China's one child policy has reduced growth

- Over the 30 years of family planning **population growth has been reduced by 300 million** (Fig 3).

Fig 3 Birth, death and growth rates



Family planning policies have effectively reduced the Total Fertility Rate (TFR): 5.75 (1970), 2.25 (1990), 1.7(2000) [Note that these figures are low for an LEDC e.g. the average rate of natural increase is up to 3.5 % (Kenya). As a comparison the TFR for the USA is 2].

But this graph depicts the national average The table below shows wide differences in birth rates for selected regions against the national average of 15.2 /1000 for 1999. The TFR follows the same pattern e.g. Beijing 1, rural areas e.g. Guizhou 2. This is of great significance for China where 70.6% of the population is rural.

Region	Birth rate/1000
Tibet	23.2
Qinghai	26.8
Shanghai Municipality	5.4

- Gradually, birth control targets are being reached but both population size and growth rate are still too high. In 1999 the population was 60 million in excess of the target of 1.2 billion.

China therefore still faces socio-economic challenges

- Food security** has become a key issue. As urban areas expand, arable land is reduced. Furthermore, valuable arable land will start to disappear in 2003 as water levels rise behind the then completed Three Gorges Dam. Deforestation on slopes too steep for farming has resulted in soil loss and the subsequent depletion of water resources. The diminished flow of the Huang He which fails to reach the sea for an increasingly longer period each year, together with the rapid fall of the water table beneath the North China Plain, China's main grain producing region, is serious news indeed. The agricultural sector uses 87% of China's water.
- Water shortages** affect over half China's cities. Shortage of water in the North China Plain has been the driver behind the ambitious, controversial and costly South-North water transfer scheme, now under way. Water from the Yangtze will be taken to Tianjin via the eastern route and to Beijing via the middle route.
- Unemployment** is a key issue. Each year 20 million people reach working age. In urban areas unemployment officially stands at 3.6% but could well be double that. More importantly it is set to rise and could exceed 15%. Indeed in some individual cities in the North East (a traditional manufacturing area) it is as high as 43%. Already redundancies from closure of state-owned enterprises since 1997 total over 30 million.

But the situation will be exacerbated as rural migrants swell the numbers, their movement to the cities now made easier by the relaxation of the hukou (household registration system restricting movement to the towns). As a result of mechanisation it is estimated that there are some 100-140 million surplus rural workers. The creation of jobs to absorb some of the surplus labour is leading to deflation as factories pour out goods in excess of demand. Both over-production of goods and underemployment are only too obvious in retail stores.

- This flow of rural –urban migrants adds to the **already growing demands for housing, education and health care, and transport in urban areas** brought about by natural increase.
- The policy resulted in an **ageing population**. In 1989, 5% of the population was over 65 years. Now the percentage over 65 years is 7% and by 2025 could reach 30%. As in many MEDCs, this increase has serious repercussions for the provision of health care and of pensions. Traditional reliance on children to support parents will need to be replaced by socialised care and already the government is building retirement homes.
- Another outcome since the mid 1980s has been a **distorted sex ratio**, in part due to killing of girl babies, failure to register their birth or abortions. The male to female ratio is now 116 : 100 compared to the norm of 100:103
- Spoilt children** as parents lavish too much attention on single offspring are only too evident in urban areas. The number of 'little emperors', obese and demanding boys is of growing concern as many become delinquents in their teens.

The one child policy has now become the focus of hot debate as some areas are experiencing negative growth (see Case Study)

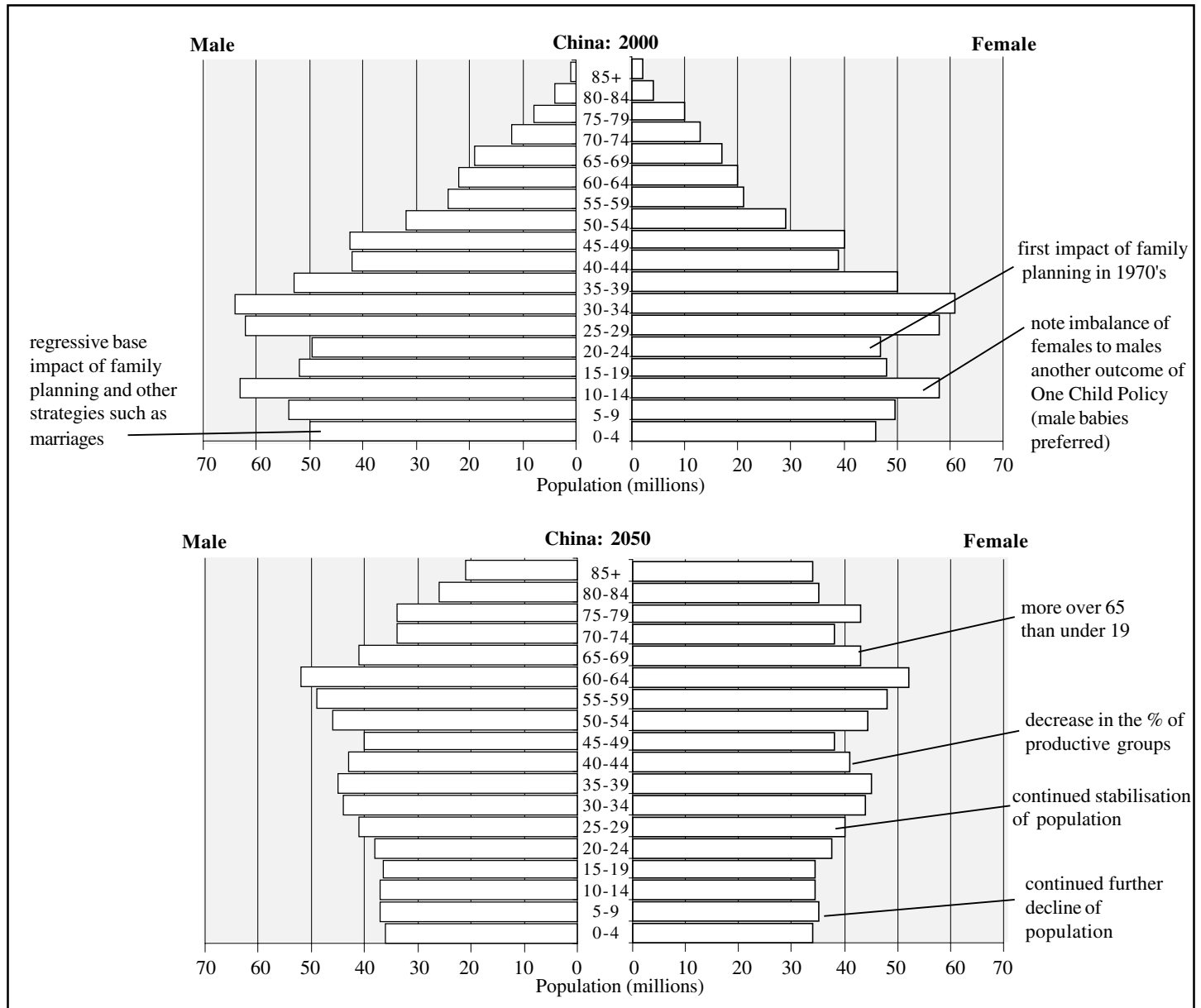
Case Study: Shanghai

- Shanghai is China's leading economic city, experiencing phenomenal economic growth. It hopes to compete as a global city. In December 2002 it won its bid to host World Expo 2010 which could further its economic growth. But fears have been growing that the one child policy could bring about a downturn in its fortunes.
- The TFR for Shanghai is currently 0.8. Shanghai's population (13 million) has in fact been decreasing since 1993 and furthermore it is decreasing at an increasing rate.
- Right now this is good news for Shanghai which has a surplus labour problem and one which is set to increase as state industries shut down.
- But in the long term (100 years) the one child policy will not only create a labour shortage which could undermine its economic supremacy but will also result in too many aged people needing support.
- Shanghai was the first city to allow couples where each is from a one child family to have two children. This is not proving popular.
- Amendments to Shanghai's family planning laws are top priority but there is controversy!
It has been suggested that
 - well educated couples be allowed more than one child: parents with first degrees could be permitted to raise two children, and those with higher degrees, three children but often such couples do not want a second child as these parents have high aspirations which they could not meet with an extra child. In fact there is a growing number of DINKS (double income, no kids).
 - couples may be permitted to have a second child if only one or other partner is a single child
 - where two divorcees remarry, they may be permitted a second child if each child of their first marriage is under the custody of the respective first partner.

Population projections and the current policy for the future

Faced with so many challenges, it is widely held that population replacement level is not acceptable long term. If the TFR remains at 1.8/1000 over the current decade, and then falls to 1.6/1000, China's population will peak at 1.4323 billion in 2040. This year is seen as the key year. By 2099 population will, according to the low projection, decline to 800 million (see Fig 4).

Fig 4 Population pyramid summary for China



An alternative forecast is for a population just over 1 billion by 2100. This could be seen as a less optimistic forecast in some ways. At the eighth Population Seminar in 2002 it was proposed that 800 million should be China's target for 2099. In 200 years time the target should be 300 million, or at the most 500 million (approximately the size of the population in 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded). Only then can everyone have a high standard of living with a healthy environment.

Further Research

For China:- useful background can be obtained from.
Shanghai – Pudong: Economic Miracle (Geo Factsheet 108)
Regional Inequalities - Case study of China (Geo Factsheet 113)
Chengdu: a case study of sustainable development (153)

Websites:

www.population concern.org.uk
www.census.gov/ipc
www.census.gov//china population
www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/LUC/ChinaFood/data/pop/pop_1.htm
(there are 23 separate topics at this site finishing at 23.htm
www.us.cencus.gov (international database) - this site prints pyramids for 2025 and 2050 for all countries of the world

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