

China's population: the one-child policy and beyond

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“The greatest demographic experiment in human history”

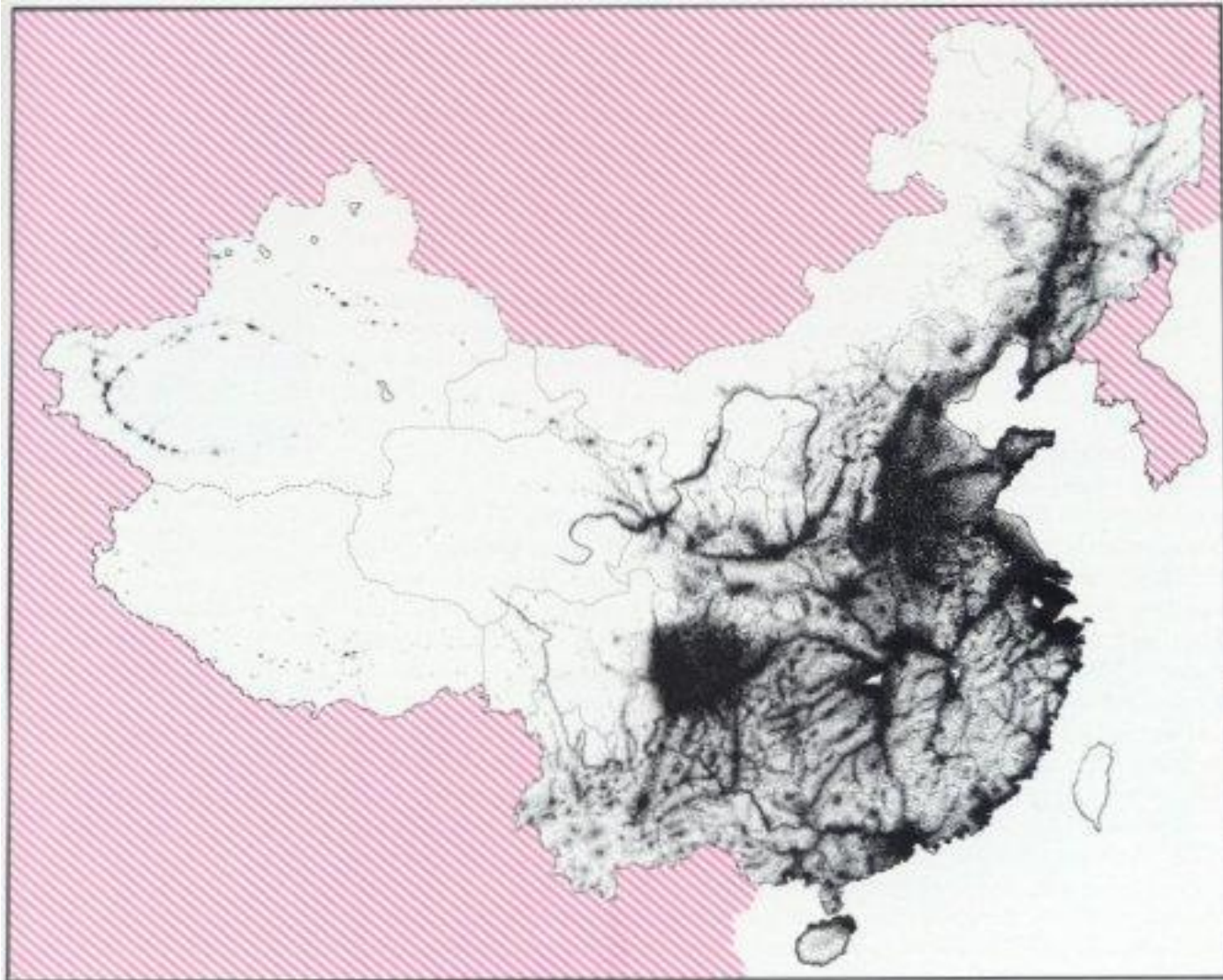
- Aim of one-child policy: “to control population quantity and improve the quality of life”
- Allowing China to achieve real improvements in living standards even if population grew by 300 million
- Urban fertility rates were already dropping at 1978 launch of policy, but rural ones were not



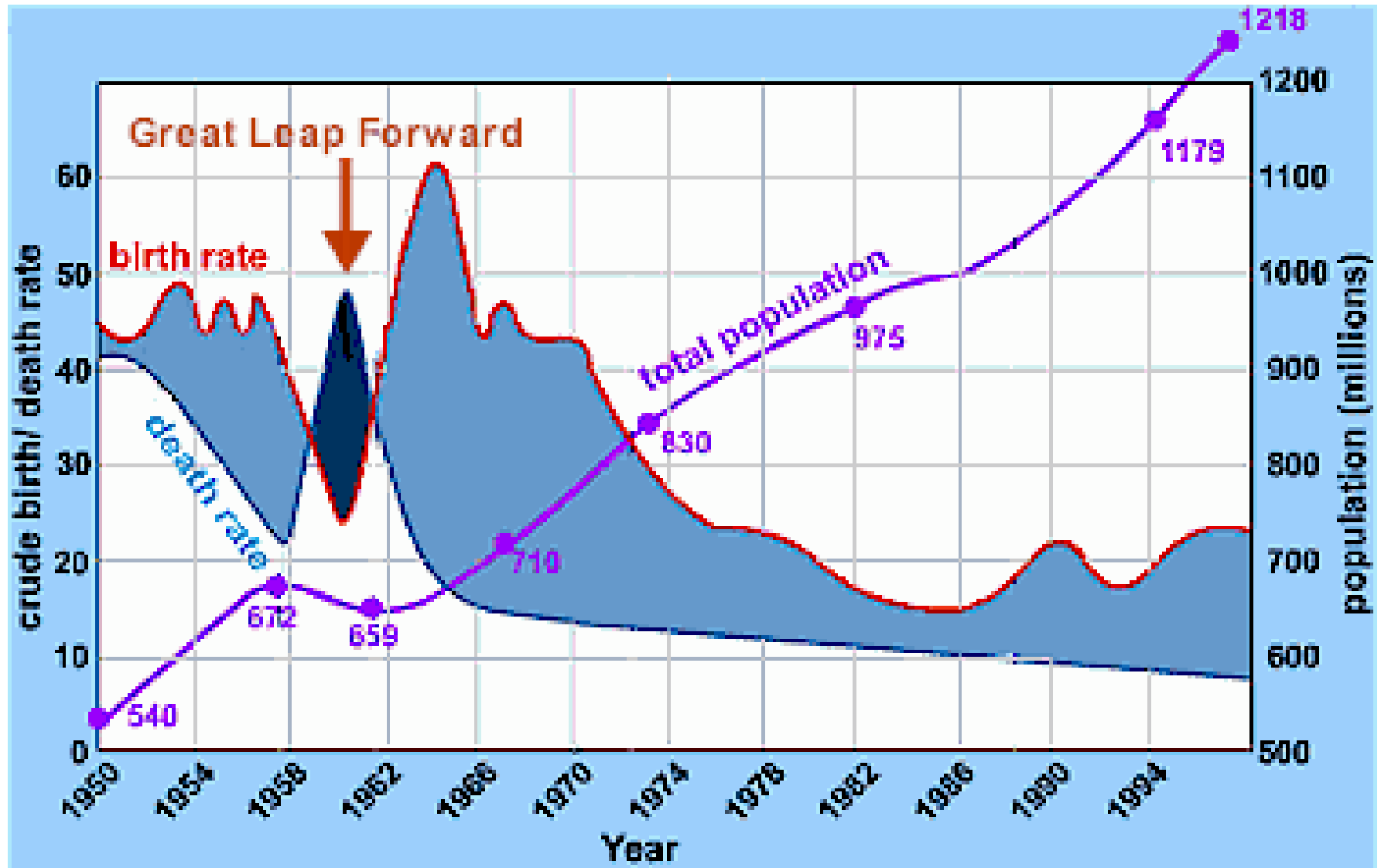
Shifts in regulations, but consistency in enforcement

- 1978-1984: one child per couple
- After 1984: rural couples allowed a second child if first was a daughter (or had a disability)
- Early 2000s: extended to urban only-child parents; by 2012, c.52% of Chinese women eligible to have a second child
- November 2013 reforms allowing another c.30 million women a second child – if they want one – if one parent is an only child
- But breaches of the rules always harshly punished

Population distribution in China



China's population since 1949



Policy enforcement

- Financial penalties – “social compensation fee” for unauthorized births
- Until fee is paid, child cannot be household-registered (hukou system), and cannot attend state schools
- Parents and child can be barred from state employment, CCP membership, bank credit
- Family-planning officials, in practice, incentivized for harshly coercive enforcement, especially during campaigns
- “Local methods”: forced abortions into 3rd trimester, sterilizations, detention, beating of family members, demolition of property

Hazards of whistle-blowing in China

- Chen Guangcheng's family's ordeal after he exposed coercion in Linyi, Shandong province, in 2005
- Persecution of family members goes on even after Chen's May 2012 exile to US
- 2012 Feng Jianmei case showed 3rd-trimester forced abortion remains common



Gendered effects of one-child policy

- Birth rate down from 33.4 per 1,000 in 1970 to 12 per 1,000 in 2010
- Total number of births averted by family-planning policies now c.400 million
- But a disproportionate number of girls “missing” from population – noticeable in schools

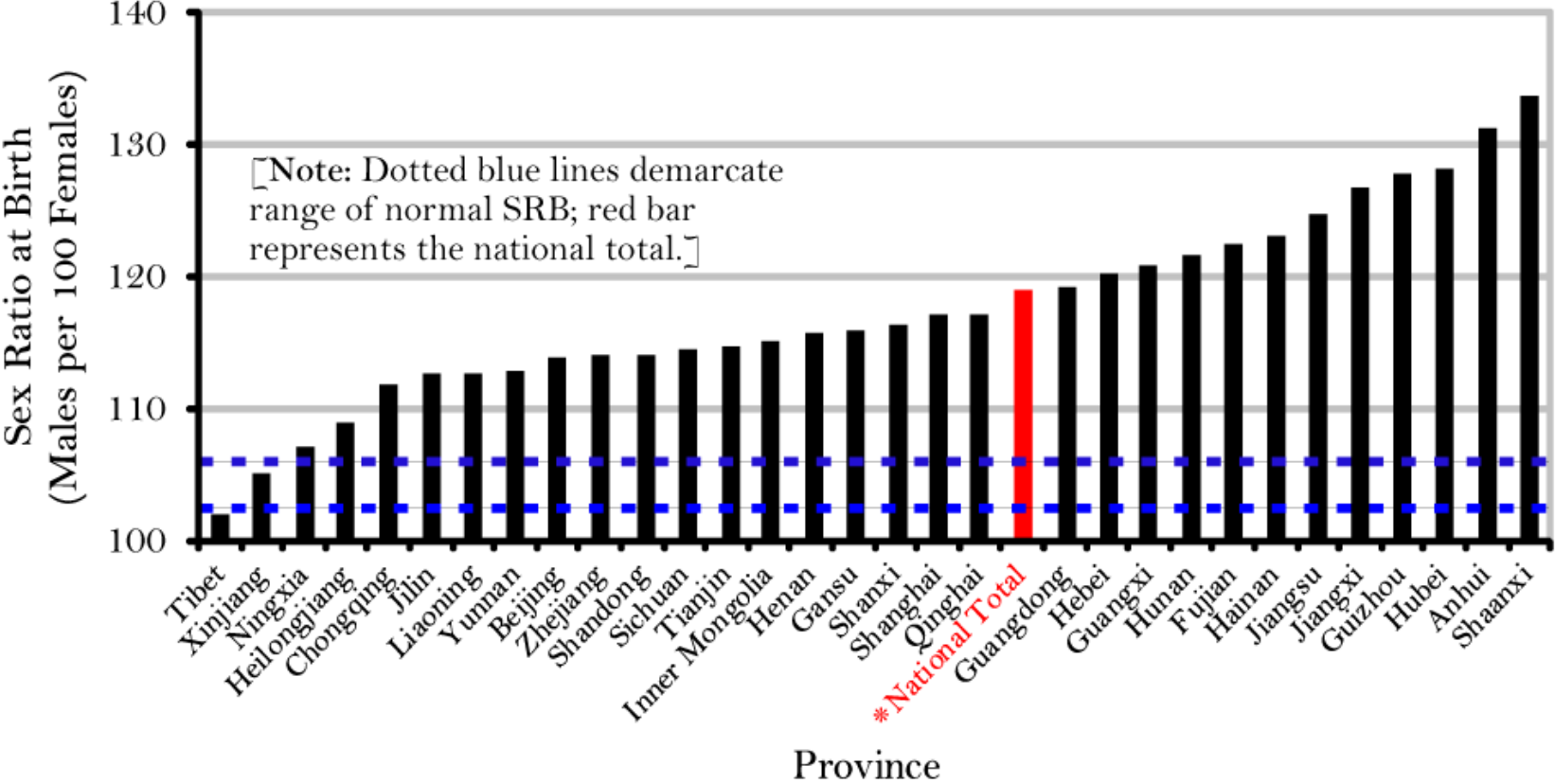


Shortages and son preference create a market in women and children



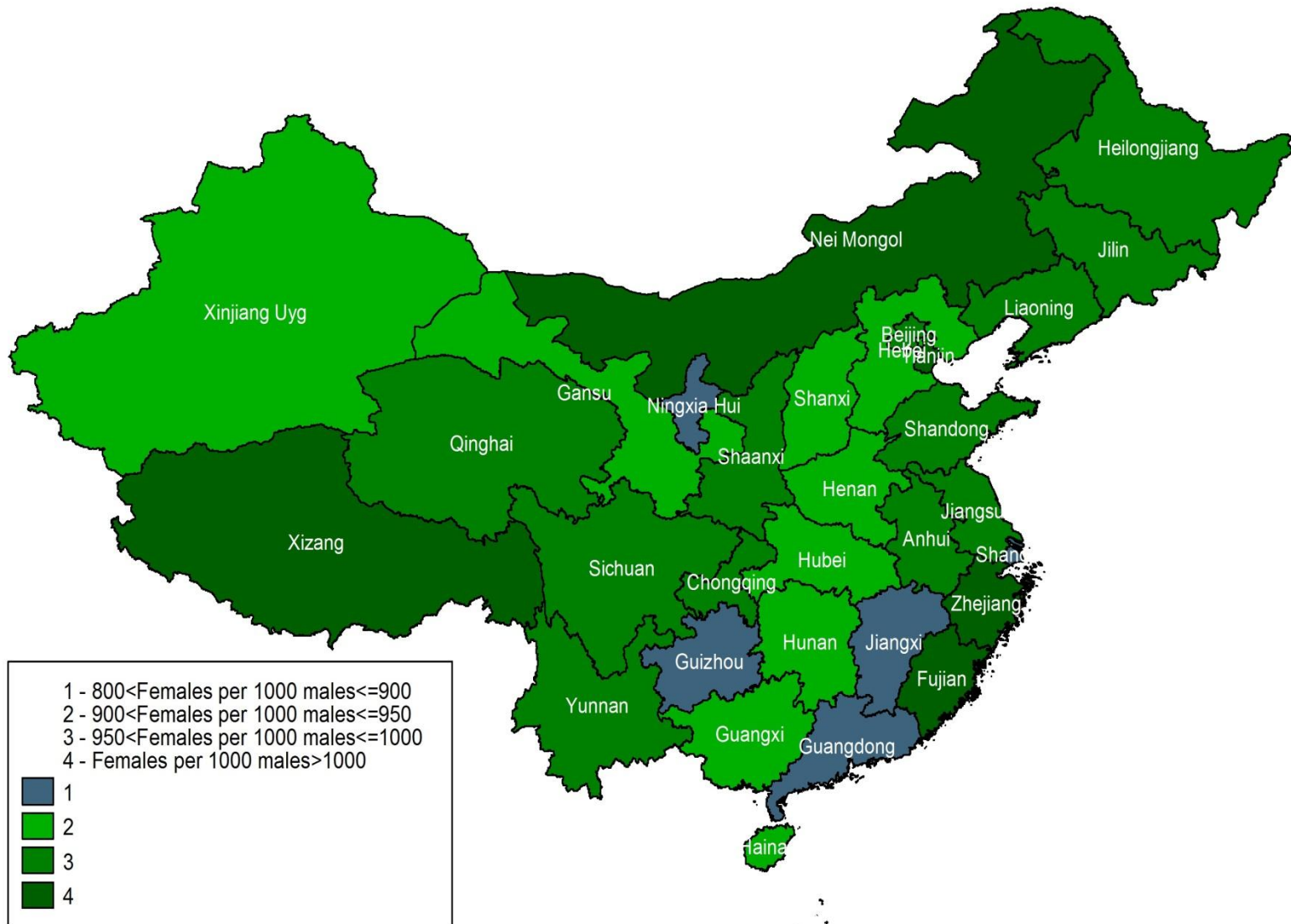
- Up to 118 boys born for every 100 girls
- Imbalance drives human trafficking – women as bought brides for “army of bachelors”, children for illegal adoption

Male to female sex ratios by province



CHINA: Sex Ratio Map, 2011

Females per 1000 males



Source: China Statistical Year Book, 2012

Where are the missing girls?

- Prenatal sex selection (main method); abandonment; higher mortality rates; infanticide; unregistered girls
- Estimate (2000 figures) of c. 8.5 million girls truly missing, 4.5 million uncounted
- If no more girls went missing after 2001, population would be reduced by 3.2% over 100 years
- If sex ratios returned to gender balance over 20 years from 2001 – 5.4% population reduction
- If ratios stay the same: 13.6% population reduction
- No great divergence until after 2030 – long-term trends

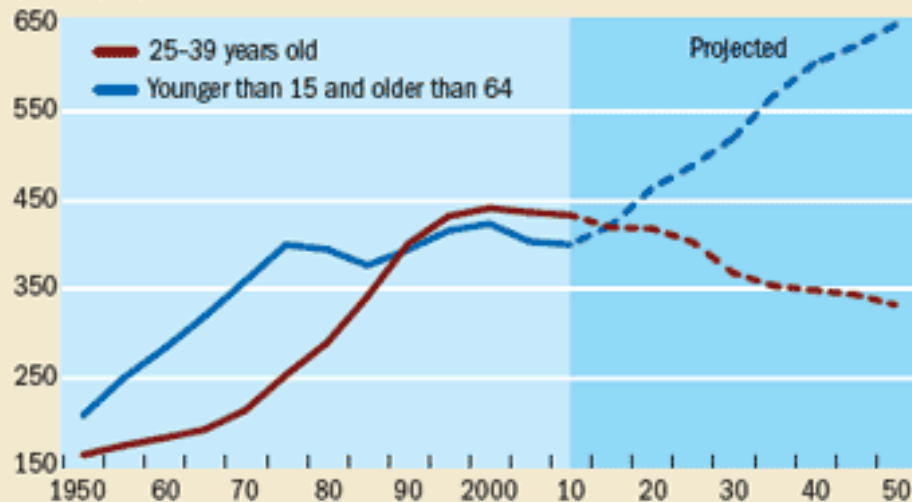
Is China getting old before it gets rich?

Chart 2

Population pressure

The core group of industrial workers (age 25–39) in China is shrinking while the non-working-age population is growing.

(million people)

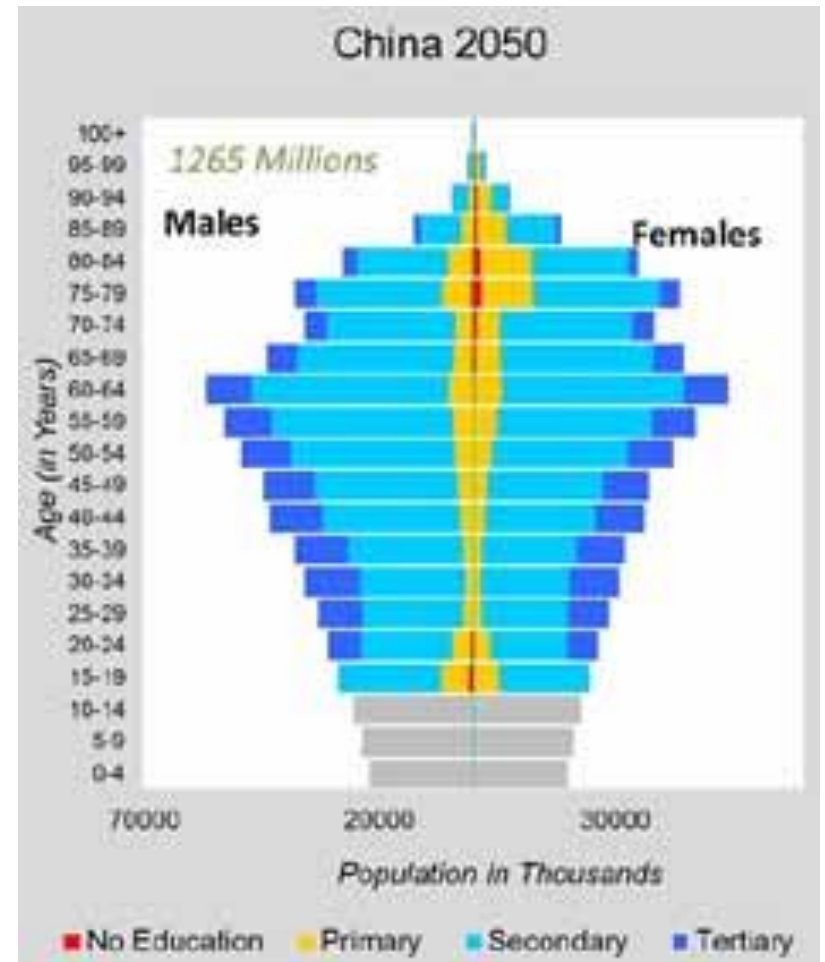
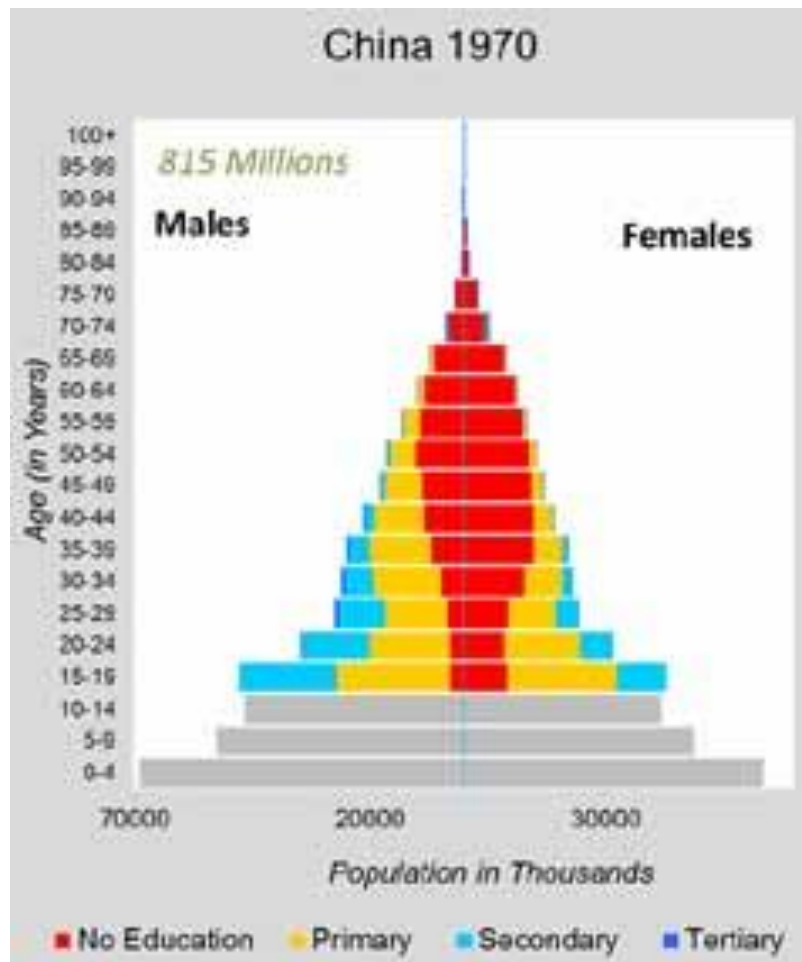


Sources: United Nations; and IMF staff estimates.

- Fertility rate c.1.5, below 2.1 replacement level
- State still expects family to provide care for elderly – only 1.5% in other provision
- China passed “peak labour” in 2011 – working-age population is now shrinking
- Japan reached same stage in 1990, with per-capita living standards at 90% of US levels; China is still below 20%

When 25% of Chinese are over 60, per-capita incomes will at best be one-third of those in ageing Western nations

China will have gone through in 30 years a demographic transition that took over 100 years in Europe



How much longer will the one-child policy last?

- Scandals over abuses, coercive enforcement – e.g. Chen Guangcheng case – met with repression, secrecy
- Policy will be phased out as it ceases to serve government aims – when it threatens continued economic growth and social stability, through 4-2-1 problem, “army of bachelors”
- Opportunity costs
- Was there a non-coercive alternative?