

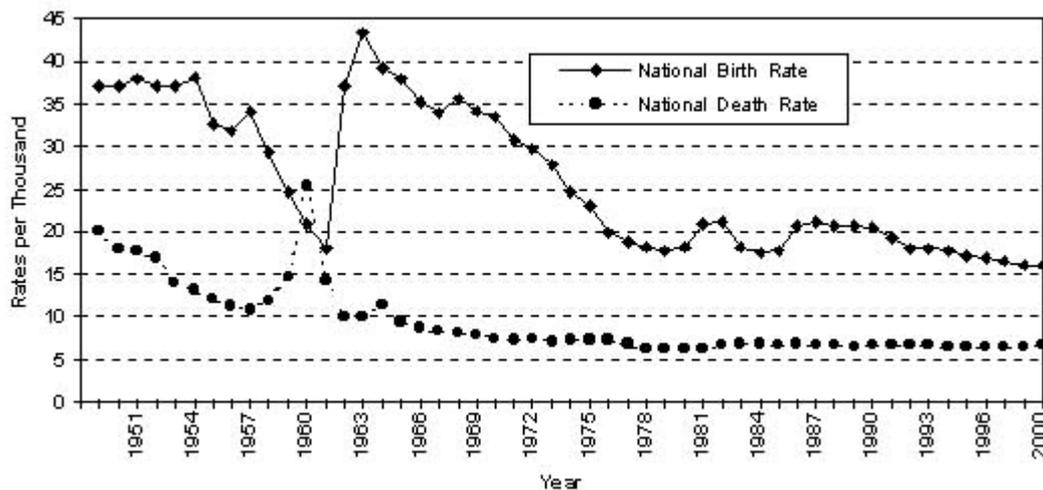
Population Growth in China : The Basic Characteristics of China's Demographic Transition

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By the nineteenth century China's history was characterised by continuous wars, revolution and famines and the nation had become politically and economically weak in spite of its long and rich cultural tradition and his past rich civilisation. Accordingly, before 1950 China had demographic characteristics of a pre-modern society with high mortality and high fertility rates. This situation produced certain stability in population size or, at least, lead to a slow increase.

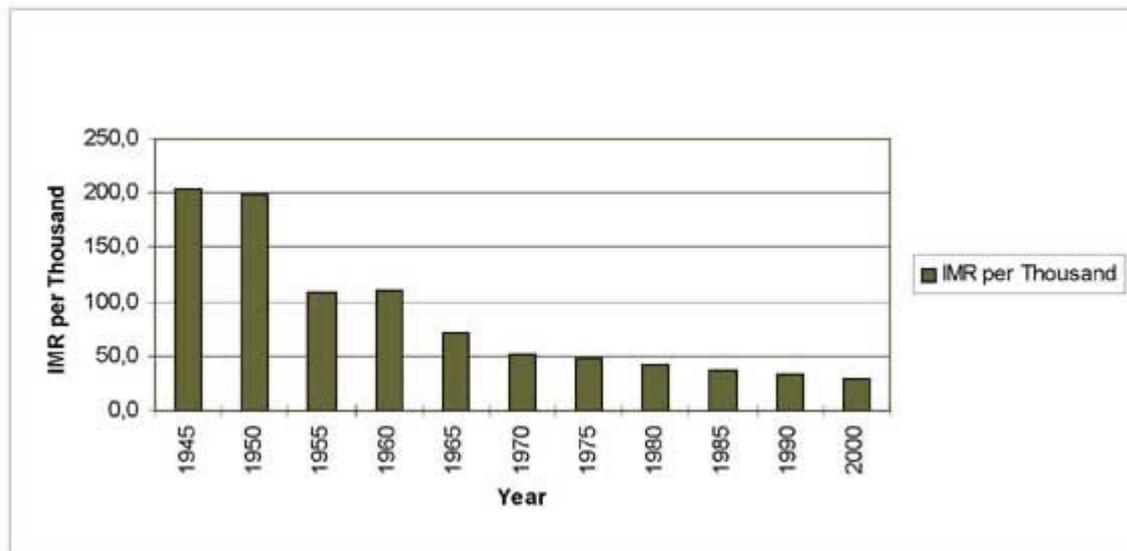
With the return of peace, after the foundation of The People's Republic of China in 1949, China entered its demographic transition: first mortality began to fall rapidly and second, fertility remained for many years at about an average of six children per woman. As a result of this China experienced rapid population growth due to the high number of children born, to a sharp decline of infant mortality rate and to the increase of life expectancy at birth.

Figure 1 : Crude Birth Rate and Crude Death Rate in China from 1952 to 2000.



It can be seen from Figure 1 that a sudden and continuous decline of Crude Death Rate has taken place since 1950 and from 1949 to 1957 CDR was reduced by almost half. After the crisis period in 1958 (The Great Leap Forward) and the following three years famine period, CDR continued to decline steadily and reached a low level of below seven per thousand in the 1980's and maintained this level with small fluctuations in the 1990's. Today China's Mortality level is among the lowest in the developing world. As is shown in Figure 2, the Infant Mortality Rate has dropped rapidly over the last four decades and that the greatest reduction happened in the 1950's and 1960's. Infant mortality rate is an important indicator because it is generally agreed that it is related not only to health and mortality situation but also to the level of development of a nation since it is very sensitive to socio-economic changes and to women's education level.

Figure 2 : The Infant Mortality Rate in China



According to Table 1, from an estimate of figure of about 35 years before 1949, Life Expectancy at Birth in China has shown a large increase within a short period of time. In 1973 it was about 64,5 years and in 2000 it reached over 71.

Table 1 : Life Expectancy at Birth in China (1949-2000)

<i>YEAR</i>	<i>LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH</i>
1949	35
1975	63
1981	67.8
1985	69.2
1989	68.5
1995	68.8 (67.9 male ; 69.1 female)
2000	71.3 (69.6 male ; 73.3 female)

From 1950 China has had a period of high fertility with the Total Fertility Rate around six Children per woman. As can be seen in Figure 1, between 1958 and 1961, mainly because of policy errors and nation-wide natural calamity, China experienced a period of famine that lead to a large drop in fertility and a large excess of deaths. This period of crisis was followed by a recovery period in which fertility rate increased rapidly and reached a peak in 1963 because of compensatory childbearing after the famine.

As a consequence of these demographic changes, China had to manage the problem of improving health, education and life quality for an ever large number of people with an economy that is still weak and inadequate resources. For this reason in 1970 the Government formulated the first anti-natalist policy named 'later-longer-fewer', and that promoted later

births, longer spacing between births and fewer births. This policy was followed in 1979 by the family planning program 'one-child policy'. As it is shown in Figure 3, from 1970 fertility declined rapidly in China to an average of about 2.5 children per woman in 1980 and, after a period of significant fluctuations in the 1980's, went below the replacement level in 1990 with 1.84 children per woman. China experienced its demographic transition in a society with a relatively low level of socio-economic development but progressed with unprecedented speed due to strong government supported programmes for public health, birth control policies, institutional changes and social reform. Today China is the third largest country of the world by area and the largest by population with 1.277.558 people in 2000 and a growth rate of 0,9% per year.

References

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