

# Population & Demography

CAN CHINA SHOULDER THE BURDENS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE?

CHINA  
BALANCE  
SHEET

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## Background

VAST MIGRANT WORKER “TOWNS” ARE SPRINGING UP ON THE EDGES OF MAJOR CITIES WHERE CHINA’S DOMESTIC CHALLENGES COME TOGETHER IN MICROCOSM: WEAKENING SOCIAL SAFETY NETS; ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH, AND SANITATION TROUBLES; POVERTY; AND RISING LEVELS OF DISAFFECTION.

- China’s population of more than 1.3 billion is an implacable burden for the country’s political, social, and economic development. Keeping such a sizable population fed, clothed, sheltered, and generally satisfied consumes enormous resources in itself.
- Beyond the sheer enormity of China’s populace, certain other population and demographic trends, such as internal migration, aging, and a skewed gender ratio, have a multiplier effect in exacerbating China’s host of socioeconomic challenges.
- A 2007 study by China’s National Population and Family Planning Commission predicted that the population would reach 1.5 billion in three decades and that more than 70 percent will live in cities by 2034.

“UNLIKE IN THE WEST AND OTHER DEVELOPED ECONOMIES, CHINA WILL GROW ‘OLD’ BEFORE IT BECOMES ‘RICH.’”

—RICHARD JACKSON AND NEIL HOWE,  
*THE GRAYING OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM:  
THE DEMOGRAPHICS AND ECONOMICS OF  
RETIREMENT POLICY IN CHINA*

## Current Situation

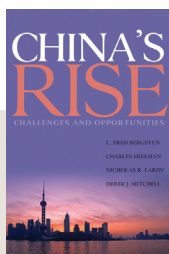
- The China Population Information and Research Center reported in August that the population had grown by more than 9.5 million people thus far in 2008, reaching over 1,325,350,000. China has approximately 20 percent of the world’s population.
- According to official state media, in 2008 there were an estimated 200 million migrant workers, and that number is expected to continue rising, with 300 million new migrants by 2034 at current trends.
- Migrant workers today account for more than 20 percent of China’s working-age population (15 to 64 years old). Yet, according to the United Nation’s projections, China’s working-age population will peak around the year 2015 and then start shrinking.
- The China Youth and Children Research Center reported that between the years 2000 and 2005 the percent of the population aged 14 to 35 declined by 6 percentage points, about 61 million people.
- Statistics released by the State Council Information Office in 2007 indicated that the sex ratio for newborns is 119 boys to 100 girls, whereas the global norm is 105 boys to 100 girls. The skewed gender ratio results from a combination of the one-child policy, the traditional preference for a male child, advances in sonogram technology to determine the sex of a fetus, and widespread availability of abortion in China (sex-selective abortion is illegal in China, but occurs nonetheless).
- An official from the State Family Planning Commission stated in 2007 that crimes such as abduction of women and human trafficking are plaguing the areas with the greatest gender imbalance.

### Implications

- Rural-to-urban migration is a double-edged sword for China. Migration enables surplus rural labor to find urban jobs and accumulate savings, and areas that employ migrant workers benefit from a ready supply of cheap labor. However, large-scale migration rapidly increases the rate of urbanization in China. Recognizing emerging challenges, the State Council in January 2006 passed new guidelines on the protection of rural migrant workers' rights, including timely wage payment and provision of education to their children.
- China has yet to develop a successful and well-funded pension system, and hence the great majority of Chinese continue to rely on the traditional form of old-age insurance: children. Ten years from now, as China's baby boomers begin to retire, the first single-child generation will assume the burden of caring for the elderly.
- In terms of absolute numbers, with 153 million people over 60 years old by the end of 2007, China already has the world's largest elderly population. That figure is predicted to reach 250 million by 2020.
- A 2007 report by the Population Development Studies Center of China's Renmin University stated that about 10 percent of males born in the 1990s will be unable to marry when they reach marriageable age. This surplus male population could result in an increase in crime, the sex trade, and bride trafficking—and, potentially, further complicate adequate provision of elder care in a society where daughters-in-law are typically relied on to take that responsibility.

“IT WILL BECOME MORE DIFFICULT FOR LOW-INCOME MALES TO FIND SUITABLE SPOUSES AS THEY GET OLDER. A LARGE NUMBER OF UNMARRIED MALES WILL CAUSE SOCIAL PROBLEMS.”

—2007 REPORT BY THE CHINA YOUTH AND CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER AND RENMIN UNIVERSITY OF CHINA



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:  
SEE CHAPTER 3: “CHINA’S DOMESTIC TRANSFORMATION: DEMOCRATIZATION OR DISORDER?”  
IN *CHINA: THE BALANCE SHEET: WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW NOW ABOUT THE EMERGING SUPERPOWER* BY C. FRED BERGSTEN, BATES GILL, NICHOLAS LARDY, DEREK J. MITCHELL