

Demographic Transition

The defining features of demographic transition are the levels of fertility, mortality, and family limitation before and after the transition occurs (1). Before transition, less than half of all children in East Asia survived to adulthood. For families (2) to reproduce themselves, the mother had to bear a large number of children to compensate for mortality loss. After the transition, nearly all children survived to adulthood. If couples did not act to limit their fertility, they might have twice or three times as many surviving children as they would have had in the past. Nearly all couples adopt some form of family limitation, however, limiting fertility to an average of about two children per woman (3).

Pretransition levels of mortality vary widely, but risks of death are generally an order of magnitude or more higher than modern levels, Fertility levels vary widely (4), but the average level of fertility is always much lower after the transition (5),

Family limitation is necessarily widespread after the transition, but the pretransition situation is variable. Primitive methods of family limitation can be very effective, and were systematically practiced in some pretransition populations. There is evidence of family limitation in premodern China (6, 7) and in Tokugawa Japan (8, 9).

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Fertility Decline in East Asia

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