

Countries have contrasting population problems

Some countries want to reduce their birth rate and other countries are trying to increase their birth rate.

Why did China want to decrease its birth rate?

In 1979 China had a quarter of the world's population. Two-thirds of its population was under the age of 30 years, and the largest cohort born in the 1950s and 1960s were entering their reproductive years. The government saw strict population control as essential to economic reform and to an improvement in living standards, so the one-child family policy was introduced.

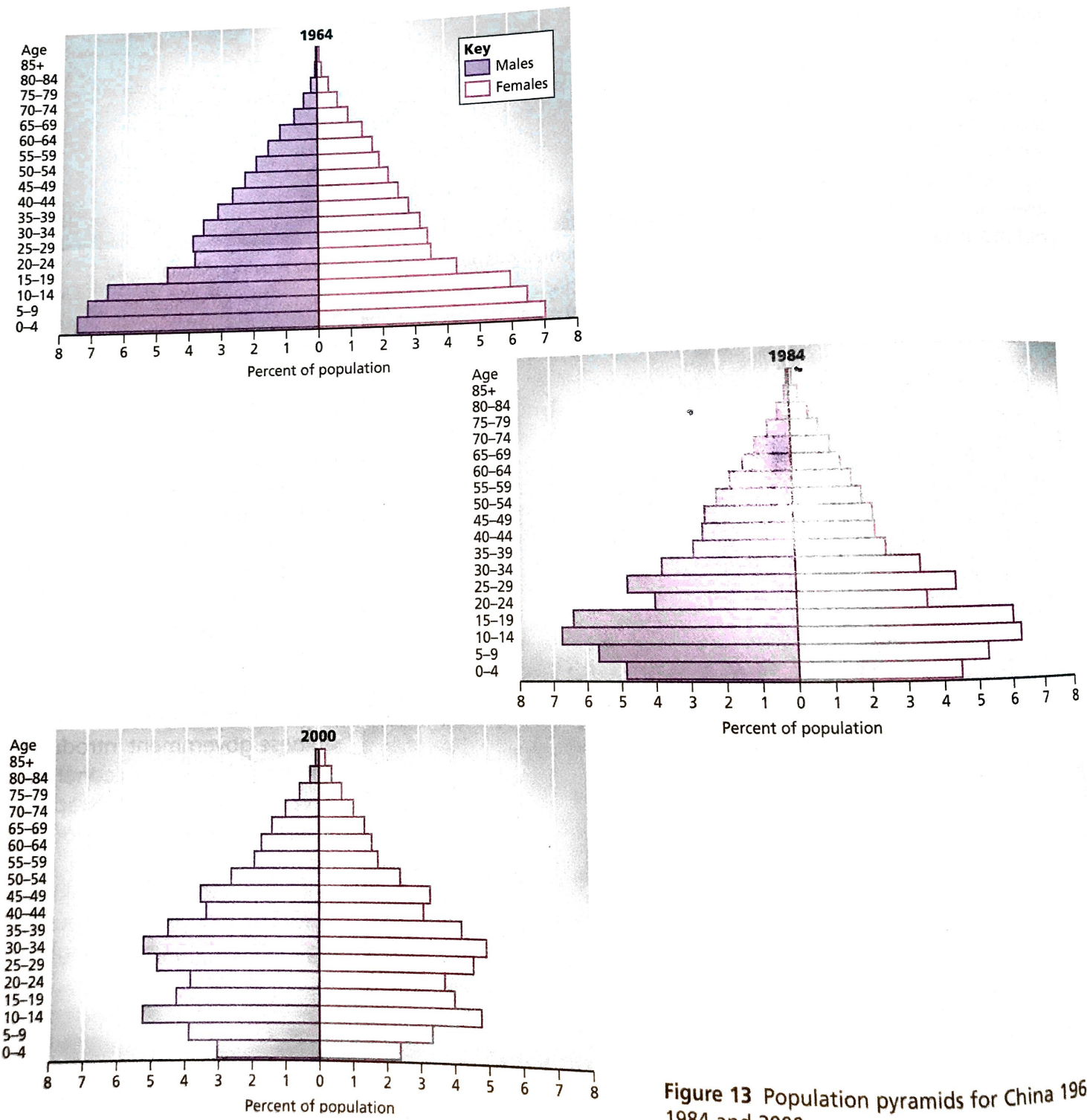


Figure 13 Population pyramids for China 1964, 1984 and 2000

Incentives

Couples with only one child were given a 'one-child certificate' entitling them to a package of benefits, including:

- cash bonuses
- longer maternity leave
- free education
- free medical care
- better child care
- preferential housing arrangements.

Disincentives

Couples were required to pledge that they would not have more children. If they had another child they lost all their privileges, could be sacked from their jobs and also received heavy fines.

People were monitored by the 'granny police'. These women made regular household visits to keep track of the status of each family under their jurisdiction and collected information on which women were using contraceptives, the methods used, and which had become pregnant. They then reported to the brigade women's leader, who collected the information and took it to a monthly meeting of the commune birth-planning committee. Each commune was allowed only a quota of births. To satisfy these quotas unmarried young people were persuaded to postpone marriage, couples without children were advised to 'wait their turn', women with unauthorised pregnancies were pressured to have abortions, and those who already had children were urged to use contraception or undergo sterilisation.

Recent changes to the one child policy

In rural areas, where approximately 70 per cent of the people live, a second child is generally allowed after five years, but this usually only applies if the first child is a girl. A third child is allowed among some ethnic minorities and in remote, underpopulated areas.

For urban residents and government employees, the policy is strictly enforced, with a few exceptions. The exceptions include families in which the first child has a disability or both parents work in high-risk occupations (such as mining) or are themselves from one-child families.



Figure 14 Mural promoting the one-child policy