

increased consumer spending on children or new living arrangements for elderly family members, create or amplify demographic changes.

Changes in Age Structure

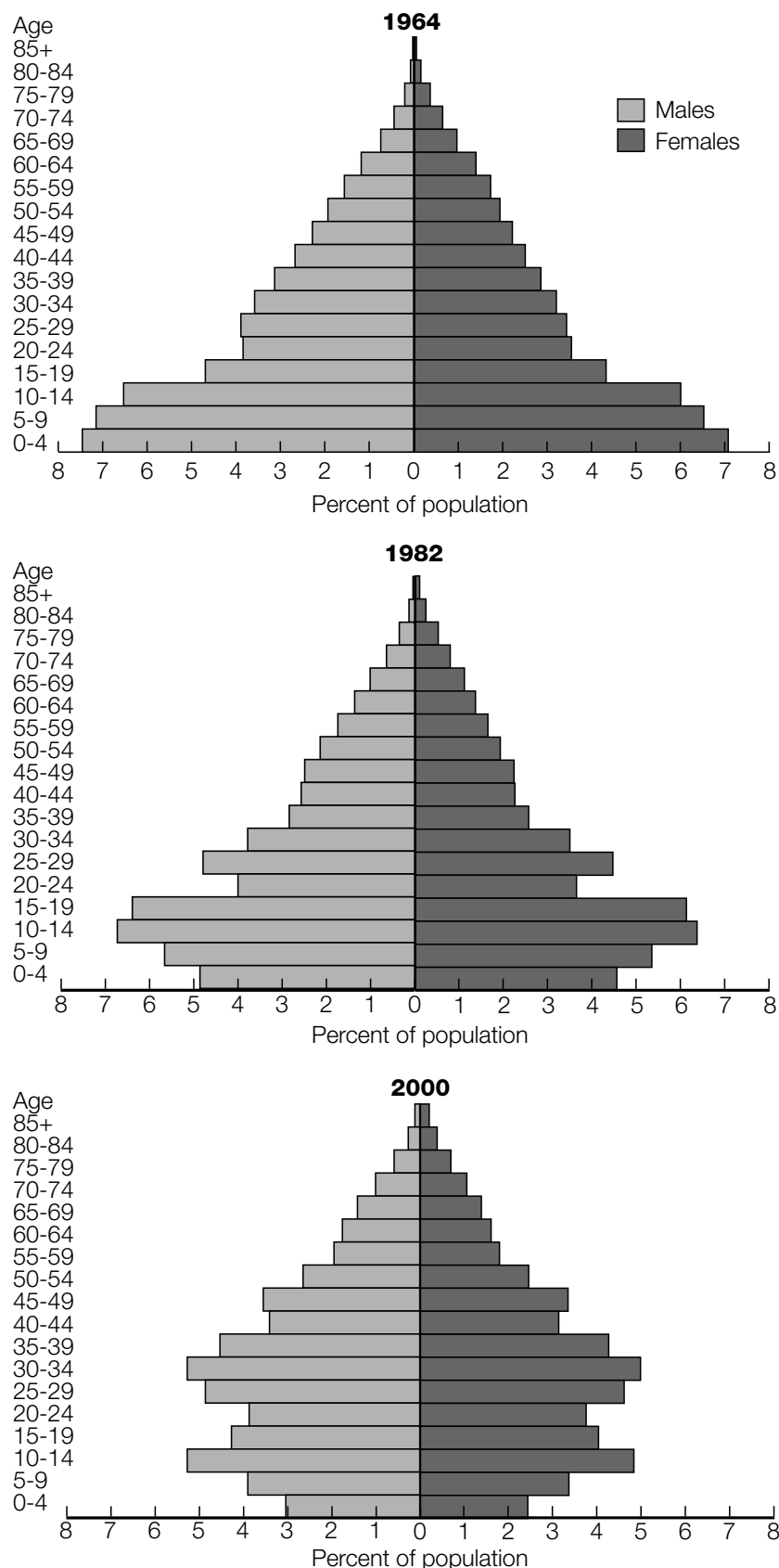
The dramatic changes in China's population structure are clearly visible in China's age and sex profiles since 1964 (see Figure 6). The profiles show the effects of such events as the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s, when birth cohorts were drastically reduced. Declines in mortality and especially fertility have had more lasting effects on the shape of the population. In 1964, with fertility levels still high and mortality just beginning to fall, the population structure had a classic pyramid shape, with a wide base and narrow top. But the population profile reveals the dramatic drop in fertility and surge in infant mortality during the famine spawned by the Great Leap Forward—which took a bite out of the 15-to-24-year-olds in 1964 and the 35-to-44-year-olds in 1982. The 1982 pyramid's narrowing base reveals the effect of sharp fertility declines in the 1970s. The fertility declines are even more evident in the 2000 pyramid.

China's population is aging because of the dramatic fertility declines. The proportion of the population age 60 or older increased from just over 7 percent in 1953 to more than 10 percent in 2000. The elderly share is projected to reach 27 percent in 2050 (see Figure 7, page 22). The oldest groups are growing rapidly in sheer numbers and as a proportion of the total population.

One effect of such rapid aging is that dependency ratios will change; there will be fewer young people to support the country's growing elderly population. In Chinese society, families provide much of the support for elderly family members, and young people are likely to feel the strain of these demographic changes. In fact, many researchers foresee one unintended consequence of a one-child

Figure 6

China's Population by Age and Sex, 1964, 1982, and 2000



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base (www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew.html), accessed April 7, 2004; and tabulations from the China 2000 Census.