

## Missing Girls: A Globalizing Issue

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### Abstract

The recent 50 years have been characterized by an increasing proportion of men in the world's population. In addition to excess female mortality, this rise has been caused by the emergence of prenatal sex selection in Asia and Eastern Europe and has resulted in millions of missing girls. Among all preconditions such as the rise in sex selection technology and the rapid decline of fertility, the preference for sons is at the core of this demographic masculinization and only when it dies out will sex ratio come back to normalcy.

Women's long march toward greater gender equity has been a major landmark of the second half of the twentieth century. Educational expansion, urbanization, and rapid economic development have created many new opportunities for women around the world over the last few decades. Demographic change has in particular brought many benefits to women such as increasing longevity and survival of children, less frequent and more spaced childbearing, lower maternal mortality, and higher spatial mobility. Yet, aggregated population figures suggest on the contrary that women appear to have been subjected to the most systematic form of demographic discrimination over the last 50 years and that as a result, their relative share in the world's population has been regularly declining. Using recent demographic estimates ([United Nations Population Division, 2013](#)), we can observe the gradual increase in the sex ratio, which from 99.6 males per 100 females in 1950 to 101.6 in 2010. This growing proportion of men is a clear sign of a new gendered demography that has swept Asia and other parts of the world during the last decades.

### The Growing Demographic Deficit of Women

The demographic records are clear: women have seen their proportion decline exactly when the world's population as a whole has recorded its most rapid historical increase following the onset of mortality decline during the twentieth century. The first explanation for their reduced share in the overall population is that women have not benefited from increased longevity as much as men. The apparent surplus of men is due in particular to various forms of discrimination causing excess female mortality, especially during childhood ([United Nations, 2011](#)). Another explanation is that female populations may be now affected by discrimination before their birth. In fact, both prenatal and postnatal mechanisms are at the source of this reduction of women's share in the population observed in many countries ([Croll, 2000](#); [Miller, 2001](#)).

We should first remind readers that demography may appear ambivalent when it comes to sex ratios. On the one hand, more men are born than women and the sex ratio at birth (SRB) usually osculates around 105 male births per 100 female births ([Chahnazarian, 1988](#)). On the other hand, mortality is systemically favorable to women – from intrauterine period to old age. Women's life expectancy is often several years ahead of

that of men, for both biological and behavioral reasons, and this differential causes the sex ratio to diminish regularly with age, starting at 105 males per female at birth to 100 during adulthood and even lower levels beyond 50 years of age. When mortality improves and fertility declines as happened almost everywhere over the last 100 years, the average age of the population increases as well as the proportion of women. But this is not what was observed in several countries because of the persistence of excess mortality among girls and the emergence of prenatal sex selection.

These two mechanisms have different social features ([Guilmoto, 2012b](#)). Gender-based excess mortality is an age-old feature of certain demographic régimes. Girls and women deemed of lesser value are in many ways disadvantaged, most commonly by being denied equal access to food, care, and other resources. Girls may be for instance vaccinated in lower proportions than their brothers, get a smaller share of food, or be taken less often to a clinic in case of illness. The most radical form of discrimination is female infanticide, a practice reported in the past in several regions of Asia. Other traces of excess female mortality are less easy to detect in the absence of reliable statistics, but they have been shown to prevail in many countries where mortality rates among women are suspiciously higher than expected. Yet, selective infanticide has now almost completely vanished and recent trends point to a gradual reduction in mortality differentials, with life expectancy now higher for women than men across the world.

The second mechanism relates to the elimination of unborn girls during pregnancy or even earlier during conception. It is never directly observable for want of reliable data on abortions by sex of the fetus. Yet, the SRB has unexpectedly increased in several countries over the last 30 years. It took years for demographers to make sense of this increasing share of male births and to fight off pseudo-biological theories such as the effects of hepatitis epidemics, conflict and stress, or unique physiological conditions in some countries. Yet, the fact that SRB in affected populations inevitably rise with birth order – as parents react to the absence of prior male births – confirms that this is not a biological mechanism, but on the contrary the result of a conscious demographic choice. In fact, apart from issues related to the quality of statistics, the only valid explanation for the relative absence of female births in several Asian countries lies in the emergence of prenatal elimination of female embryos and fetuses, with sex selective abortions

playing a major role in these imbalances. (Early demographic studies can be found in Ramanamma and Bambawale (1980), Zeng et al. (1993), and Park and Cho (1995)).

Prenatal discrimination has indeed become the main driver of sex imbalances at birth over the last 30 years. Table 1 presents recent statistics for a selection of countries where the proportion of male births is unduly high. This comparative table suggests that the issue of adverse SRB levels is not restricted to China and India: sex selection has become a more global phenomenon, with distinct manifestations in several regions of the world. The countries listed here form admittedly a mixed bag of nations with regard to their level of economic development, political systems, and cultural and religious traditions. We find for instance atheistic, Buddhists, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Christian countries in our list. While Asia has long been blamed *en bloc* for prenatal discrimination, it appears that several affected countries are located in Eastern Europe and that conversely, many important Asian countries – from Iran to Japan and Indonesia – appear totally immune to mechanisms of prenatal sex selection.

In Asia, China and India are most prominent with their high SRB and these two countries are the first contributors to the world's imbalances (Attané and Guilmoto, 2007). The SRB has reached the extreme level of 120 male births per 100 female births in parts of India and China after 2000. India's average SRB is lower, but this is mostly due to the fact that many regions in the South or the East of the subcontinent do not practice prenatal sex selection at all. In Northwest India, especially from Punjab to Gujarat, the SRB can in fact be around 120 male births per 100 female births or higher. While lack of reliable estimates prevents us from concluding on Pakistan's probably high level of birth masculinity, the recent rise in the

SRB in Vietnam during the last decade has been well documented. In addition, the almost normal SRB level observed today in South Korea conceals the rise observed during the 1980s, which briefly took birth masculinity to 115 male births per 100 female births before a subsequent decline. South Korea offers indeed the only illustration of a complete sex ratio transition, in which countries observe successively a temporary rise in their SRB and its decline (Guilmoto, 2009).

In Eastern Europe, two distinct regional clusters emerge (Guilmoto and Duthé, 2013). The first is located in the Southern Caucasus and includes three countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) where birth masculinity is almost as high as in China. In spite of their proximity, these three countries have very distinct socioeconomic features as well as cultural and religious traditions and have been united only during the Soviet Union's era. Similarly, the other geographical cluster of high sex ratios at birth centers in Albania includes neighboring Kosovo, Montenegro, and Western Macedonia that were parts of the former Yugoslavia. These regions have not been part of the same polity since the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century.

To this list we should add a scattered set of diasporic populations, immigrants from sex-selecting regions found throughout the world in various countries and whose offspring sex ratios are biased in favor of male births (Dubuc and Coleman, 2007). This finding has been reported for instance among populations of Indian, Korean, and Chinese origin in North America and the United Kingdom. Albanian migrants in Italy and Greece also appear to beget more boys than biology would predict. While this phenomenon has little demographic impact in host countries, it shows that gender discrimination is not so much linked to the social and economic environment in origin countries than to the culture – mindset and attitudes – of people.

This initial geographical cluster suggests that adverse sex ratios tend to cluster in small regions and this is also true within countries as high values observed in India's Northwest and Vietnam's Red River Delta demonstrate. This obvious cultural dimension of gender discrimination goes deeper than ethnic, religious, or linguistic affiliation. For instance, the three countries of the South Caucasus have almost similar adverse levels of SRB in spite of deep religious, linguistic, and political variations. But there are also social variations, such as differences between rural and urban areas and across socioeconomic groups. Detailed studies show in particular that the richer strata tend initially to discriminate more strongly against female births than the poor. All these features help us understand why and how prenatal sex selection takes place (Guilmoto, 2012b).

### The Causes of Gender Discrimination Regarding Offspring

Countries have often been reluctant to acknowledge the existence of prenatal sex selection, blaming faulty statistics or biological hazards for distorted sex ratios. It is true that prenatal sex selection tends to project an unsavory image of societies practicing it, but demographic evidence – from birth registration figures to census and survey results – has gradually been

**Table 1** Estimates of the sex ratio at birth in various countries around 2010

Country	Sex ratio at birth
<b>East and Southeast Asia</b>	
China	117.8
Singapore	107.5
South Korea	106.7
Vietnam	111.2
<b>South Asia</b>	
India	110.5
Pakistan	109.9
<b>Caucasus</b>	
Azerbaijan	116.5
Armenia	114.9
Georgia	111.8
<b>Southeast Europe</b>	
Albania	111.7
Kosovo	109.7
Montenegro	109.8

The normal sex ratio at birth is 105 male births per 100 female births.

Estimates from birth registration and demographic surveys. Source: Guilmoto, C.Z., 2012b. Sex Imbalances at Birth. Current Trends, Consequences and Policy Implications, UNFPA, Bangkok and Guilmoto, C.Z., Duthé, G., 2013. Masculinization of births in Eastern Europe. Population & Societies 506, 1–4.

shared to civil society and governments via academic and media reports. Once recognized, sex imbalances at birth tend to be attributed in each country to a specific set of local factors such as the dowry paid by parents of girls in India, strict family planning rules and Confucian precepts in East Asia, or economic crises and conflicts in Eastern Europe. Yet, the publicity received by these 'local narratives' of prenatal discrimination tends to obscure the commonalities of a demographic phenomenon that occurred almost simultaneously across Eurasia. Prenatal sex selection from Albania to Korea does in fact follow similar mechanisms with almost identical root causes. Sex selection is simply a recent adaptive behavior by couples to avoid births of the unwanted sex and it corresponds to a rational strategy in response to a set of changing constraints and opportunities. To understand its logic, we need to distinguish its three indispensable preconditions: the perceived benefits of sex selection guided by gender preference, the availability of means to implement it, and the additional urgency imposed by reduced family size (Guilmoto, 2009). I examine these three factors separately (Figure 1).

### Son Preference

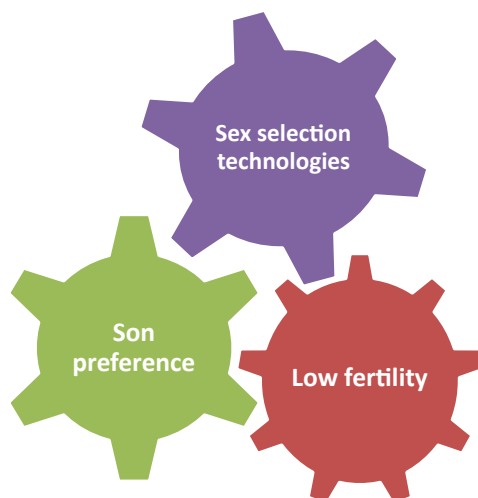
Son preference constitutes the primary factor behind prenatal and postnatal discrimination and it plays the role of the 'demand factor' in our equation: births of girls are avoided because of a skewed gender valuation system in which boys get preeminence. When given a choice about abortion, food sharing or health expenses, some families tend automatically to favor boys. In most cases, this is because they want to ensure the birth of at least one boy. Put differently, what parents want to expressly avoid is a family with no son. The cultural and political contexts may widely differ, but the pressing need for a male progeny is the common trait from the Balkans to East Asia (John et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2011; Kaser, 2008). Here are a few illustrations in the way this preference for sons plays out in different settings.

Girl children may first be seen as more 'expensive' to bring up, mostly for security or honor-related reasons. When older,

young women are also seen as more difficult to marry off, and this is particularly true in South Asia when marriage payments come essentially from the bride's family. But the low valuation of women becomes more obvious after marriage and sex-selecting countries inevitably correspond to areas where married women leave their natal family to join their husband's. As a result, bringing up and educating women are perceived ultimately as a loss and equivalent to 'watering the neighbor's garden' since all the parents' efforts will benefit another family. This feeling is due to the fact that newlywed women will become an active member of their husband's family in kinship systems characterized by strong virilocality or patrilocality. In patrilineal societies, married sons stay close to their parents and often coreside with them. They often share residence, agricultural land, or business interests with their parents. They contribute to most aspects of their parents' well-being in terms of physical protection, affection, economic support, and material assistance. In societies with limited individual instruments of social security (health insurance or pension benefits), family solidarity is a key to old age support and to withstand unanticipated health or economic shocks. Without a son, parents would be clearly at risk especially since customs sharply disapprove of being supported by one's married daughters. In patrilineal societies, solidarity and living arrangements within the family are strictly asymmetrical and exclude married daughters that belong to another family by virtue of marriage.

Support to the patrilocal family receives a very strong social sanction in the form of 'filial piety', held as a prime virtue in many Asian countries. But this lifelong support exerted strictly along the male line also has implications beyond the life of parents since many religious or traditional systems of belief also require male progeny after their death. Sons may be indispensable in funerary rituals or ancestors' worship, so that the need for sons has an indefinite horizon. To these immaterial benefits of male children, we should also add the status and honor symbol of fathering sons and perpetuating the family name. Couples with no son are lambasted and discriminated against for failing to prolong the patrilineal lineage, with effects ranging from constant sneering to inferior status for men and from domestic violence to repudiation for women. Similarly, the birth of sons is celebrated with great fanfare when that of girls is often a source of lament (Croll, 2000).

This entrenched preference for sons is often seen as an effect of wider gender inequity. It should not, for son preference is often unrelated to many other manifestations of gender discrimination at work, in the family, workplace, or public spaces. Women in China and Vietnam have for instance reached a high level of social and economic autonomy, but with apparently little effect on traditional bias against girl children. Conversely, we can see no prenatal sex selection in many countries where women are otherwise discriminated against by law and officially barred from access to the same economic, legal, or political position as men. When investigated further, son preference and the gender hierarchy it epitomizes appear closely linked to the nature of kinship systems that determine particular marriage, inheritance, and coresidence customs. All observations made earlier on the factors behind son preference presuppose a strictly patrilineal and patrilocal family organization. In more bilateral societies, when



**Figure 1** The three preconditions for prenatal sex selection.

the mother's and father's family are on a somewhat equal footing, discrimination against girls simply does not make sense. This can be illustrated by the absence of sex selection in countries close to China, India, and Vietnam such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, or Indonesia. Kinship rules hold a larger sway than religious or ethnic affiliation when it comes to gender preference and they are strictly enforced to ensure the reproduction of family systems (Chakraborty and Kim, 2010).

### Technology and Fertility Decline

In addition to gender bias, there are two other indispensable factors for sex selection to occur (Guilmoto, 2012b). The next precondition is a typical 'supply factor' related to the availability of effective techniques to avoid female births. Sex selection has been made possible at this scale only because of a recent technological breakthrough. Of course, methods for influencing the birth of a son have long existed in son-preferring societies. In India, pilgrimages to temples and other specific rituals are for instance thought of as a way to improve the chance of having boys. Prescriptions related to the timing of the intercourse and to the diet of pregnant women are also supposed to affect birth masculinity in many settings. But these prenatal 'folk methods' were probably of limited effectiveness. Postnatal methods of sex selection were also common, starting with female infanticide, a most radical method long attested in parts of South and East Asia. Selective infanticide was often linked by hypergamic norms among higher-status groups, but at times it simply represented a crude way to avoid a redundant female birth. A more common way to eliminate female children is through neglect after birth. Higher mortality rates are the undeniable outcome of discriminatory attitudes toward daughters that translate into passive discrimination. Yet, all these techniques are mostly remnants of the "ancien régime" of sex selection. In fact, they were all rather ineffective, low-tech methods, with the exception of infanticide, which for its part entailed huge psychological costs.

The first change took place when modern contraception became available, allowing women to stop childbearing once they had reached the desired gender composition. As a result, many families end with a boy as the last child as is observed in Vietnam or India. This strategy is definitely biased toward boys, but it has no impact whatsoever on the overall sex ratio of births that remains only determined by random biological factors. The contraception revolution also pointed to a new trend, the desire to control family size and the new possibility to actively avoid unwanted pregnancies. At about the same time, the new prenatal diagnostic techniques developed in industrialized countries started to spread in richer Asian countries during the 1980s, making sex detectable after 3 months of pregnancy. After 1980, many clinics in Asia were already offering sex diagnosis services. When this technology hit countries like India, women immediately understood that sex detection could allow them to opt for sex-selective abortion of female fetuses when they only needed a son (Ramanamma and Bambawale, 1980). Combined with abortion, prenatal sex diagnosis provided a unique tool to implement a more systematic form of sex selection (Miller, 2001).

In the former socialist world, from Eastern Europe to Vietnam, access to modern technology emerged only with the

introduction of the new private health care facilities that proved more flexible to respond to the emerging demand for sex selection. In some other countries, the main issue remains access to abortion, which may be strictly outlawed or limited to lifesaving situations. Ultrasonography has gradually become both relatively easy to implement and inexpensive after a rapid fall in the price of scanning machines. More recently, new methods have emerged. Some allow the early detection of the sex of the fetus, using blood of women during the second month of pregnancy. Other high-tech techniques are linked to *in vitro* fertilization or preimplantation genetic diagnosis. These techniques are getting common in industrialized countries, but remain often inaccessible in Asia. Yet, what these new developments suggest is that future advances in reproductive technologies will inevitably make prenatal sex selection easier and that abortion may soon be outdated as a method to avoid unwanted girls (Dondorp et al., 2013).

Fertility level is the last of the three preconditions of this analytical framework and is the easiest to understand. It stems from the impact of fertility decline on the gender composition of the family. With six children, the odds that parents get six daughters and remain without a son are indeed very low (1.4%). But with two children, the risk becomes much higher (about 24%). In other words, parents who wanted a son in the past were most likely to have one after successive births. But as fertility declines, the probability of parents remaining sonless increases. At the same time, women in need of a son are also less ready to undergo repeated pregnancies and to have unwanted daughters. Increasingly risk-averse and economically conscious parents refuse to submit themselves to a biological roulette and are now in a position to decide both the quality and the quantity of children they will have.

In addition to these social and economic considerations, family planning regulations introduced in several countries such as China and Vietnam have increased the 'marginal cost' of an additional child through various fines and penalties. Some have projected that fertility control in China was the main cause for sex selection. Yet, the skewed sex ratio also observed among other Chinese populations in Taiwan or in North America suggests that family planning was only one factor behind skewed sex ratios.

### The Implications of Sex Selection

Gender discrimination plays out in two sequences. The first one is the immediate disappearance of girls at birth (or during early childhood) while the second one refers to future demographic disturbances among adults. The routine elimination of girls before their birth is no doubt the most extreme symptom of women's contemporary undervaluation that goes well beyond all other forms of discrimination. Since Amartya Sen's pioneer paper on missing women (Sen, 1990), we can measure the extent of the resulting gap across populations. Within families, the imbalance is mostly invisible since parents who abort female fetuses often have had prior girls. But when compared across larger communities, figures point inescapably to a surplus of boys. It is in fact possible to get a better idea of the actual rift between male and female by using demographic estimates on the age and sex distribution

for entire populations. 'Missing women' are women that ought to be found in population censuses if the sex distribution was not skewed toward men. By applying sex ratios by age computed for nondiscriminating countries, from Latin America to Europe, and correcting for age and mortality variations, it is possible to assess the number of women that are apparently missing from demographic records in Asia and Eastern Europe.

Using such a technique in conjunction with the United Nations Population Division population estimates, we obtain a total gender gap of 117 million women missing in 2010 (Table 2). Most of them should be found in China (66 million) and India (43 million). This large figure reflects in part the recent rise in sex-selective abortions, but also the cumulated toll of excess female mortality in the past. It is equivalent to the female population of Brazil or Indonesia, respectively the fifth and fourth most populous countries in the world. It represents about 8% of the female population in affected countries.

Among these missing women, we find 39 million of them would be below 20 years of age. This corresponds to the cohorts born since 1990, covering roughly the period when prenatal sex determination started to spread outside industrialized countries. The proportion of missing girls is especially high in China where they account for 14% of the women below 20 years of age. In India as a whole, where prenatal sex selection is less frequent, 13 million girls can be estimated as missing, but the contribution of excess mortality to this gap is also significant in India. China and India taken together account for 95% of the gender gap among the youth. The gender gap remains close to or above 5% in the Republic of Korea and in East-European countries.

A second way to look at sex imbalances at birth consists in examining their longtime consequences. This analysis starts

with a set of demographic projections, in which the SRB is adjusted according to different future scenarios. These demographic simulations provide a precise description of future distortions in the age and sex structures of affected countries such as China and India. Of primary interest is the ripple effect of current sex imbalances at birth onto the young adult population after two or three decades. Projections show that even in the optimistic scenario of a rapid return of birth masculinity back to normalcy, men in China and India are bound face a serious 'marriage squeeze' in the years to come. Men will vastly outnumber women of marriageable age and saturate the marriage market for several decades, with a 60% surplus of prospective grooms over potential brides. Demographers have worked different adaptive scenarios whereby men would defer marriage by several years, but the magnitude and duration of birth imbalances preclude any demographic adjustment (Guilmoto, 2012a). The size of this 'male surplus' will be clearly too big to be offset by international migrations of potential brides or grooms. Moreover, trends observed elsewhere in East Asia or Western Europe suggest that women are likely to marry older and in smaller proportions in the future, a change bound to exacerbate the squeeze effect of their demographic deficit on the marriage market. Consequently, not only will a lot of men have to marry much later than in the past, but a rising proportion among them will also not be able to find a wife at all. The necessary readjustment of marriage systems will happen in patrilineal countries where family reproduction precisely depends on the male line and where only a small proportion of men remained unmarried in the past. Compared to Western societies where both male and female singlehood have long existed and where same-sex unions are gradually legalized, marriage systems in patriarchal societies are rather inflexible and allow limited leeway in case of a significant male surplus in the marriage market.

This unheard of situation has given rise to many speculations about its upcoming repercussions, ranging from rising male homosexuality and HIV AIDS contamination to human trafficking and international conflicts (Hudson and den Boer, 2004). But research recently conducted in some of the most vulnerable areas of China and India confirms the mounting pressure in women-scarce rural areas with significant social, sanitary, and demographic consequences on affected communities (Kaur, 2013; Li et al., 2010). Men resort to bride import from other, poorer regions when they can, and have at times to rely on existing criminal organizations for that purpose. An even higher proportion of men from underprivileged backgrounds seem condemned to involuntary celibacy, with married life becoming a new unattainable status because of their economic or social situation. In fact, if sex selection has mostly affected girls of higher status – since prenatal gender bias is more common among the rich – the price will be later paid mostly by men from the poorest strata. Sex selection is often considered a typical environmental Tragedy of the Commons in which opportunistic behavior by rational individuals leads later to the depletion of the resources and to a collective catastrophe. But a closer gender and class analysis suggests that the dividends and retributions stemming from the manipulation of biology will not be equally and simultaneously shared across society.

**Table 2** Gender gap (missing women) by country in 2010

	Number of missing women			
	All women		Women below 20 years	
	In thousands	%	In thousands	%
Afghanistan	1097	7.2	502	5.7
Albania	40 <sup>a</sup>	2.5	15	3.1
Armenia	31 <sup>a</sup>		31	7.4
Azerbaijan	104		104	7.8
Bangladesh	2020	2.8	354	1.2
China	66 163	10.3	23 687	14.2
Hong Kong	27 <sup>a</sup>		27	4.4
Georgia	19 <sup>a</sup>		19	3.8
India	43 267	7.3	13 197	5.6
Montenegro	2 <sup>a</sup>		2	2.7
Nepal	114 <sup>a</sup>		114	1.7
Pakistan	2907	3.4	281	0.7
Singapore	114	4.5	11	1.9
South Korea	533	2.2	260	4.8
Vietnam	245 <sup>a</sup>		245	1.7
Total	116 685	7.7	38 850	7.6

Numbers given in thousands.

Percentages computed over the corresponding female population.

<sup>a</sup>No measurable gender gap among adults.

Source: Guilmoto, C.Z., 2012b. Sex Imbalances at Birth. Current Trends, Consequences and Policy Implications, UNFPA, Bangkok.

## Future Directions in SRBs

No one believes though that current sex imbalances at birth reflect a new demographic equilibrium and that they will persist indefinitely. Skewed sex ratios appear socially unsustainable in the long run. But this analysis suggests that prenatal sex selection depends on the conjunction of three preconditions and some are unlikely to improve in the near future. Access to sex selection technology will continue to expand, even if some countries have actively attempted to ban prenatal sex diagnosis. Techniques to influence the sex of the births will continue to improve and spread across the world, making sex selection easier to implement than today. With countries offering state-of-the-art preimplantation technologies such as the United States or Taiwan, we may even expect the development of a new form of sex selection tourism. In a similar fashion, there is no reason to expect any significant turnaround in the low fertility situation that initially encouraged parents to plan the sex composition of their family. Even where stricter family planning regulations are relaxed in East Asia, low and ultralow fertility will largely remain and prevent parents from having more children in the quest for a son.

A reduction in son preference is therefore the only factor likely to bring about a lasting change. The bias against girls seems to have hardly changed over the last decades in view of persistent high sex ratios, but there are signs of a downturn. South Korea's experience in sex selection shows that the preference for boys over girls can recede and bring the sex ratio down to a normal level. In this country, patriarchal kinship institutions inherited from Confucian traditions have given way to less asymmetrical family structures in which daughters play a greater role. This evolution has been mostly attributed to the effect of social and economic change and to the new educational and employment opportunities offered to women by the rapid development that took place since the 1970s (Chung and Dasgupta, 2007). The prohibition of sex selection was also introduced and enforced right from the 1980s. In fact, the policies recently set up by many governments in other countries to enforce gender equity in social relationships and in family laws and sensitization campaigns can only accelerate this transition away from entrenched male bias. Apart from South Korea, there are now discernible indications of decline in birth masculinity levels in several parts of India and China, which suggests that the downturn, however slow, is probably already underway. The overall picture remains complex since in spite of a potential decline in the two largest world populations, prenatal sex selection might still spread in the future to new countries in Africa or in the Middle East when fertility declines and access to prenatal reproductive technologies progresses.

*See also:* Dowries and Other Marital Transfers; East Asian Studies; Gender; Fertility Transition: China; Fertility Transition:

East Asia; Fertility Transition: South Asia; Gender and Feminist Studies in Geography; Gender and Place; Gender and Women's Studies, Applied Research On; Gender, Economics of; Gender: Anthropological Aspects; Russian and Post-Soviet Studies: Gender; Sex Selective Abortion.

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