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Human Capital and Fertility in Chinese Clans Before Modern Growth

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This paper studies the pre-industrial origins of modern-day fertility decline. The setting is in Anhwei Province, China over the 13th to 19th centuries, a period well before the onset of China's demographic transition and industrialization. There are four main results. First, we observe non-Malthusian effects in which high income households had relatively fewer children. Second, higher income households had relatively more educated sons, consistent with their greater ability to support major educational investments. Third, those households that invested in education had fewer children, suggesting that households producing educated children were reallocating resources away from child quantity and towards child quality. Fourth, over time, demand for human capital fell significantly. The most plausible reason is the declining returns to educational investments. The findings point to a role for demography in explaining China's failure to industrialize early on.



This paper is available as [PDF \(333 K\)](#) or [via email](#).

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