

FAMILY POLICIES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION IN ASIA WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Associate Professor Dr Shanthi Thambiah
Gender Studies Programme
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Malaya

Introduction

- ▶ There is remarkable diversity between countries in Asia in terms of the types of family policies implemented in these countries.
- ▶ Family policies contain both an assurance to upholding the traditional family and an acceptance that the diversity of contemporary family forms which demands a more pragmatic approach.
- ▶ Most Asian governments recognize the importance of the family however family issues are gradually declining in importance on the national and international development stage which requires country level obligations to ensure inclusive and equitable support to families with a focus on gender equality and empowerment in order to achieve the SDG goals.
- ▶ The family can both protect and be detrimental to women's and girls' lives and well-being (Collin 1991; Trask 2015). It is therefore, of utmost importance that a gender perspective is brought into family policies at the formulation stage that integrates the SDG goals.

Social Inclusion

- ▶ Nancy Fraser (1997) has argued forcefully that justice today requires redistribution and recognition.
- ▶ She has proposed an analysis with two irreducible dimensions of justice - redistribution and recognition.
- ▶ The point is that there is a real dilemma between an ideal about social equality based on socio-economic redistribution and an ideal of equity based on cultural recognition. Both conditions must be satisfied if participatory parity is to be achieved.
- ▶ Fraser's three key concepts of redistribution, recognition and participation can be useful in our understanding of social inclusion.

Gender Perspective

- ▶ The lack of gender equality with respect to economic, social, educational and employment opportunities continues despite the commitments and efforts of governments in Asia to this issue.
- ▶ The unequal relationship between men and women, remains rooted in cultural norms and social relationship (Kabeer 2005).
- ▶ Feminist scholars have criticized mainstream analyses of inequality and welfare states for their neglect of gender aspects (Fraser 1989; Gordon 1990; Leira 1992; Lewis 1997; O'Connor 1993, 1996; Pateman 1988; Siim 1988; Williams 1995).
- ▶ They argued that gender is one of the important factors that must be considered in analyses of inequality and welfare states.
- ▶ Analyses of the role of gender in distributive processes brings a worthwhile unit of analysis to the fore which is the family and the household which are typically taken as basic observational units.

Some Areas Needing a Gender Perspective on Family Policies in Asia

► Declining fertility

Region	1990	2000	2010
East Asia			
China	2.3	1.7	1.6
Hong Kong	1.3	1.0	1.2
Korea	1.6	1.5	1.2
Taiwan	1.8	1.7	1.1
Japan	1.5	1.4	1.4
South Asia			
Sri Lanka	2.5	2.2	2.3
Southeast Asia			
Philippines	4.3	3.8	3.1
Malaysia	3.3	3.4*	2.2

*1995

Source: United Nations Population Division, 2013
For Malaysia - Thambiah 2010

Declining fertility

- ▶ Fertility decline began in Japan much earlier than the other countries and reached replacement level by the 1970s.
- ▶ Declining fertility
- ▶ The fertility rates in Singapore, Korea and Taiwan declined rapidly in the 1960s and the most rapid decline in China was in the 1970s and 1980s.
- ▶ The mean age of first birth has increased dramatically in most countries due to better access to education for females and the increase in mean age at first marriage. Given the link between marriage and fertility the impact of delayed marriages can be linked to declines in fertility (Jones 2007).
- ▶ The Asian 'flight from marriage' for women is being observed in several Asian countries (Jones 2012).
- ▶ In addition crude divorce rates also grew steadily and significantly a larger percentage of divorces are those that involve children (Yoon-Jeong Shin et. al.2014).

Declining fertility

- ▶ There is in general a preference for two-child family and this ‘unmet need’ for children could provide a space in which policies could be implemented to support childbearing (Philipov 2009). This unmet need was observed for Japan (Suzuki 2003), for Korea (Kim 2003), Singapore (Yap 2009).
- ▶ So the fertility decline observed should be explained as not just the choice of couples but the existence of barriers to fulfilling that need. So for these advanced Asian countries as stated by McDonald (2013) that they are in a ‘low-fertility trap’.

Declining fertility

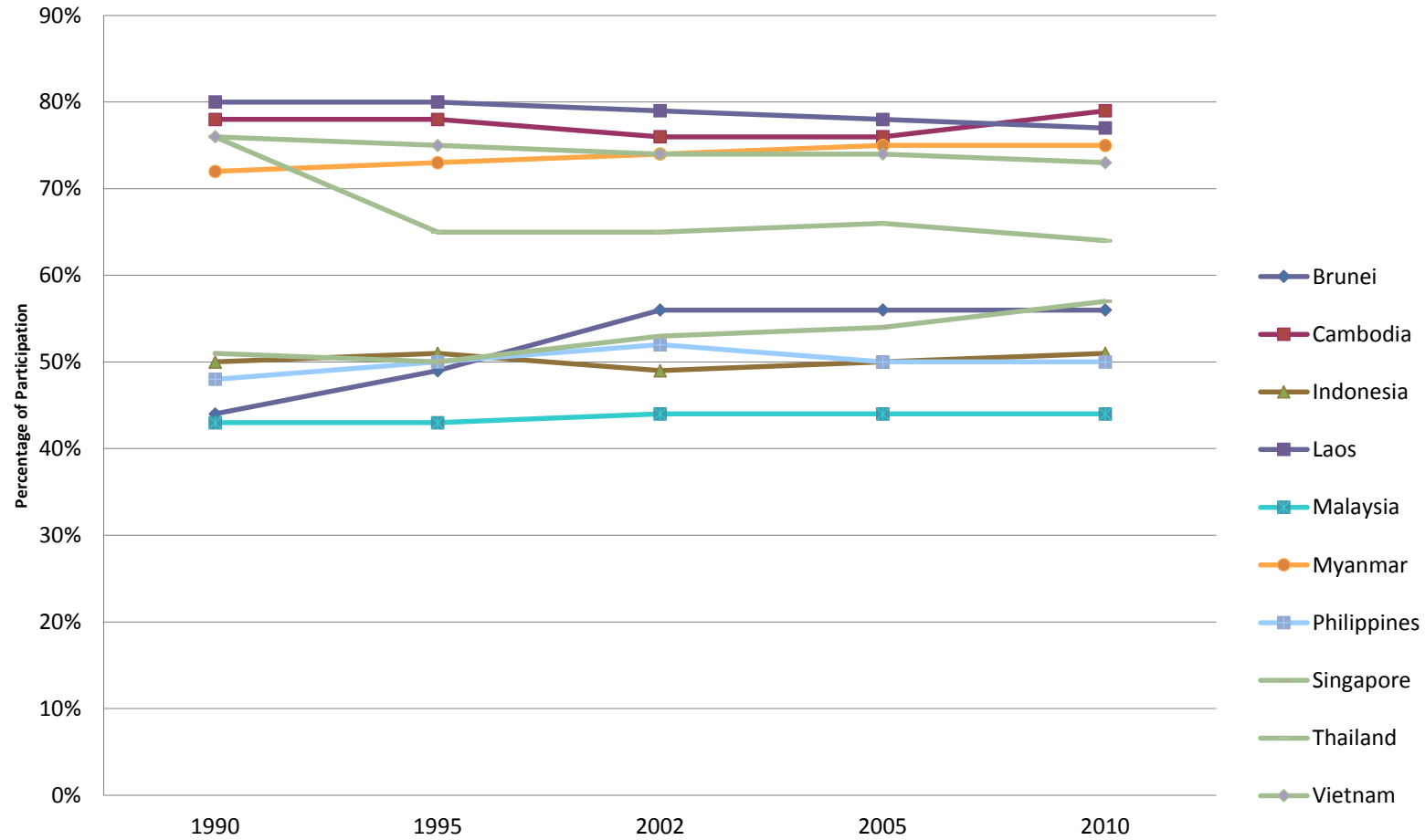
- ▶ Policy initiatives - are in the form of cash benefits to child rearing households and there are three types cash benefits:
 - ▶ i. Universal support (Japan - child allowance)
 - ▶ ii. Non-universal but expanded support (Korea and Singapore's baby bonus)
 - ▶ iii. Support for underprivileged children (China, Hong Kong, Malaysia)
- ▶ Although these policies aim at social inclusion of children through cash benefits but its redistributive role have minimal impact on gender equality and its outcome for fulfilling the 'unmet need' for children will not be achieved due to its lack of a gender perspective in the policy domain.

Female Employment and the Family

- ▶ The female employment rate in most East-Asian countries, is on the rise since the 1990s.
- ▶ The countries that show a relatively high female employment rate since 2010 include some developing countries, such as Vietnam, China and Thailand.
- ▶ The reason for the relatively high employment rate among women is because a large number of women in those countries still engage in the traditional agriculture or informal sectors (Yoon-Jeong Shin et. al.2014).
- ▶ Brunei and Singapore which are high income countries in ASEAN show upward trends of female labour force participation rates. Thailand which is an upper middle income country in Southeast Asia has about a 20% higher female labour force participation rate compared to Malaysia.

Female Employment and the Family

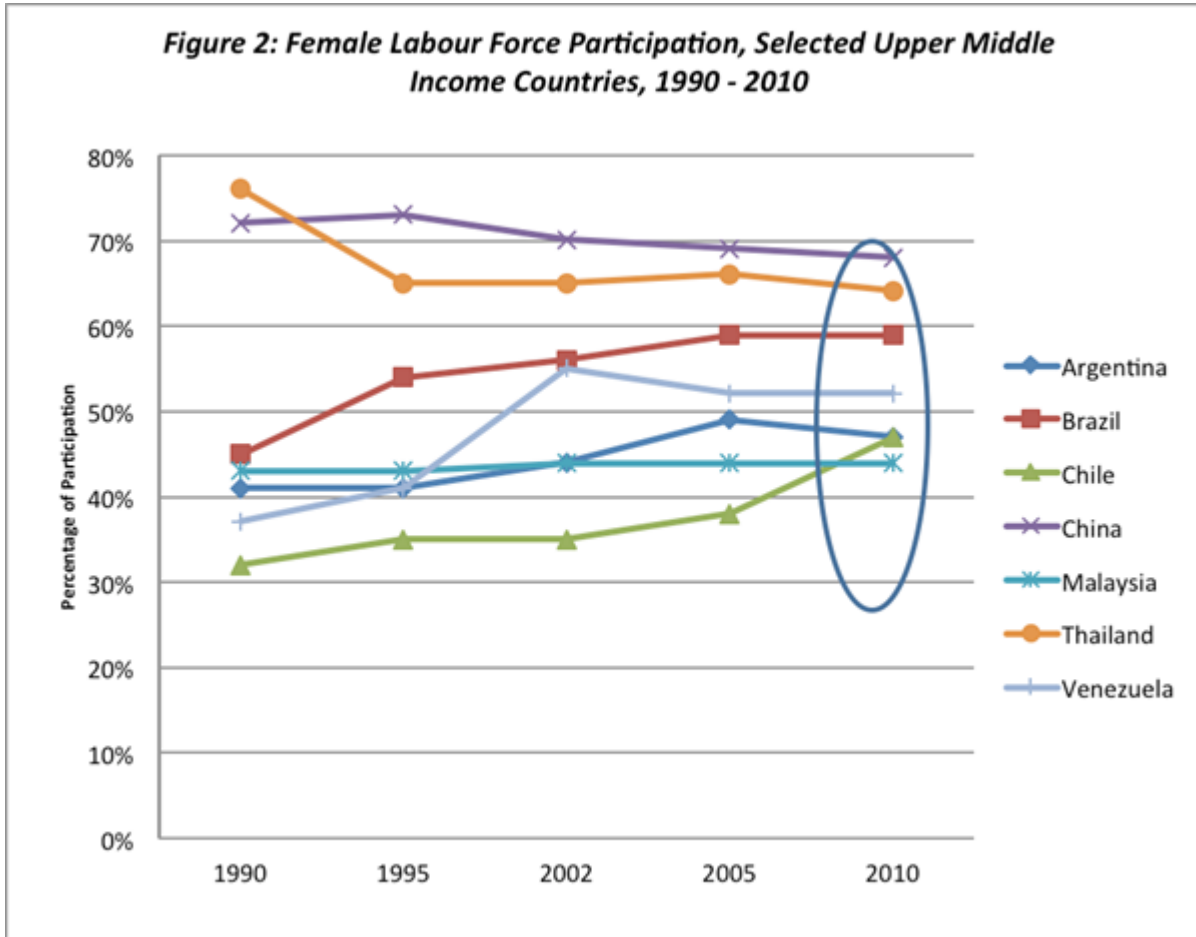
Figure 1: Female Labour Force Participation, South East Asia, 1990 - 2010



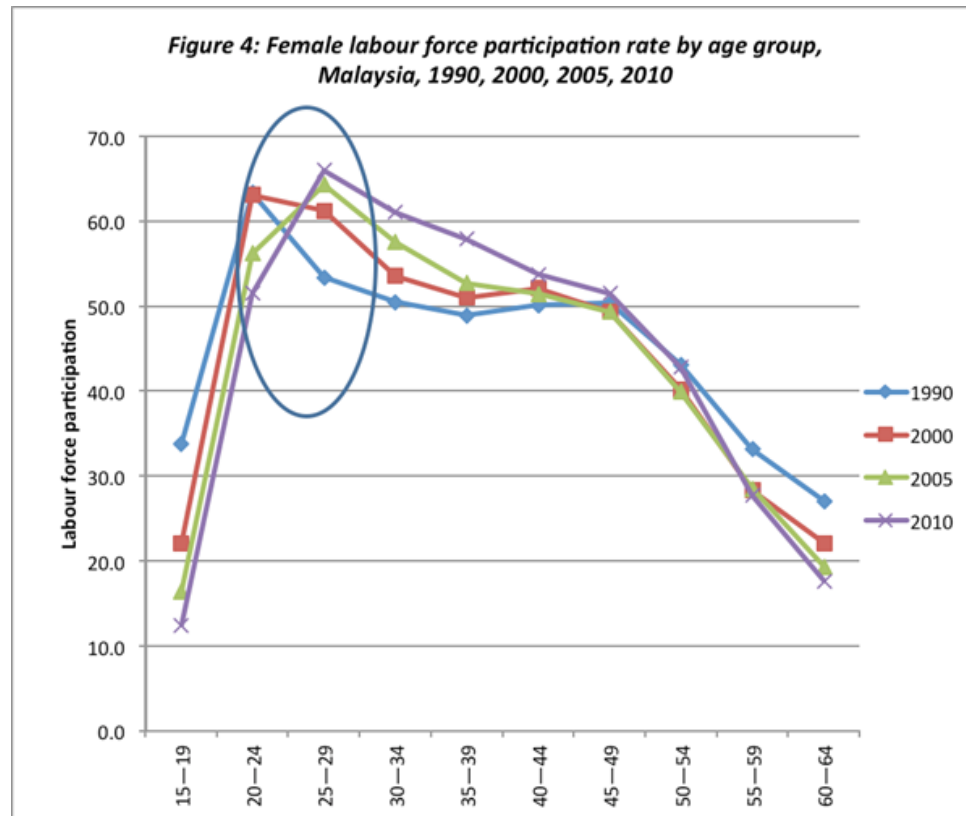
Female Employment and the Family

- ▶ It is also important to compare Malaysia with other upper middle income countries which are enjoying an upward trend in female labour force participation rates.
- ▶ Upper middle income countries have an upward trend in female labour force participation rates. Countries like Chile, Argentina and Venezuela had lower female labour force participation rates in the 1990s compared to Malaysia but these countries show an upward trend in female labour force participation rate compared to Malaysia.
- ▶ Brazil shows a healthy and consistent upward trend but started off at the same level with Malaysia in the 1990s and by 1995 had overtaken Malaysia by a 10 percentage point and has since been moving upwards. China has the highest female labour force participation rate among the upper middle income countries (see figure 2) in Asia.

Female Employment and the Family



Female Employment and the Family



Female Employment and the Family

- ▶ Due to the difficulties of balancing work and family, many mothers with children drop out of the labour market and this hinders their career building.
- ▶ The exit from the workforce for women from the 25-29 to 30-34 and also 35-39 age groups is most likely linked to marriage, childbearing and child rearing.

Female Employment and the Family

- ▶ Policy initiatives in Asia - with an increasing female labour force participation rate in East and South East Asia, the lack of a work-family balance policy is directly related to women dropping out of the labour force because women are predominantly doing the child rearing and childcare.
- ▶ Malaysia, China, Hong Kong and most Southeast Asian countries need a general policy direction as implemented in some East Asian countries where childcare and elderly care are transformed from being solely the responsibility of the women in the family to a public-family partnership.
- ▶ Prolonged parental leaves, providing childcare and childcare subsidies and extending public care services should be the appropriate policy measures that can halt women from dropping out of the workforce and poorer women from re-entering the informal economy.

Female Employment and the Family

- ▶ Bringing a gender perspective into the family policy domain by addressing the social exclusion of mothers and women taking care of children from the labour market is paramount in ensuring justice to women by removing obstacles to income earning potential and facilitating the process of women being financially independent and therefore less at risk of being subjected to domestic violence and other forms of vulnerabilities.

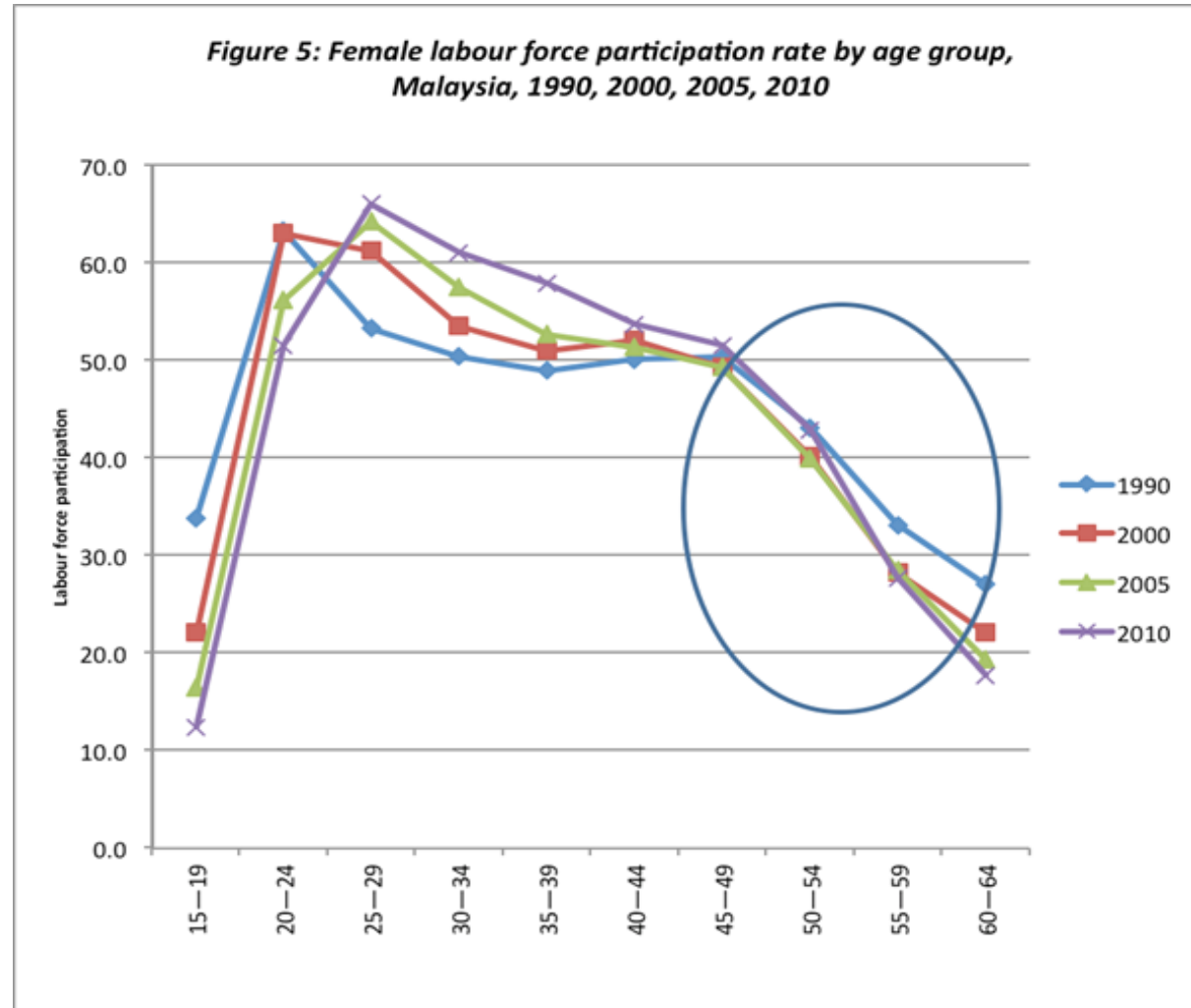
An Aging Asia and Care of the Elderly

- ▶ An aging society is progressing in Asia but issues related to how to care for the elderly is only beginning to get the attention of Asian governments. Caring for the elderly has been predominantly a family responsibility in Asia and public investment for the elderly could not meet with the requirements for the elderly - inter-generational contract is seen as more important than social contractors for individual well-being.
- ▶ There is a need to examine types of adult child - parent relationship and social class in Asian countries which is experiencing an aging population. This will reveal issues related to intergenerational solidarity.

An Aging Asia and Care of the Elderly

- ▶ Like childcare care of the elderly is also mostly done by women leading to women dropping out of the labor force to care for the elderly in Asia. For example in Malaysia as shown in figure 5 below there is a steep decline in the percentage (8-9%) of women in the labour force in the age group 45-49 to 50-54 and declines even more steeply by 15.1% from the age group 50-54 to 55-59.

An Aging Asia and Care of the Elderly



An Aging Asia and Care of the Elderly

- ▶ These women who are dropping out of the labour force for elder care will lose out in terms of pension and social security when they are older risking vulnerability and poverty in old age.
- ▶ There is a need to stop women dropping out of the labour force at later age with governments in Asia paying more attention to elder care especially in the Malaysian context.

Conclusion: Family Policy for Social Inclusion from a Gender Perspective

- ▶ Developing countries in Asia have experienced changes in family structure and relations of family togetherness with decreases in family fertility. Asia needs to work on family policies dealing with these changes in the family. It is a big challenge for most Asian countries because they are struggling even with formulating social welfare policy for the disadvantaged people.
- ▶ The trends that is changing the family such as the ageing population, declining fertility rate and decline in the commitment to marriage and in family solidarity such as higher divorce rates and declining co-residence with the elder generations are becoming prevalent.

Conclusion

- ▶ In Asia both children and the elderly have relied on their families especially women to meet their care needs. This division of labour is not sustainable and is an obstacle to social inclusion of women which hinders the redistributive role of paid employment for women.
- ▶ The traditional family model with its traditional gender roles which is expecting women to bear the dual responsibilities of care giving and wage earning is no longer just. There is a need for a pro-egalitarian model for family policy to promote gender equality.
- ▶ Government need to take responsibility to help women to combine paid work and family responsibility and to get fathers to play a larger role in household chores, elder care and child care.

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▶ Thank You