

# **Major Trends Affecting Families in East and Southeast Asia**

## **Final Report**

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## **Introduction**

This report discusses five areas of development affecting families at the dawn of the new millennium. These areas are: (1) changes in family structure; (2) demographic transformation; (3) migration; (4) the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and (5) the impact of globalization on families. The analysis of major trends in these five areas will be made from the perspective of family policy options to assist families in need and to facilitate family life. A note on methodology precedes the discussion of these five areas.

## **Methodology**

There are five main global trends identified by United Nations experts in the comparative analysis of family formation and family structure. More specifically, UN experts assume that families are (1) facing changes in structure leading towards "smaller size households, delayed marriage and childbearing, increases in divorce rates and single parenthood"; (2) undergoing demographic transformation characterized by "aging"; (3) affected by a rise in migration; (4) suffering the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and (5) trying to cope with the effects of globalization.

As these are generalizations from global figures, it was imperative to verify the presence of those trends in East and Southeast Asian countries before proceeding to the analysis of causes. Thus, this paper provides data on the five areas of development and identifies the nature of these trends in East and Southeast Asia.

The search for empirical verification covered two major sources: (a) national population census data and official statistics published by national governments over the past three decades; and (b) country population figures collected or compiled by international organizations such as the Common Database of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Statistical Division, United Nations; the UN Yearbook of Statistics, and world statistics published by the World Health Organization, UNESCO, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank, among others. The complete list of sources is provided in the bibliography. These sources provide printed information as well as electronic information through their websites. Both types of information were utilized in this study. The website addresses of sources are indicated in the bibliography whenever applicable.

The world region known as East and Southeast Asia comprises seventeen countries or economies: seven in East Asia and ten in Southeast Asia (World Bank, 2002:241). The seven East Asia countries are: China, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea DR, Korea Rep, Macao and Taiwan. The ten Southeast Asian countries are: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. A major constraint to the comparative analysis of these seventeen

countries is the unevenness of data reporting and available population statistics. While some countries (for example, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore) publish periodic and detailed figures on a wide range of population characteristics and census data, other countries publish only general indicators and/or only irregularly (for example, China, Malaysia and Vietnam) or sporadically (for example, Brunei, Cambodia, Korea DR, Lao PDR, Myanmar) or are not included in the United Nations reports (Taiwan). Thus, the comparative analysis of family trends was conducted on the ten countries in East and Southeast Asia for which comparative data were available: China, Hong Kong, Japan and the Republic of Korea (henceforth referred to as Korea) representing East Asia, and Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam representing Southeast Asia. Although these were the ten countries with most data available for the comparative analysis, unfortunately, China and Malaysia had not released their 2000 population census figures when this study was being conducted (November 2002 to March 2003) and their latest figures were for the 1990 population census. Comparative population data on Vietnam were published up to 1989. Due to these problems Malaysia, China and Vietnam could not be included in some of the tables and charts presented in this paper.

The main objective of comparing specific countries in East and Southeast Asia was to identify main family trends and to discern their nature and causes. Two important parameters in this analysis are space (geographical boundaries) and time (historical period). In terms of geographical boundaries, I address ten nations/economies (nine sovereign countries plus Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of China). In terms of historical period, the best-documented period as indicated by available comparative data, is the decade 1990/1991 to 1999/2000. The specific years included in the analysis are those for which all or the majority of the ten countries reported comparative data.

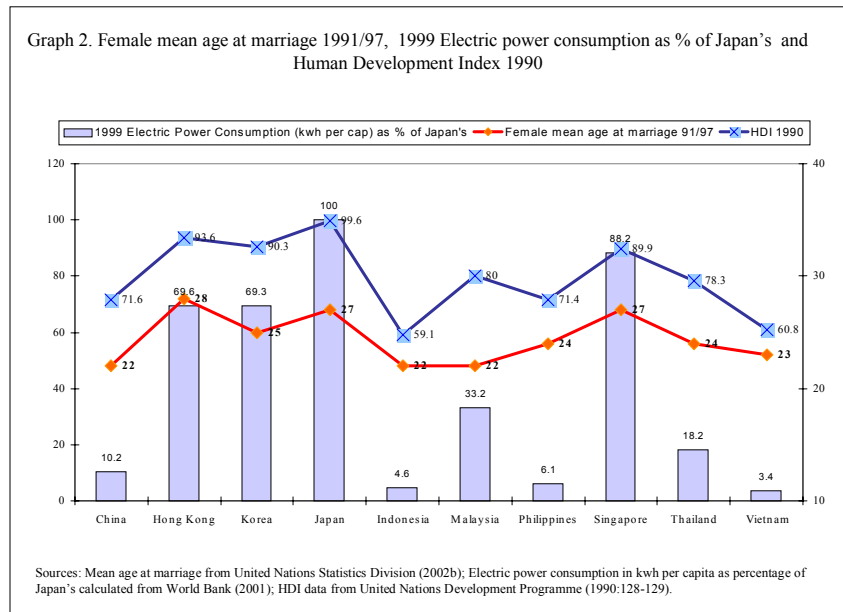
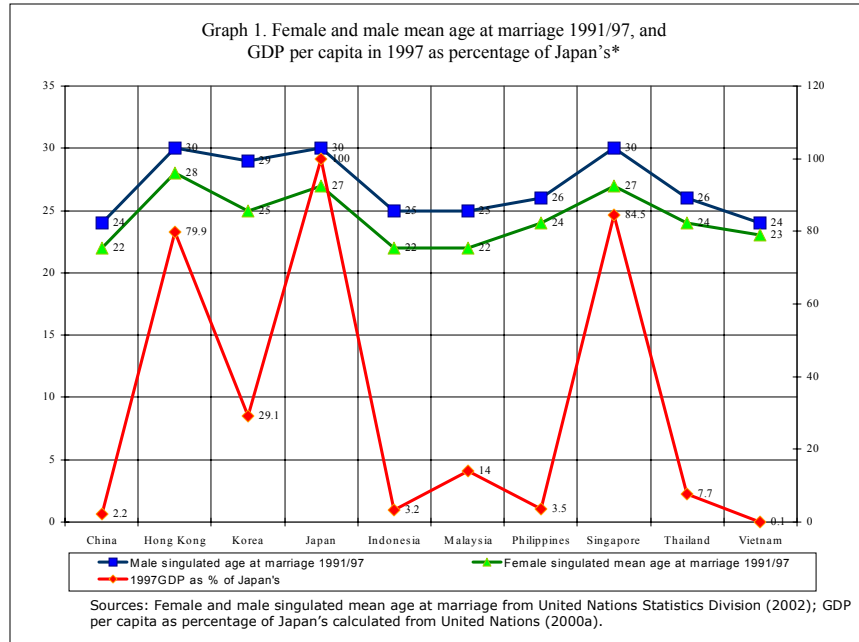
To reiterate, not all seventeen countries in East and Southeast Asia could be included given the lack of comparative data. The analysis and findings presented and discussed in this paper refers only to the ten countries/economies listed above. Consequently, the information obtained permits a critical analysis of the assumptions about family trends in these ten countries but cannot be used to ascertain the specific situation of the seven countries for which comparative information was not available. Generalizations to the latter countries should be made with circumspection. With this cautionary note in mind, the convenient term 'Asian' families will be used from now on to refer to families in the ten countries in this discussion.

## **1. Changes in family structure**

Observation of the three main manifestations of family formation (singlehood, marriage and divorce) show that Asian families have undergone structural changes over the past decade: longer postponement of marriage and an increase in divorces are the prominent features. However, there is a significant variation across Asian countries in the nature and intensity of those changes as indicated by age group and gender data for the ten Asian countries in 1990/91 and 1995/96.

### **1.1 Marriage postponement**

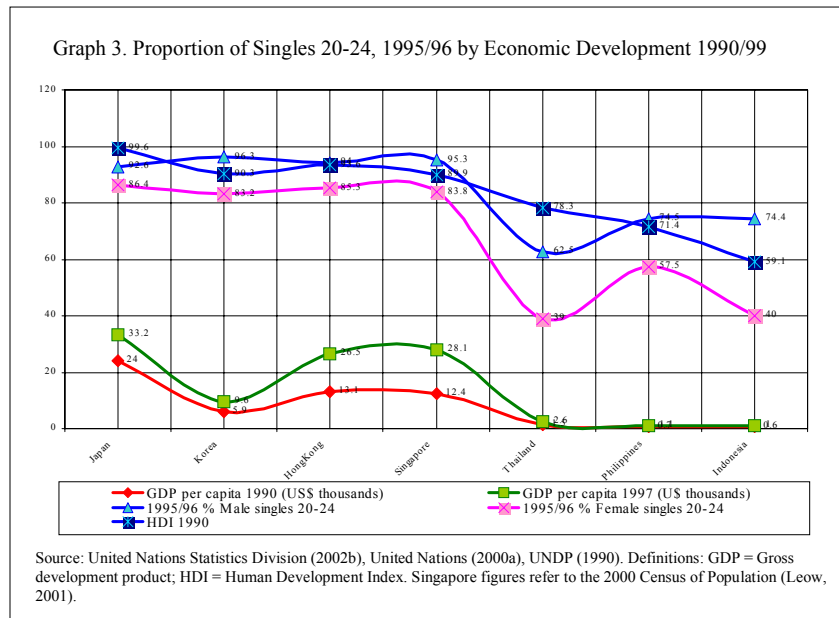
The female singulated mean age at marriage increases significantly with increases in economic development, irrespective of the economic development indicators used.

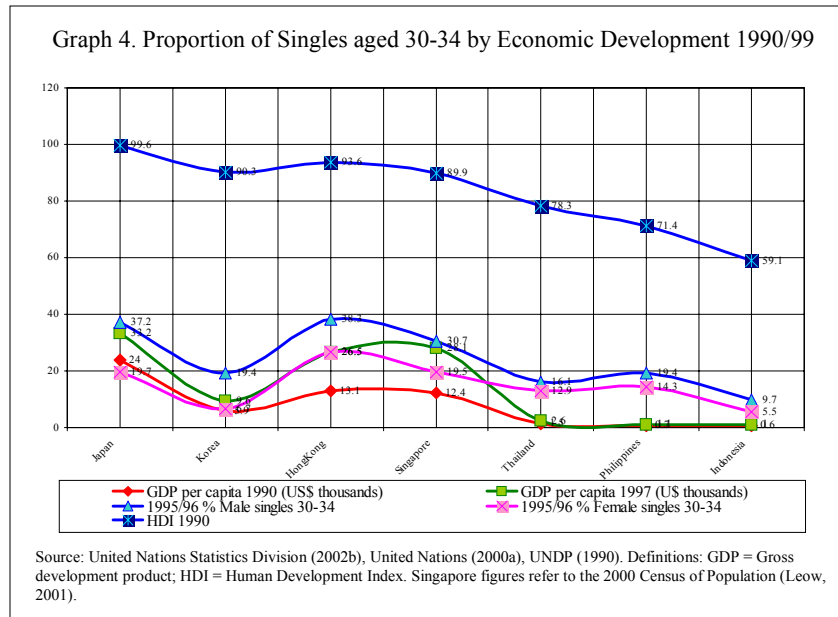


This is illustrated in Graphs 1 and 2 showing the impact of GDP per capita, electricity consumption per capita and Human Development Index (HDI) scores. The GDP figures for the past ten years show the same two trends as those Graphs 1 and 2. First, the ten countries in the region differ significantly in economic development: from the post-industrialized economy of Japan to the impoverishment of Vietnam. This feature of Asia will be discussed in more detail in Section 5 on globalization.

Second, there is a clear tendency for young men and women to postpone marrying and to utilize the opportunities created by their country's economic development, particularly educational and employment opportunities. The average age at marriage is highest for Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the three countries with the highest income per capita and HDI ratings. This contrast with the tendency of men and women to marry early in countries with the lowest GDP and HDI scores: Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, and China.

Another illustration of marriage postponement is the proportion of men and women in age cohorts 20-24, 30-34, 40-44 and 50-54 remaining single. The trend in the proportion of single people in each of these age cohorts confirms that of age at marriage and indicated in Graphs 3 and 4. Three key situations are clearly outlined: (a) there is a significant difference in singlehood across Asian countries; (b) the difference in singlehood pattern is clearly associated with a country's level of socio-economic development ascertained by GDP and HDI scores; and (c) there is a slight variation between men and women, as the impact of socio-economic development appears to influence most the postponement of marriage among women in the age cohort 20-24 (Graph 3) and men in the age cohort 30-34 (Graph 4). The correlation between socio-economic development indicators and the proportion of singles in each age cohort of men and women (Table 1) is significant only among the youngest females adults (aged 20-24) but not among their older counterparts. This suggests that although postponement of marriage has not reached yet the levels observed among European and American women it is likely to follow the pattern of developed countries if the level of socioeconomic development increases.





As the increase in a country's capacity for wealth creation (i.e., higher level of industrialization) is accompanied by marked improvements in the standard of living and overall quality of life of its population, the corresponding association of marriage postponement with scores in the Human Development Index (Graphs 3 and 4) is not surprising. The situation of the Philippines is slightly different from the other countries in that Filipinos tend to have a proportion of singles that and a proportion of people with formal education that are higher than those of other countries with similarly low levels of socioeconomic development. Yet, notwithstanding the Philippines case, the overall influence of socio-economic development upon marriage postponement in Asia is evident.

As I shall discuss in Section 2, the postponement of marriage is normally followed by a delay in the birth of the first child and a corresponding decrease in the total number of children. The important question here is whether marriage postponement should be seen as a problem or as a normal feature of a country's improvement in overall socio-economic development. The interpretation of this trend as a problem focuses on the accompanying phenomena of postponement of parenthood and fewer children. From a physical health perspective, medical experts advice that women give birth in their early twenties as the probability of health risks and complications for mother and child increases with the age of the mother. From the perspective of governments concerned with issues of defense, tax revenue and labour force supply, the decreasing fertility rate is a serious problem.

Table 1. Marriage Postponement and Socioeconomic Development - Pearson's Correlation Coefficients<sup>1</sup>

Proportion of singles in age cohort		Socioeconomic development indicators		
		Electricity Consumption (kwh per capita) 1999	Human Development Index 1990	Human Development Index 1999
Gender, age cohort & year	Correlation			
Males 20-24, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N <sup>2</sup>	.902 .0001 10	.863 .001 10	.864 .003 9
Males 20-24, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	.867 .011 7	ns	.832 .020 7
Males 30-34, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	.845 .002 10	.831 .003 10	.804 .009 9
Males 30-34, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	.827 .022 7	.864 .012 7	.864 .012 7
Males 40-44, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	.696 .025 10	.683 .030 10	ns
Males 40-44, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	.765 .045 7	ns	ns
Females 20-24, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	.941 .0001 10	.948 .0001 10	.973 .0001 9
Females 20-24, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	.913 .004 7	.878 .009 7	.939 .002 7
Females 30-34, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns
Females 30-34, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns
Females 40-44, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns
Females 40-44, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns

1. Sources: Correlations calculated from figures in UNDP (1990); ESCAP (2002); World Bank (2001).
2. N refers to the number of countries included in the calculation. All ten countries have marital status data for 1990/91. The 1995/96 marital status data are for six of the ten countries: Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. Data for Singapore refers to the 2000 Census of Population (Leow, 2001). The other three countries (China, Malaysia and Vietnam) have no comparable marital status data available at the time of writing this report. There was no 1999 HDI score for Vietnam. ns = not statistically significant correlation at p equals or lower than .05.

Irrespective of whether we think in terms of health or economic or defense implications, the decisions to marry and to procreate are fundamentally private concerns. Private decisions with public and collective consequences, no doubt, but still decisions are that fundamental to civil liberties, to the individual's right to choose and to the individual's right to valid and reliable information on the basis of which they can make informed decisions. The Declaration of the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations (United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 2001:67) emphasizes the right of men and women to live their lives in dignity. To do so requires to be informed on choices and on the real and potential consequences of those choices. Governments need to promote the careful and continuous study of population changes and distribute objective information to the population on the long-term effects of marriage postponement.

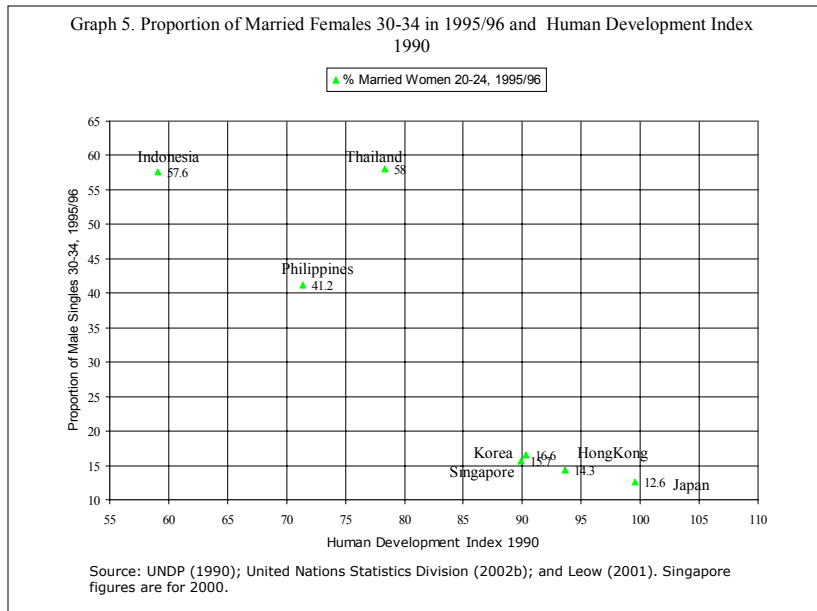
## 1.2 Marriage trends and gender

I have chosen the term marriage postponement in the preceding discussion for a specific reason. The figures on family formation in Asia do not indicate a trend towards permanent singlehood but rather towards postponement of marriage. A clear sign of this trend is that the large majority of men and women in the all age cohorts from age 30 onwards are married. At the same time, just as in the case of the proportion of singles, the variation in the proportion of married people in the younger cohorts is associated significantly with the level of socioeconomic development in each country (Table 2). Graph 5 illustrates this association for women in the age cohort 20-24 using the Human Development Index 1990 as an indicator of overall socioeconomic development. Countries with the highest HDI scores (Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore) show the strongest tendency towards marriage postponement as they have significantly lower proportions of their women aged 20-24 being married. In contrast, this female cohort has a larger proportion of married persons in countries with the lowest HDI scores (Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand).

The gender factor is important in the context of Asia where social norms and expectations on life goals and family roles differ for men and women. Men, typically perceived as providers for their families, appear to respond to the pressure to secure skills training, employment, and their financial situation before getting married. These endeavors tend to keep an increasing number of single men busy up to their mid-thirties. But women are more inclined to spend their first decade of adulthood 'enjoying' the experience of employment before fulfilling the personal --and social-- goal of getting married. The significant negative correlation between the proportion of married persons and the indicator of industrialization and the HDI scores in Table 2 is present for men in the age cohorts 20-24 and 30-34. In contrast, among women only the cohort 20-24 shows significant coefficients.

An additional perspective of these trends is presented in Graphs 6 and 7. These graphs highlight the changes from 1990/91 to 1995/96 in the proportion of married people in the socially significant age cohort 30-34. The message from these graphs is





that, notwithstanding the influence of the level of socioeconomic development discussed above, the differences in political and cultural conditions of Asian countries preclude easily generalizations. With no obvious effort on the part of the state to stop or reverse the trend, Japan and Hong Kong are facing a clear decline in the proportion of married men and women. While having high HDI scores as Japan and Hong Kong, Singapore shows an upward trend in the proportion of married among people aged 30-34. Singapore is a contrasting case where the state has set a pattern of intervention with schemes and incentives to promote marriage among the younger generations (Quah, 1998a:82-122).

### 1.3. Divorce trends

Marital dissolution is a rather complex and private problem. While attitudes towards divorce vary from one community to another, divorce is at best handled with mixed feelings, and it may be perceived as a failure by the persons involved as well as by those close to the couple (family, friends, colleagues). It is widely recognized that the most seriously affected by marital breakdown are the children. As there are no comparable data on attitudes towards divorce in the ten Asian countries covered in this analysis, the data examined here draw on demographic and socioeconomic variables in the total population. The divorce figures in particular come from the United Nations Statistics Division's Common Database. As only some countries reported figures for "Separated" and "Divorced," only the "Divorced" category was used in the analysis to enhance comparability.

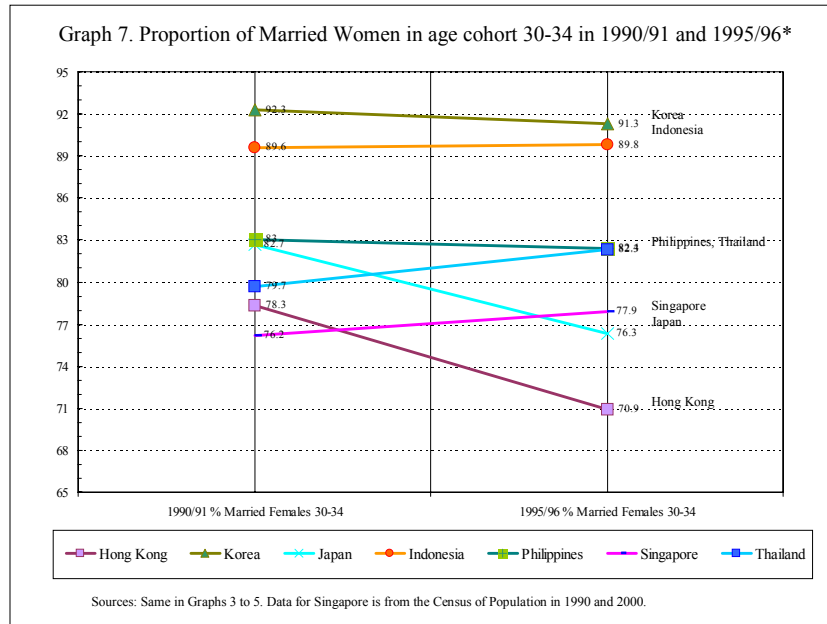
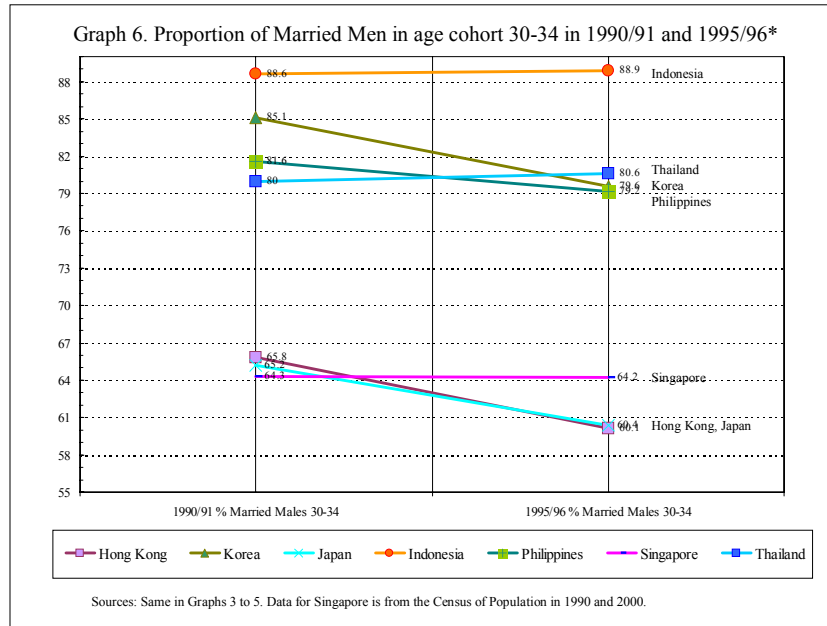
Table 2. Proportion of Married Persons and Socioeconomic Development - Pearson's Correlation Coefficients<sup>1</sup>

Proportion of Married Persons in age cohort		Socioeconomic indicators		
		Electricity Consumption (kwh per capita) 1999	Human Development Index 1990	Human Development Index 1999
Gender, age cohort & year	Correlation			
Males 20-24, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N <sup>2</sup>	-.907 .0001 10	-.874 .001 10	-.874 .002 9
Males 20-24, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	-.903 .005 7	-.789 .035 7	-.869 .011 7
Males 30-34, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	-.835 .003 10	-.826 .003 10	-.793 .011 9
Males 30-34, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	-.838 .018 7	-.861 .013 7	-.858 .013 7
Males 40-44, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	-.694 .026 10	-.705 .023 10	ns
Males 40-44, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	-.763 .046 7	ns	ns
Females 20-24, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	-.944 .0001 10	-.949 .0001 10	-.976 .0001 9
Females 20-24, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	-.920 .003 7	-.885 .008 7	-.944 .001 7
Females 30-34, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns
Females 30-34, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns
Females 40-44, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns
Females 40-44, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-tailed) N	ns	ns	ns

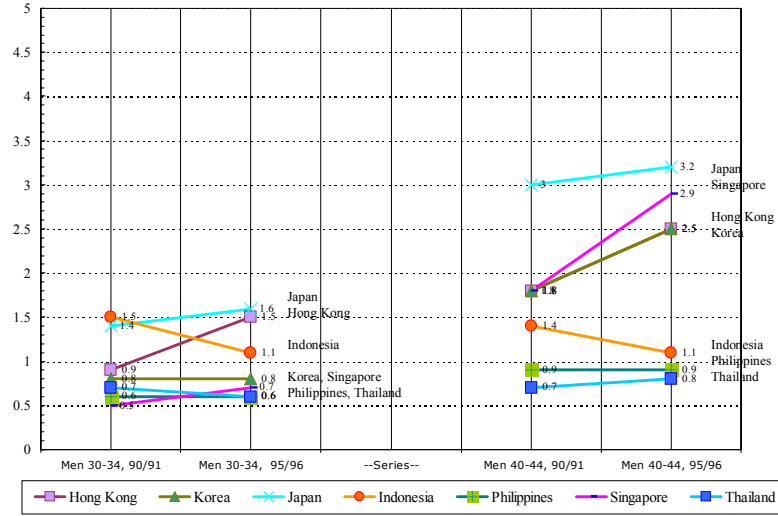
3. Sources: Correlations calculated from figures in UNDP (1990); ESCAP (2002); World Bank (2001).

4. N refers to the number of countries included in the calculation. All ten countries have marital status data for 1990/91. The 1995/96 marital status data are for six of the ten countries: Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. Data for Singapore refers to the 2000 Census of Population (Leow, 2001). The other three countries (China, Malaysia and Vietnam) have no comparable marital status data available at the time of writing this report. There was no 1999 HDI score for Vietnam.

ns = not statistically significant correlation at p equals or lower than .05.

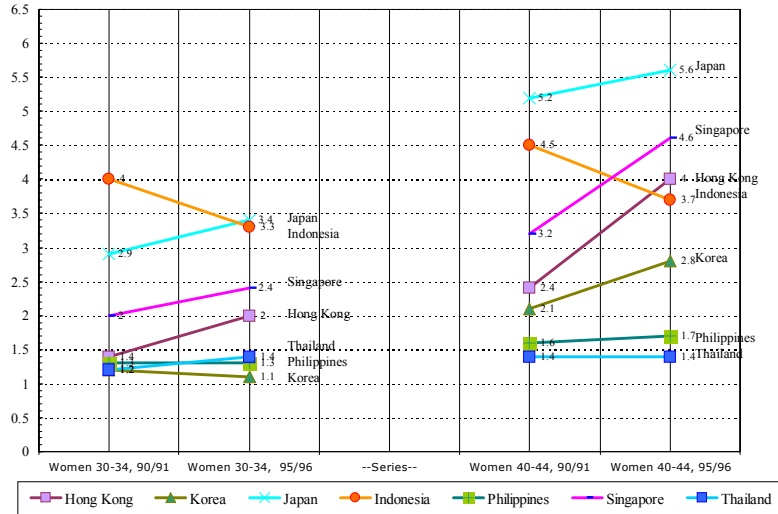


Graph 8. Proportion of Divorced Men in Selected Age Cohorts, 1990/91 and 1995/96



Source: United Nations Statistical Division (2002b)

Graph 9. Proportion of Divorced Women in Selected Age Cohorts, 1990/91 and 1995/96



Source: United Nations Statistical Division (2002b); Leow (2001). Singapore figures are from the 2000 Census of Population.

Table 3. Correlation of Proportion of Divorced Persons in Selected Age Cohorts, Marriage Age and Socioeconomic Development (Pearson's Correlation Coefficients)<sup>1</sup>

Proportion of Divorced Persons in age cohort		Electricity Consumption (kwh/cap) 1999	% 15-19 Female population ever married, 1991/98	Female singulated means age at marriage 1991/97	Male singulated means age at marriage 1991/97	Human Development Index 1990	Human Development Index 1999
Gender, age cohort & year	Correlation						
Males 20-24, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N <sup>2</sup> 10	ns	.721 .019	ns	ns	-.669 .034	-.673 .047
Males 20-24, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N 7	ns	.817 .025	ns	ns	ns	ns
Males 30-34, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Males 30-34, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Males 40-44, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Males 40-44, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N 7	.982 .0001	-.837 .019	.822 .023	.953 .001	.863 .012	.922 .003
Females 20-24, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N 10	ns	.724 .018	ns	ns	ns	ns
Females 20-24, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N 7	ns	.845 .017	ns	ns	ns	-.813 .026
Females 30-34, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Females 30-34, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Females 40-44, 1990/91	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Females 40-44, 1995/96	Pearson correlation Significance (2-t) N 7	.762 .046	ns	ns	.762 .046	ns	ns

1.Sources: Correlations calculated from figures in UNDP (1990); ESCAP (2002); World Bank (2001).

2.N refers to the number of countries included in the calculation. All ten countries have marital status data for 1990/91. The 1995/96 marital status data are for six of the ten countries: Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. Data for Singapore refers to the 2000 Census of Population (Leow, 2001). The other three countries (China, Malaysia and Vietnam) have no comparable marital status data available at the time of writing this report. There was no 1999 HDI score for Vietnam.

ns = not statistically significant correlation at  $p$  equals or lower than .05.

As it is the case in Europe and the Americas, divorce is increasing in Asia (Graphs 8 and 9 illustrate this trend with two age cohorts of men and women). However, the increase requires qualification. The possible influence of a number of macro-social factors (such as illiteracy rates, rates of female labour force participation and female economic activity, level of urbanization, and indicators of socioeconomic development) on the proportion of divorced persons in each age cohort were examined through bivariate and factor analysis. Table 3 offers a summary of the most important of these correlations. Three main features were identified in the analysis: (a) divorce rates in different age cohorts are affected by different sets of factors; (b) the divorce trend is different for men and women; and (c) the cultural or socio-economic characteristics of each country play a part in the landscape of divorce.

### 2.1 Age and divorce

Factors contributing to individuals' and couples' decision to breakup their marriage vary according to age. The well-known fact that couples who marry young (say, in their late teens or early twenties) are the most vulnerable to divorce given their immaturity and lack of financial stability, cannot be confirmed directly with the available data, but indirect figures suggest the same trend in Asia. Countries like Indonesia with higher proportions of married female teenagers (aged 15-19) are more likely than other countries to have higher proportions of divorced men and women in the age cohorts 20-24 (Table 3). Another aspect of interest is the difference in the proportions of divorced persons in each age cohort. The proportion of divorced persons increases drastically from the age cohort 20-24 to age cohort 50-54 (Graphs 8 and 9). I elaborate on the age variation in section 2.3 below.

### 2.2 Gender and divorce

A distinct gender variation is detected in the proportion of divorced persons in each age cohort. As illustrated in Graphs 8 and 9, the proportion of women who are divorced is larger than that of divorced men at any age in all countries. This characteristic has important implications for family formation and family structure in Asia. It appears that men who divorce are likely to remarry soon after (or to be already married to another wife when the laws of the country permit polygamy as is the case in Muslim countries such Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei where matrimony and divorce are under the jurisdiction of the Islamic or Shariah Court). It is more difficult for a divorced woman to remarry for various reasons including her role as custodian parent (there is a tendency to give child custody to the mother) and, given traditional beliefs, the weight of negative social stereotypes of divorced women. Divorced women with dependent children face serious constraints as single parents and as breadwinners particularly when they lack marketable skills that could secure them a job.

### 2.3 Divorce and country-specific characteristics

The rich diversity of cultures, languages, socio-economic and political structures of Asian countries influences the lives of their peoples and consequently the structure of their families and family life. Using the data that permit comparisons, seven of the ten countries with complete figures for 1990/91 and 1995/96 could be examined (Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). The two main factors associated with divorce trends are the level of wealth ascertained by the country's 1997 gross national product per capita (GDP) and the level of socioeconomic development indicated by the Human Development Index (HDI)

scores for 1990 and 1999. Table 3 and Graphs 10 and 11 illustrate the main differences across countries.

Countries with high economic development (high GDP per capita in 1990 and 1997) such as Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong, are more likely than countries with low GDP (for example, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia) to have higher proportions of divorced persons in the age groups 40 to 55 (Graphs 10 and 11). Indonesia is an exception to this trend as it has large proportions of divorced women in these age groups (Graph 11). The influence of Islam on the values, social expectations, and formal regulations concerning marriage and divorce sets Indonesia apart from the other six countries in this comparison. Both Thailand and Philippines have Muslim communities, but they are minorities whereas the large majority of the population in Indonesia is Muslim.

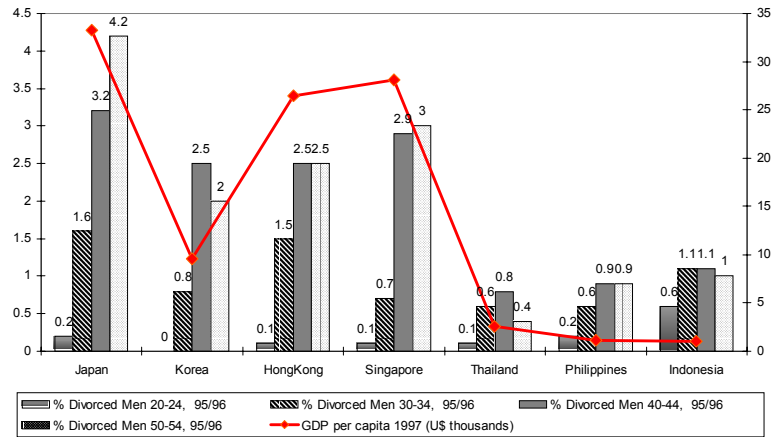
The pattern shown by the correlation of 1997 GDP per capita with the 1995/96 proportion of divorcees among males aged 40-44 ( $r = .918$ ,  $p = .004$ ) and 50-54 ( $r = .944$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and females aged 40-44 ( $r = .849$ ;  $p = .016$ ) and 50-54 ( $r = .836$ ;  $p = .019$ ), is confirmed by the correlation with Human Development Index scores (Table 3). With the exception of Indonesian female divorcees (whose circumstances were discussed in section 2.2), people over 40 years of age in countries with high levels of socioeconomic development (i.e., Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea) have a higher probability of divorce, compared their counterparts in countries with lower levels of socioeconomic development (i.e., men and women in Thailand and Philippines and men in Indonesia). It appears that a possible explanation for marital dissolution in addition to personal and private motives, is the configuration of factors associated with high economic development (for example, better educated population, wider variety of role options for women in addition to family or domestic roles, individuals' career orientation and interest in personal development, among other factors).

#### 1.4. Changes in household size

The fourth and final aspect to be discussed on changes in family structure is the pattern of changes in the size of households. The term 'household' encompasses the ideas of the 'visible' family and 'home' as it refers to the number of people living under one roof and sharing one budget.

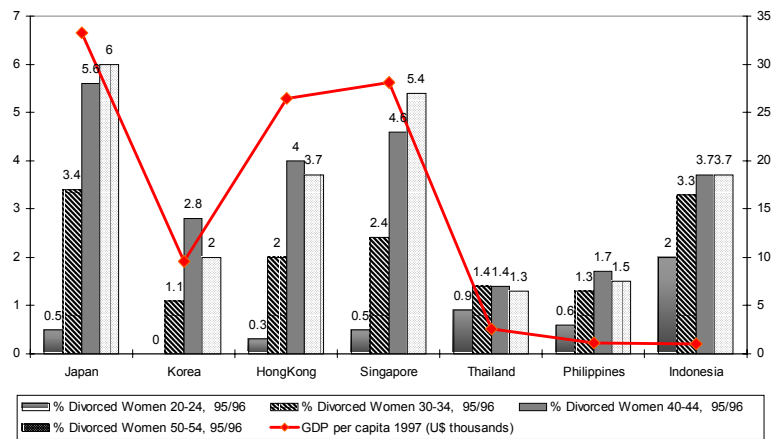
In traditional societies, the close proximity to kin was considered a valuable feature of one's home both in terms of physical and economic security. Close proximity to kin was often implemented by the sharing of the same physical compound or the same house by members of the extended family. As societies become economically and socially more diverse, heads of nuclear families within the extended family earn a living in a wider variety of occupations and locations. This process together with changes in the value of privacy, authority and hierarchy within the family, have led to the setting up of independent homes by nuclear and three-generation families thus changing the composition of domestic households everywhere. The average number of persons in domestic households is a good indicator of such a change. Graph 12 illustrates the progressive decline in the average size of domestic households in the ten Asian countries from 1980 to 2000. I include the United Kingdom and the United States as interesting illustrations of the global nature of this change.

Graph 10. Proportion of Divorced Men by Age Cohort and GDP, 1995/97



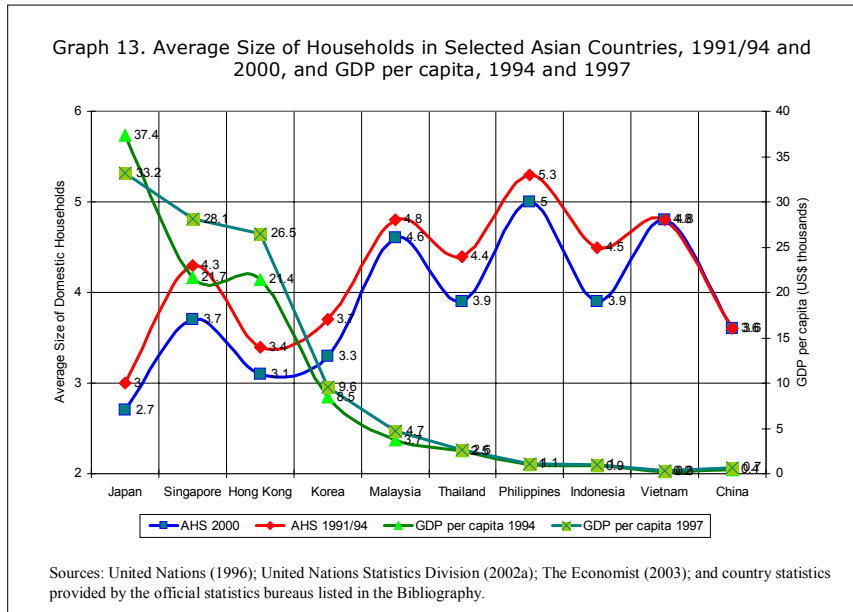
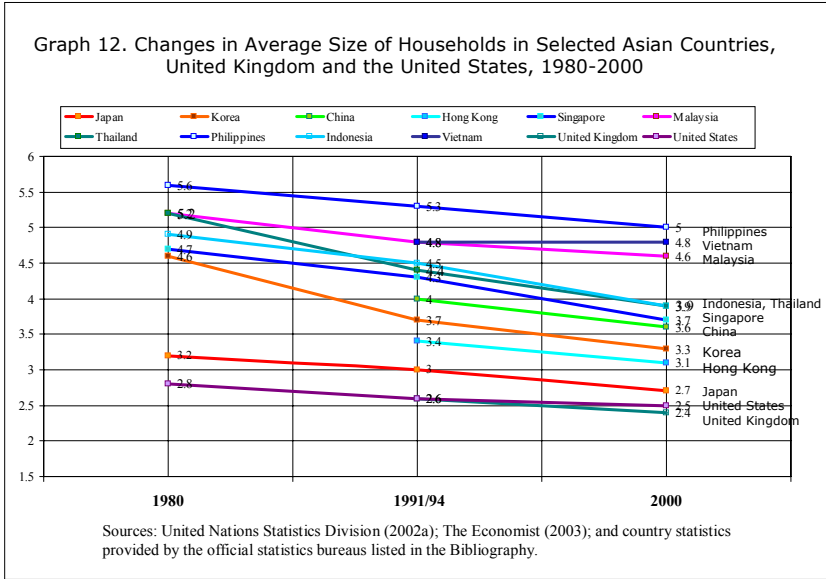
Source: United Nations Statistics Division (2002b) and United Nations (2000a). GDP = Gross development product.

Graph 11. Proportion of Divorced Women by Age Cohort and GDP, 1995/97



Source: United Nations Statistics Division (2002b) and United Nations (2000a). GDP = Gross development product.





Following the same pattern of other family structure features discussed earlier, the change in the size of domestic households is found in all the ten countries but it does take place at a different pace or 'speed' in different countries depending on their level of economic, political and socio-cultural development. There is an inverse correlation between wealth and household size both in 1991/1994 (Pearson's  $r = -.741$ ;  $p = .014$ ) and 1997/2000 (Pearson's  $r = -.717$ ;  $p = .020$ ). Countries with high GDP per capita have smaller domestic households than less affluent countries. Two exceptions to this general trend are Singapore and China (Graph 13). Singapore has a higher than expected household size, given its relatively high level of wealth. But the Singapore government has emphasized for many years the importance of procreation and of three-generation families (i.e., nuclear families with grandparents). China is another exception to this inverse correlation, but for different reasons. China's strict implementation of its one-child policy over the past decades and the job location of young or single Chinese workers are reflected in its smaller than expected domestic household size.

The differences and similarities in domestic household size among the ten Asian countries are easily identified when seen in terms of level of economic development. The same general inverse association with level of wealth (seen in Graph 13), is confirmed by the inverse association with Human Development Index scores in 2000 (Pearson's  $r = -.806$ ;  $p = .002$ ). At the same time, the differences among Asian countries are evident. There is a wider variation in average household size and HDI among the six less developed countries (Vietnam, Indonesia, China, Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia) compared to Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea. Japan on the other hand is in the same general category as the United States and the United Kingdom: small households and high levels of wealth and social development.

## **2. Demographic transformation**

The changes in family structure discussed above are taking place within the context of major demographic transformations in all the ten Asian countries. These changes are best portrayed by the youth dependency index and the old age dependency index. But before these two indicators of demographic transition are discussed is pertinent to take a look at the situation on the basic aspects of fertility, maternal mortality, and infant mortality.

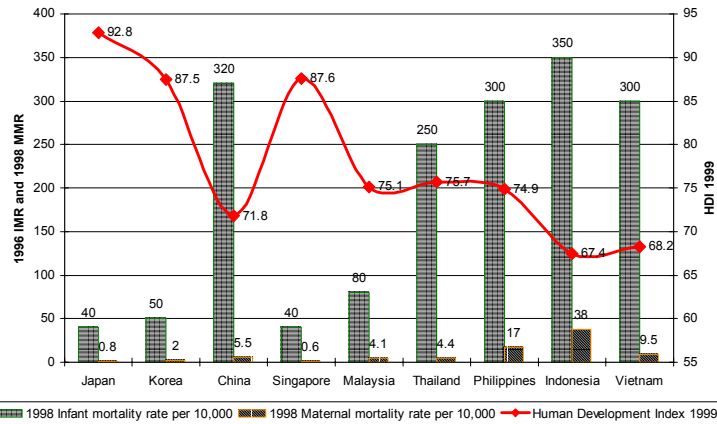
### **2.1. Infant mortality, maternal mortality and fertility**

Infant mortality and maternal mortality are typically associated with economic development. The inverse association is well documented throughout the world. The pattern found in the ten Asian countries fits that inverse association well as shown in Graphs 14 and 15. Countries with high levels of development and quality of life (Japan, Korea, Singapore) have reduced female mortality rates of associated with childbirth and infant mortality. High maternal and infant mortality rates are found in countries with low economic development and poorer quality of life (Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and China). Malaysia offers an interesting case as its infant and maternal mortality rates are lower than expected given its comparatively lower level of socioeconomic development.

Fertility rates have dropped in all the ten countries over the past two decades but there is a strong association of this drop with GDP per capita both in 1980 (Pearson correlation  $r = -.759$ ;  $p = .011$ ) and 1998 (Pearson correlation  $r = -.671$ ;  $p = .034$ ).

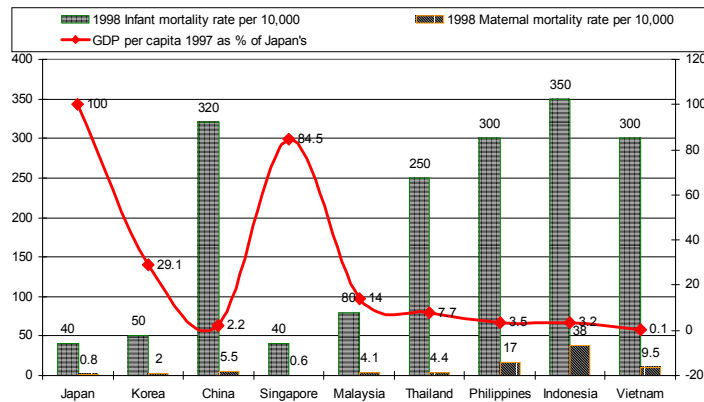
That is, fertility rates are significantly lower in countries with high GDP and Human Development Index scores such as Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore (Graph 16). As indicated earlier, a notable exception to this profile of fertility is China, due to its determination to control population growth through its one-child policy.

Graph 14. Infant Mortality Rate 2000, Maternal Mortality Ratio 1989-1999, and 1999 Human Development Index

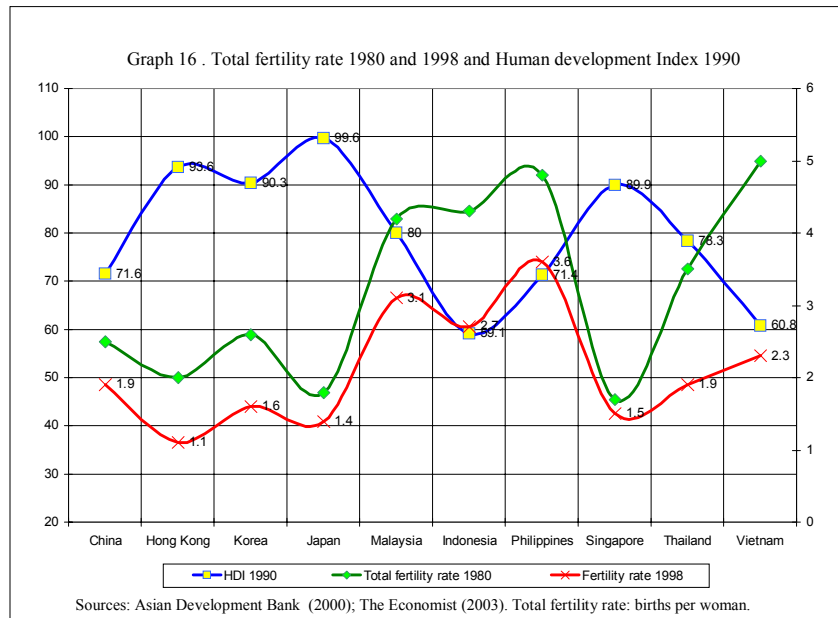


Source: UNICEF (2002); The Economist (2003). Definitions: Infant mortality rate 2000: probability of dying between birth and 1 year of age expressed per 10,000 live births. Maternal mortality ratio 1985-1999: annual number of female deaths from pregnancy-related causes per 10,000 live births.

Graph 15. Infant Mortality Rate 2000, Maternal Mortality Ratio 1989-1999, and 1997 GDP per capita as percentage of Japan's (US\$ Millions)



Source: UNICEF (2002). Definitions: Infant mortality rate 2000: probability of dying between birth and 1 year of age expressed per 10,000 live births. Maternal mortality ratio 1985-1999: annual number of female deaths from pregnancy-Related causes per 10,000 live births. Japan's 1997 GDP = 100%.

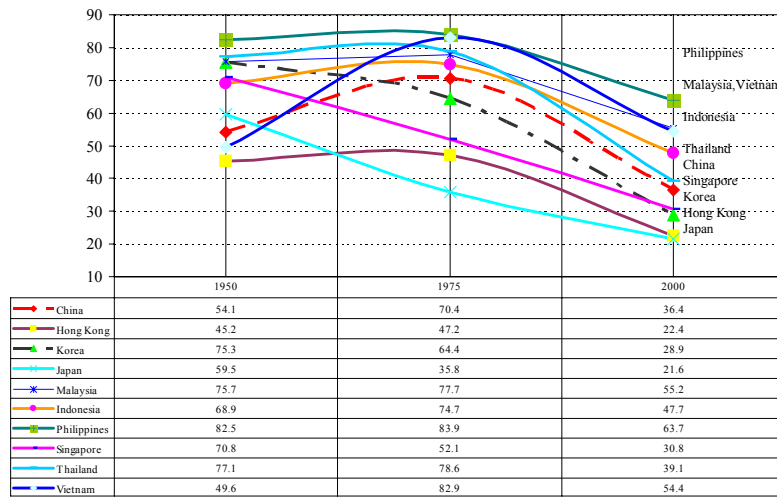


## 2.2 Youth and Old Age dependency

Following the trend in fertility, the youth dependency ratio (the ratio of persons aged 0 to 14 to those aged 15 to 64) in all the ten Asian countries declined over the past half a century as shown in Graph 17. But the decline was not steady for all countries. Philippines, Hong Kong and, in particular Vietnam, experienced an increase in the YDR from 1950 to 1975 before it began to decline. The sharp increase in Vietnam that peaked in the late 1970s, was due in part to its efforts at recovery after the war. As can be appreciated in Graph 18, the reduction in the youth dependency ratio has been accompanied by a steady increase in the old age dependency ratio (the ratio of persons aged 65 and older to those aged 15 to 64).

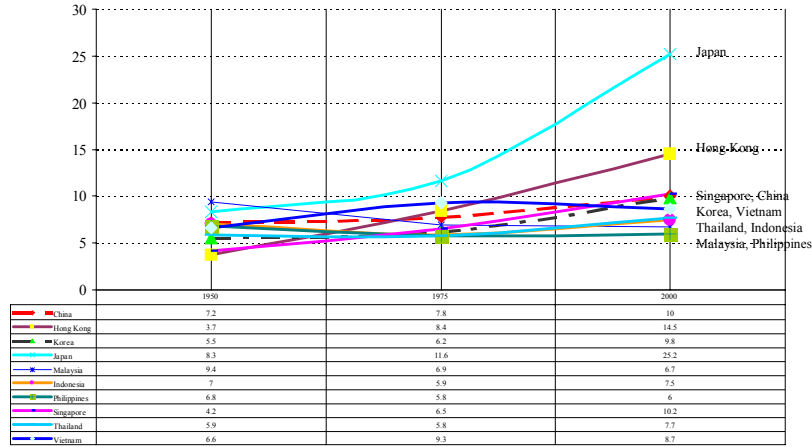
These demographic transitions play an important role in reshaping the structure of the family and family relations over time. The presence of several children leads parents to charge the older sibling with the duty of looking after the younger ones. Children tend to learn responsibility through practice when they have many siblings, whereas a single child is usually the centre of parental attention. Concerning intergenerational value transmission, the absence of grandparents diminishes the grandchildren's opportunities to learn first hand values and norms from the older generation. Compared to a typical large extended family in the 1950s sharing one large house, in a family home today we are likely to find the two parents and their two (or at the most three) children with possibly one or two grandparents. Grandparents may visit their married children, rotating their visits among their children. But the more economically developed a country is, the more likely grandparents are to live in their separate homes, by themselves. In Japan, the

Graph 17. Youth Dependency Ratio 1950, 1975 and 2000



Source: United Nations (2002)

Graph 18. Old Age Dependency Ratio 1950, 1975 and 2000



Source: United Nations (2002)

proportion of elderly persons living alone increased steadily from 611,000 in 1975 to 3,179,000 in 2001. The corresponding figures for elderly couples households are 931,000 in 1975 to 4,545,000 in 2001 (Asahi Shimbun, 2003:32).

### **3. Migration**

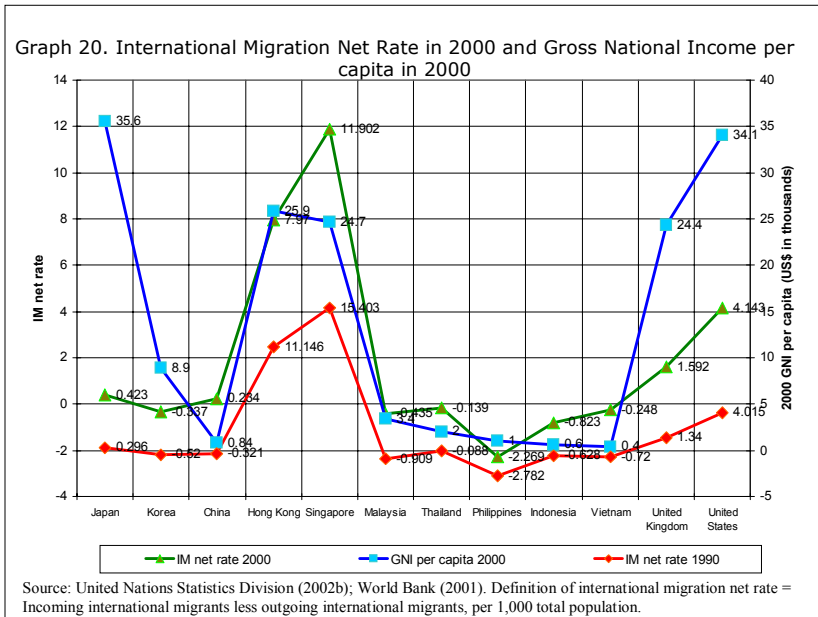
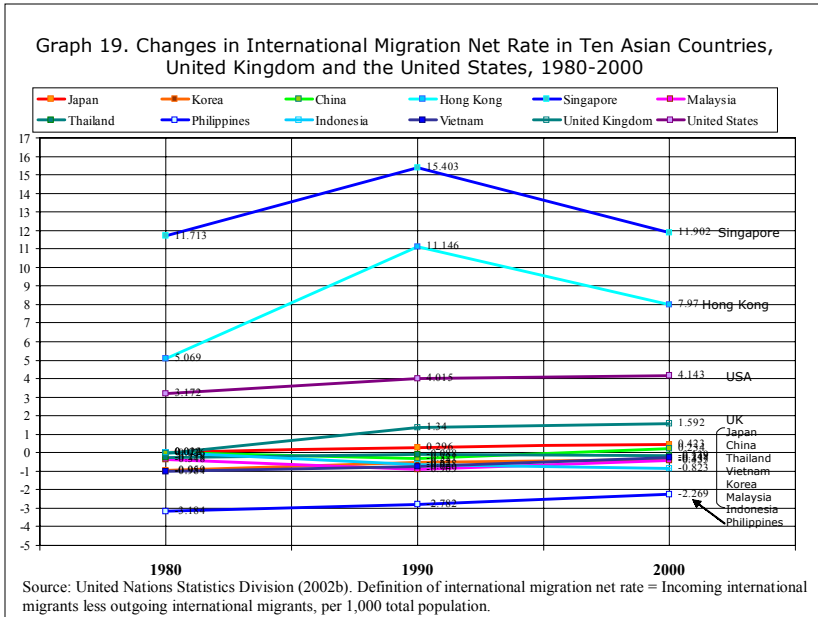
The well-known theory of push and pull factors motivating people to relocate across countries is confirmed by the figures on international net migration (INM) rates. The net rate is defined as "incoming international migrants less outgoing international migrants per 1,000 population (United Nations Statistics Division, 2002b).

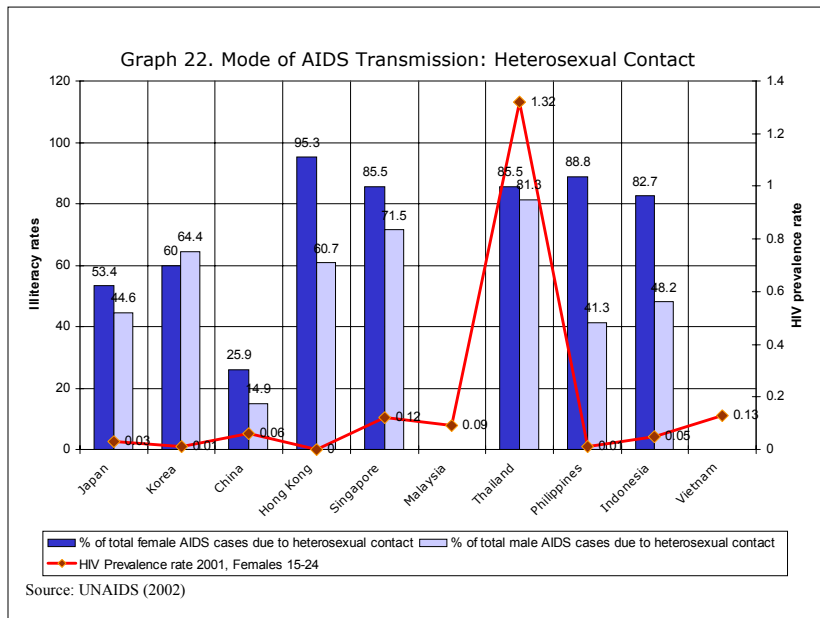
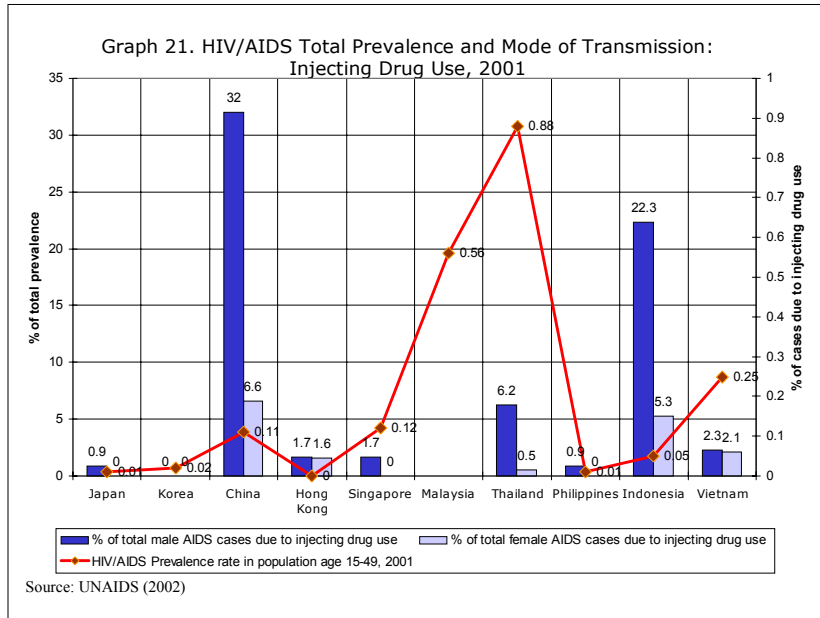
It is clear that that migration has remained relatively stable for the past two decades in most Asian countries with the exception of Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines (Graph 19). The search for better economic opportunities has prompted the bulk of outgoing international migrants in Philippines, which shows the largest negative INM rate of all ten Asian countries in Graph 19. On the other hand, Singapore and Hong Kong have the highest positive INM rates as these two global cities provide the employment opportunities for various categories of workers both skilled, such as professional and technical workers, and unskilled, mostly in construction and domestic work (Quah, 1997). The international search for talent is a serious endeavor of the Singapore government.

Still, Graph 19 also illustrates that incoming migration to Singapore and Hong Kong peaked in the early 1990s and has declined since then in response to the global economic downturn affecting employment opportunities everywhere but particularly in multinational corporations (World Bank, 2000) among other reasons. The impact of economic development on migration is clearly illustrated in Graph 20. Countries with high gross national income per capita tend to have larger positive INM rates (for the year 2000, the inverse correlation is Pearson  $r = -.601$ ,  $p = .039$ ).

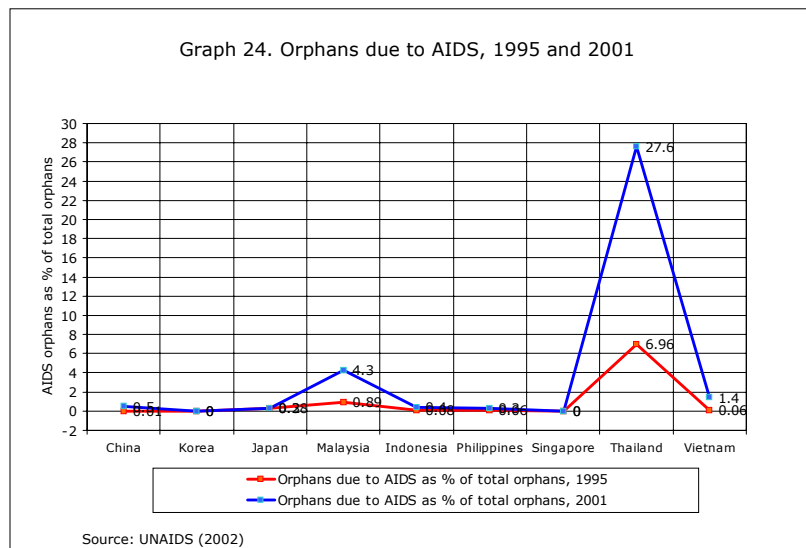
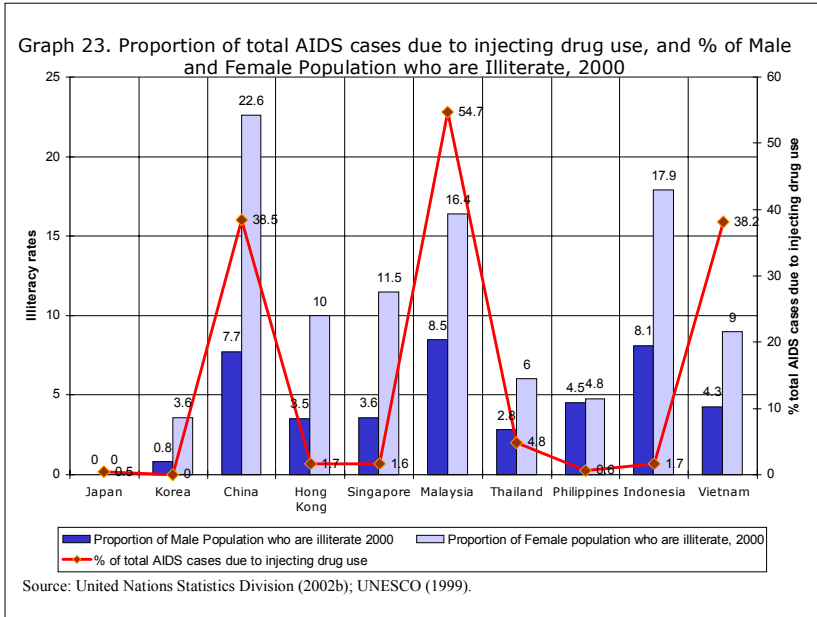
While successful migration (for example, finding a well-paid job in another country) is a welcome triumph, it comes at a high price to the migrant worker in terms of family life. A considerable number of sociological studies in the Philippines since the 1980s have focused on the strain faced by families when one or both parents have to emigrate in search of work (Quah, 1993a:86; Quah, 1993b). Filipinos are generally acquainted with internal migration from rural villages to cities and on to Metropolitan Manila. But the move of one or more breadwinners to a job in another country poses more serious challenges to the cohesion of married couples, husband-wife communication, parent-child bonding, parental authority and adolescent behaviour, among other aspects. On the positive side, the migrant worker's network of support is mobilized on a reciprocal basis: the worker sends money regularly to his/her family and kin while the extended kin provide support to the worker's spouse, now *de facto* a single parent, and children left behind (Medina, 1991:51-52; 177-179; 246-248).

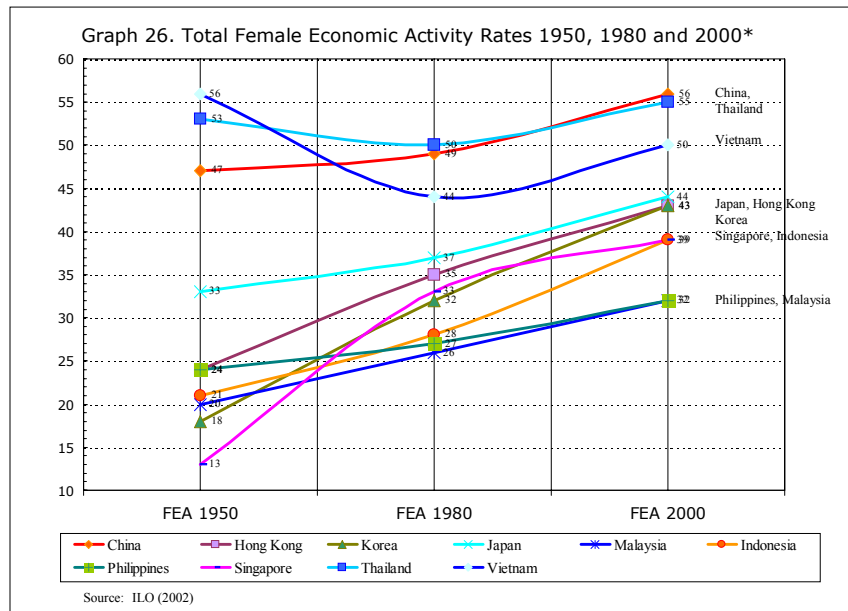
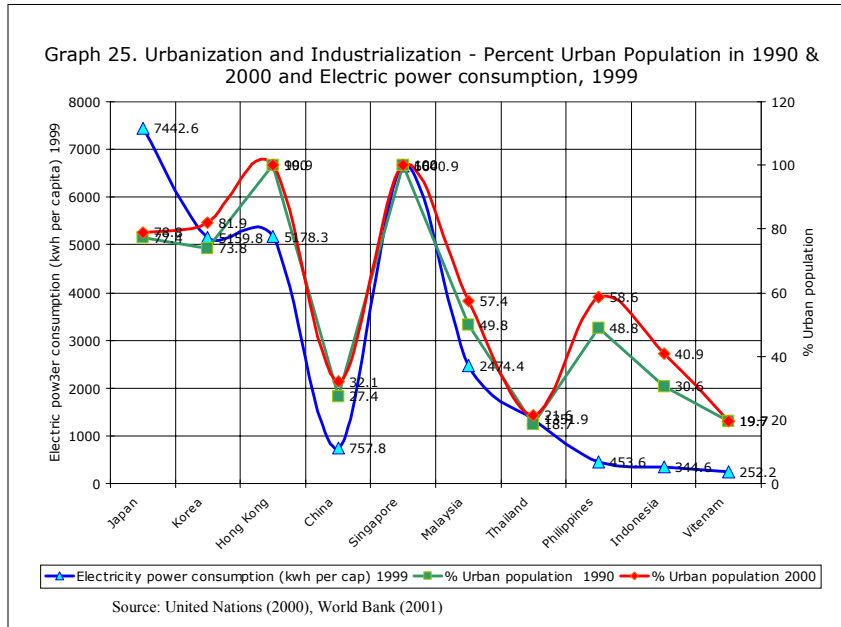
The increasing number of unskilled or low-skilled migrant workers demands that careful consideration be given to their family situation by the governments of both the country of origin and the host country. Measures should be put in place to alleviate the great effort they need to make to safeguard their family life. For

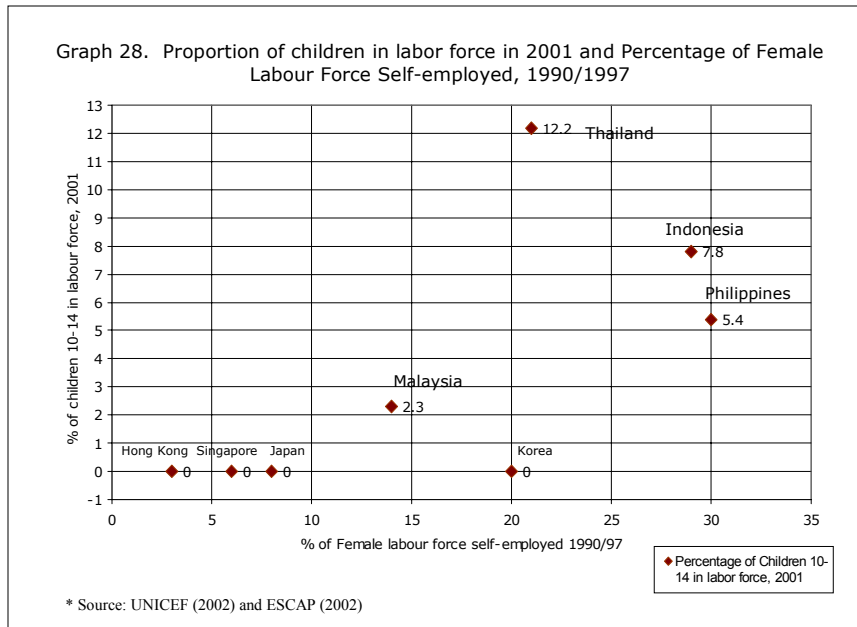
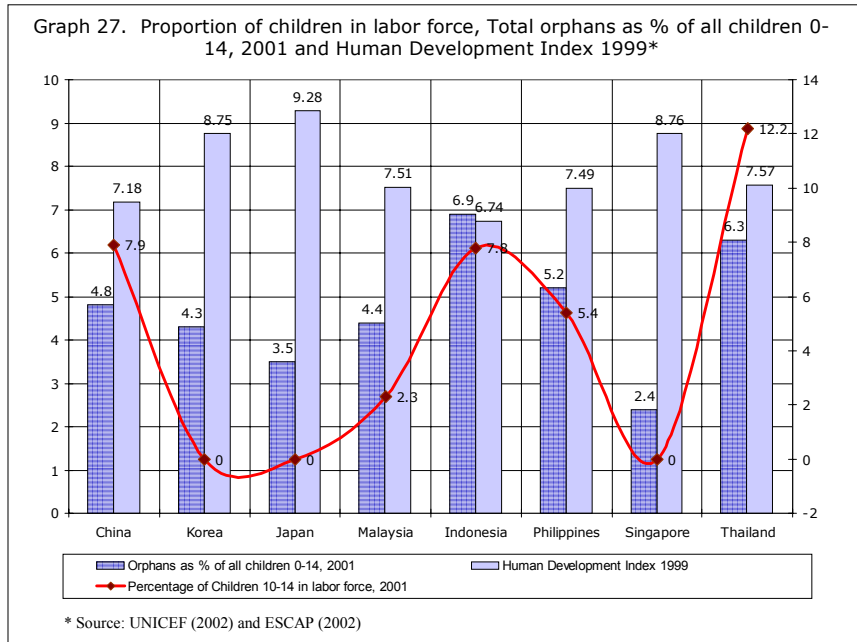












example, in host countries, the job contracts of foreign professional or skilled workers differ significantly from contracts of foreign unskilled or low-skilled workers: the latter typically proscribe the presence of spouse and children and do not include 'paid home leave'.

#### **4. Impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic**

Reflecting the heterogeneity of countries in the region, the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic varies drastically from one country to another. The countries least affected thus far are Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The official figures for Philippines are low but there is the possibility of inaccurate recording due to the logistical difficulties. The countries most affected are Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam, in that order (Graph 21). The main modes of AIDS transmission are heterosexual contact and injecting drug use (Graphs 22 and 23). The latter mode is most common in China and Indonesia.

From the perspective of the effect on the family, the seriousness of the pandemic in Thailand is conveyed by the impact on the young. Thailand has the highest HIV prevalence rate among women aged 15-24 (Graph 22); the highest percentage of orphans due to AIDS out of the total number of orphans; and the steepest increase in the proportion of AIDS orphans from 1995 to 2001 (Graph 24). As suggested in Graph 23, the level of illiteracy is positively associated with injecting drug use as a mode of HIV transmission (for male illiteracy: Pearson  $r = .728$ ;  $p = .017$ ; for female illiteracy: Pearson  $r = .810$ ;  $p = .004$ ). This suggests that efforts at increasing the population's level of education are not only necessary for the overall development of a country but also for the specific aspect of motivating preventive behaviour concerning drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. A note of interest here is that no significant association was found between the prevalence of HIV/AIDS or modes of transmission and the country's level of socioeconomic development (ascertained by wealth indicators such as GDP per capita, or by more comprehensive measures such as the Human Development Index). HIV/AIDS is a global problem found at all levels of socioeconomic development but it is fundamentally based on private decisions that have extremely serious public consequences. For this reason, public health education addressed to specific target populations is a promising course of action (Quah, 1992; 1998b). For a comprehensive analysis of the impact of HIV/AIDS on children see Cornia (2002).

#### **5. The impact of globalization**

The four preceding sections have suggested the pervasive influence of socioeconomic development upon the family and the wide variation in socioeconomic development among Asian countries. This final section demonstrates those trends and focus on two particularly problematic aspects of family relations linked to the country's level of socioeconomic development. These two aspects are female labour force participation and child labour.

##### **5.1. Overview of socio-economic variations across Asian countries**

Not surprisingly, the situation of Asian countries show the same close link between the process of urbanization and industrialization found in other world regions. However, while the process of urbanization has increased over the past decade, the differences across countries remain (Graph 25). As a global city-state, Singapore is

fundamentally an urban metropolis like Hong Kong (now China's Special Administrative Region). Japan and Korea follow in the proportion of urban population. All four are at a significantly higher level of socioeconomic development than the rest. The other six countries (China, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam) have large rural hinterlands, lower level of industrialization, and a considerable proportion of their populations living in rural areas. These sharp differences in socioeconomic development and urban-rural populations create different kinds of problems and different types of constraints, and assets for governments, families and individuals. Advice to governments on ways of assisting families in need and strengthening the family unit must be designed for each country specifically.

## 5.2. Female labour force participation

The upward trend of female economic activity rates in Graph 26 shows that holding a paid job has become if not a social norm for women, at least a 'normal' thing for women to do in all Asian countries. It is imperative to avoid the fallacy of interpreting these upward trends as an indication that women only recently began contributing to the economic support of their families. The figures on female labour force participation and economic activity are based only on paid work. But women have been important contributors to the family economy for centuries mostly in crafts and agricultural work that typically goes unrecorded because they do not earn 'wages' (Quah, 1998:144-175). Some countries have begun recording data on 'unpaid family workers' but the definition of this category and corresponding data collection system requires improvement.

The increasing participation of women in the labour force everywhere is prompted by various factors including higher levels of education and skills-training. Women now tend to continue to work after marriage and/or childbirth, although this is occurring in greater proportions in the most developed countries in the region (Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea) but the figures suggest higher women's participation in the labour force will become a general trend throughout Asia. The consequences of Asian women's paid labour for the family are mostly in terms of socially assigned traditional gender roles that are difficult to overcome. The mother is still seen as the most 'suitable' parent to take care of children and to manage the home. The contradictory situation of better educational and economic opportunities for women not keeping pace with the change in traditional social values, leads to strains within the family including marital conflict and problems of child care and child supervision. Governments are lethargic in providing the necessary facilities and job arrangement guidelines (for example, job sharing, flexible working hours, adequate parental leave, tax incentives) to enable working parents to fulfill their family obligations and to encourage co-parenting between husband and wife. The very small proportion of women holding seats in parliament throughout Asia helps to maintain the status quo. The highest percentage of parliament seats occupied by women in 2001 was 26% in Vietnam. China follows with 22%. Malaysia has 10%; Thailand 9%; Japan and Singapore 7%; Korea 6%. No information was available for Philippines, Indonesia and Hong Kong (United Nations Statistics Division, 2002a).

## 5.3. Child labour

Two perspectives of the situation of child labour in the ten Asian countries are presented in Graphs 27 and 28. The first perspective is that child labour is a sequel of underdevelopment and poverty. This is indicated by the strong inverse association

between Human Development Index scores and the proportion of children 10-14 in the labour force (Pearson  $r = -.793$ ,  $p = .011$ ) in Graph 27. In his analysis of child labour in the Philippines, an International Labour Office expert argues that the problem aggravates when there is an economic downturn as youngsters are pressed to drop out of school and find a job. He rightly points out that the available figures on child labour in Asia might not capture the entire situation as a large part of child labour is found in the informal sector (Lim, 2000) which is difficult to ascertain.

The second perspective is suggested by the close link (Pearson  $r = .699$ ,  $p = .036$ ) between the proportion of children in the labour force and the percentage of women in the labour force who are self-employed (Graph 28). Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have the highest proportion of children in the labour force and working women who are self-employed. These are countries with very low economic development. A self-employed mother in these countries may be a single parent and typically scraps a living in the informal economy or runs a small business with few or no employees. It is not unusual that some of her children assist with the business full-time or get a job to boost the meager family budget.

## **6. On family policy**

To conclude this analysis it is pertinent to address the issue of State intervention. Although the situation of each country is different, some basic principles apply to all. The preceding macro-level analysis of family trends and socioeconomic development begs the question: Can and should the government assist families? Three concepts I discussed elsewhere (Quah, 1998:247-270) are relevant to answer that question. The first one is the concept of social policy defined as "the cluster of overall decisions relevant to the achievement of [society's] goals" (Kahn, 1969:131). When those decisions and goals involve the family, the following three assumptions are implied: (a) that the country has explicit and defined social goals concerning its families; (b) that as these goals are based on relatively clear and shared values on the type of family or families the country wants to maintain or encourage, family policy refers to plans of action formulated to reflect those social values and to attain those social goals; and (c) that family policy thus defined will provide the necessary conditions for the well-being of all families. In addition to these three assumptions, a further clarification is in order: Family policy is not social engineering. On the contrary, within a democratic system of government, family policy establishes "an opportunity structure which makes certain that society does not interfere or restrain the family's efforts to meet its collective needs" (Tallman, 1979:470).

The doubts of some observers on the contributions of family policy are often countered by the views of people who support the formulation of family policies. I propose that we consider seriously the following five basic issues on the feasibility and desirability of family policy, derived from the current expert discussion: (a) most countries have a multiplicity of family forms and family life patterns; (b) social policy is limited in what it can do to help families; (c) there is always the possibility of abuse of policies and thus there is a need for a system of checks and balances; (d) there is a high likelihood of negative unforeseen consequences of policies and thus it is imperative to exercise caution in policy planning and implementation; and (e) there are some types of family problems of such magnitude or nature that State intervention may be the only alternative. The search for a satisfactory balance between the public and private spheres of life to accomplish job and family commitments is one of these problems.

Consequently, in recognition of these issues and based on the social policy experiences of developed countries, a family policy agenda may be drawn comprising the following objectives: (1) to provide the socio-economic conditions required for the strengthening of family life and to help families in need; (2) to curtail excessive State intervention; (3) to discourage citizens' over-dependence on the State; and (4) to encourage the participation of kinship, community, and other informal support networks in the provision of moral, social, material and other forms of help to families in need (Quah, 1998:249-250).

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