Recent fertility trends, policy responses and fertility prospects in low fertility countries of East and Southeast Asia

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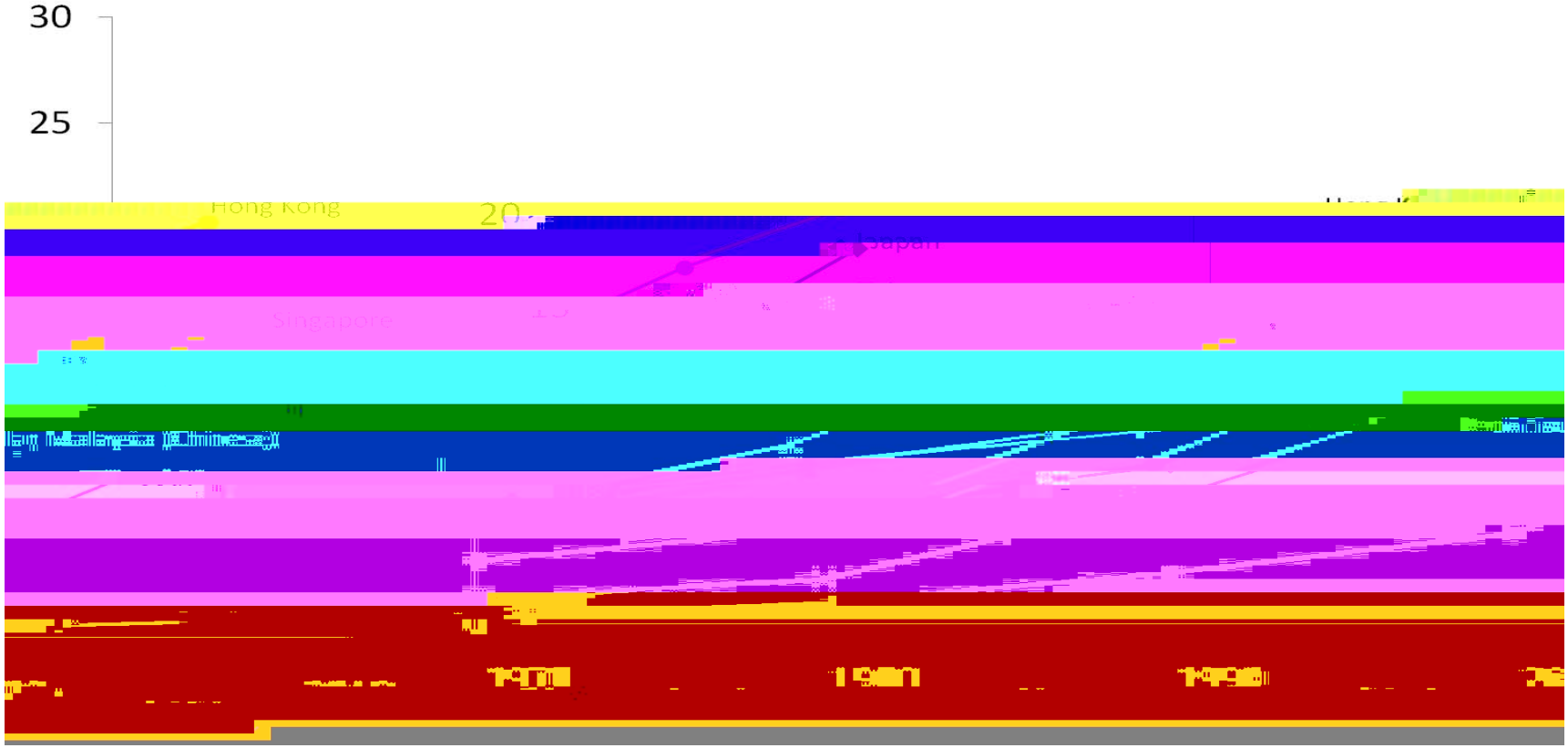
Trends in proportion single among women aged 35-39, 1970-2005



Policy responses

- **Japan**
  - Ratcheting up pro-natalist policies since 1990
  - Two main approaches:
    -

Policy responses

- **Korea**
  - **Serious policy initiatives were slow to come**
  - **2006 First Basic Plan for Low Fertility and Aged Society:**
    - Widening of subsidies of costs of childrearing and education
    - Taxes lowered for households with young dependant children or large families
    - Maternity and childcare leave expanded
    - Starting in 2008, male partners will receive three days of paid leave to help after childbirth
  - **Basic aim is to create a favourable environment for childbearing and childrearing by transferring some of the burden of child-raising from family to society**
  - **Seoul municipality heavily involved in pronatalist measures**

Policy responses

- **Taiwan**
- Nothing serious until 2006 (Mega Warmth Social Welfare Program)
- Further measures in 2008 (White Book of Population Policy)
  - Maternity leave benefits (8 weeks paid, covered by labour insurance)
  - Parental leave benefits
  - Childcare subsidy system for early childhood education and care
  - Parental leave of up to 6 months on half pay now available to mothers

Singapore’s 2004 policy initiatives

Recent policy changes in Singapore

2008:

- Increased child tax relief
- Increased cash baby bonus for first and second children
- Paid maternity leave increased from 12 to 16 weeks
- Unpaid childcare leave introduced
- Paid childcare leave extended
- Employers must give pregnant workers maternity leave benefits if they are fired without good cause in the last 6 months of pregnancy

However, in last few years, Government giving major attention to gaining acceptance for expanded migration inflow, in recognition of unlikelihood of significant fertility increases

Reasons why fertility harder to raise in East Asian countries than in ultra-low fertility countries of Europe

- **Marriage-related**
  - Childbearing outside of marriage not acceptable
  - Therefore non-marriage (including involuntary non-marriage) a barrier to fertility
  - Non-marriage rising because of
    - Issues about raising children (see below)
    - Rising female education and hypergamy factors (marriage squeeze)
    - Concern about responsibilities for ageing in-laws
    - Concern about rising divorce rates

Reasons why fertility harder to raise in East Asian countries than in ultra-low fertility countries of Europe (cont.)

- **Related to desire for children**
  - Financial costs of childrearing (Korea-Singapore US$250,000; Japan higher; this doesn't include opportunity costs of women's interrupted career)
  - Cult of the successful child – intensive child-rearing
  - Women's career issues
  - Family unfriendly workplaces
  - Alternative satisfactions to children (dogs, holidays?)
  - Unchanging male attitudes to household roles

Policy and reality

- Paternity (for childcare) leave participation in Japan: a miniscule 1.2 per cent
- Child-care leave in Korea (3 months of maternal

Some conclusions

- Institutional and cultural context in East Asian countries not conducive to a fertility upsurge; patriarchal structures and attitudes hard to change
- Pro-natalist policies are being ratcheted up, with changes almost every year
- But one estimate – spending on family policies in Korea about one fifth that in France
- Except in Singapore, retreat from marriage continuing; tempo effects not yet in play