

TRENDS IN DELAYED AND NON-MARRIAGE IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

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The marriage pattern in Malaysia has changed dramatically since the 1940s. The general trend is one of increasing age at marriage and non-marriage. Between 1970 and 2000, the singulate mean age at marriage among men and women increased about three years each, from 25.5 years and 22.0 years to 28.8 years and 25.3 years, respectively. During the same period, the proportion of never married among those aged 30–34 doubled from 12 per cent to 25 per cent among males and from 6 per cent to 12 per cent among females. This paper uses data from population censuses to examine the trends and correlates of delayed marriage for the three main ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia. Data from sample surveys are also used to shed some light on contemporary marriage behaviour. Malaysia has made great strides in socio-economic development that benefited all segments of society. However, the effects of socio-economic development on marriage postponement and non-marriage have been stronger for non-Malays than for Malays. This can probably be explained by socio-cultural and religious practices.

KEYWORDS: Peninsular Malaysia; non-marriage; delayed marriage

Introduction

Trends and Correlates of Marriage in Asia

The trend towards delayed and non-marriage in Malaysia has followed a rather similar path to that in many Asian countries. An overview of the trends and correlates of marriage in Asia provides the perspectives for examining the marriage trends and patterns in Malaysia.

Forty years ago, marriage was near-universal in Asia. However, by the early 1970s, when most national governments were instituting family planning programmes to contain rapid population growth, a trend towards delayed and non-marriage had emerged (Tsuya 2001). By 1990, the singulate mean age at first marriage for men and women had exceeded 25 years and 23 years, respectively, in most of the south-east Asian countries, and was even higher in the metropolitan centres (United Nations 2000; Jones 2004).

The proportion of never married among women aged 30–34 has increased most rapidly in Japan, from 7.2 per cent in 1970 to 26.6 per cent by 2000. Spectacular increase in the proportion never married at ages 30–34 over the same period also occurred in Myanmar (from 9.3 per cent to 25.9 per cent), Thailand (from 8.1 per cent to 16.1 per cent), and for Chinese Malaysians (from 9.0 per cent to 18.2 per cent). Similar trends are also observed for males.