

Youth Transition to Adulthood: Regional Variations and Contexts

Wei-Jun Jean Yeung

Director, Centre for Family and Population Research

Professor, Department of Sociology and Asia Research Institute

National University of Singapore

Expert Group Meeting on “The Role of Families and Family Policy in Supporting Youth Transitions”, December 11-12, 2018 in Doha, Qatar. Organized by Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Early Adulthood- a relatively new life stage -

- Between adolescence & adulthood (Booth et al., 1999; Settersten, Arnett, 2000; Furstenberg & Rumbaut, 2005; Berlin et al., 2010)
- the Transition to Adulthood (TTA) – a critical life event, the extent to which one successfully makes the transition has great long-term implications for one's life trajectory
- Government support often runs out at this stage, family and community support are critical

Major Markers of the TTA

- Completion of education
- Homeleaving
- Movement into full-time employment and economic Self-sufficiency
- marriage or partnership
- parenthood

Transition to Adulthood (TTA)

Subjective changes often precede and accompany TTA

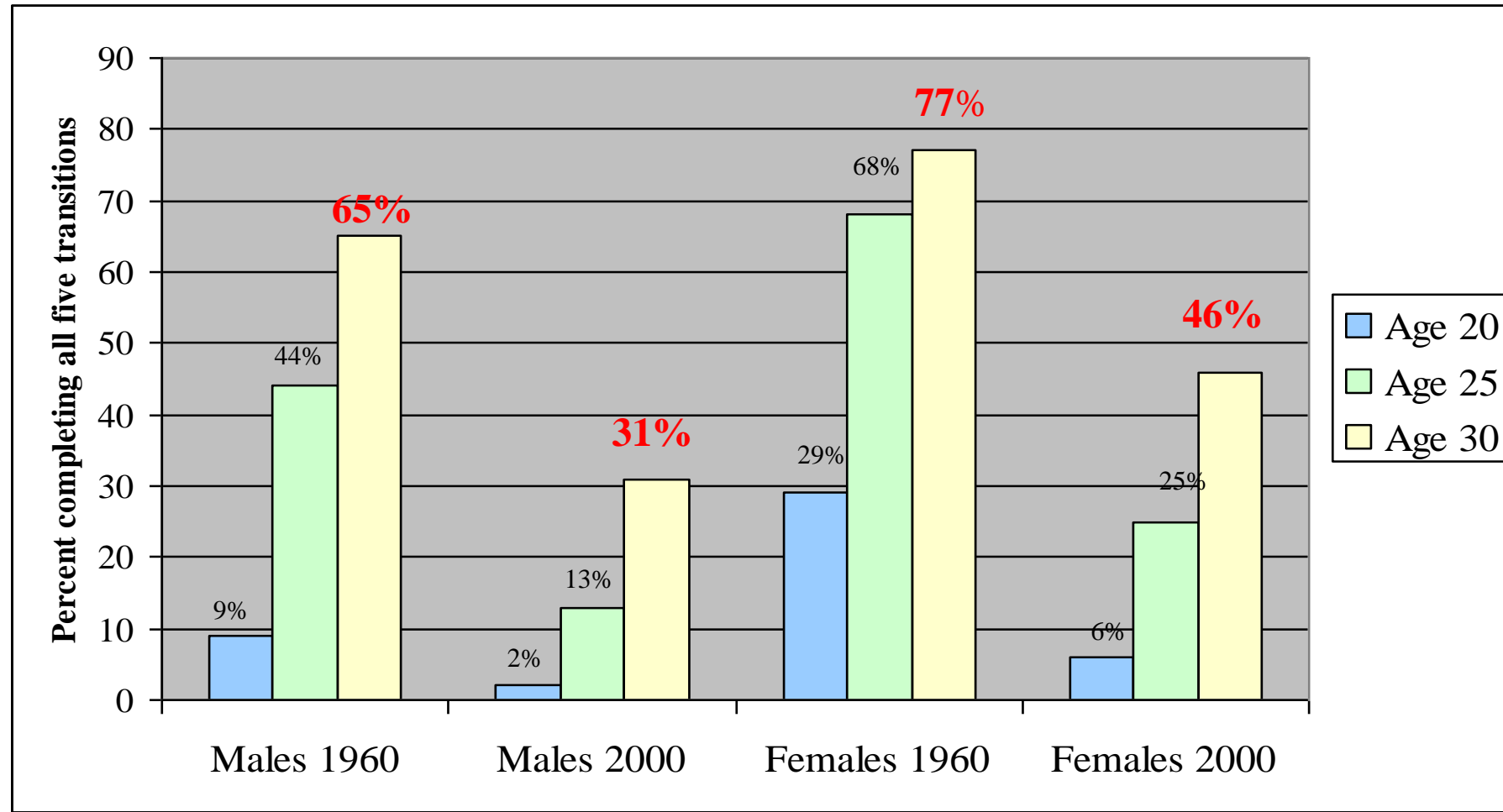
- emergent identity
- shifting sense of responsibility
- feelings of social incorporation
- must be understood in diverse socioeconomic, demographic, cultural, and policy contexts (Arnett and Tanner 2006; Yeung et al, 2013)
- Class, gender and cultural differences in expected/desirable timing and sequence of the transition
- changes in the timing and manners of this transition are reshaping young adults' well-being & inter-generation relations

Transition to Adulthood in final third of 20th Century & 21st Century in US & Europe

- More Protracted
- Less Orderly (Reversals occur)
- Less homogeneous
- Less differentiated by gender
- Two phases of early adulthood
 - Economic transition – education, employment
 - Family transition – marriage, fertility (often much later nowadays)

Figure 1: Completing the Adulthood Transition in 1960 and 2000 in USA

Leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married and having a child, Furstenberg, et. al. in Contexts, Summer, 2004

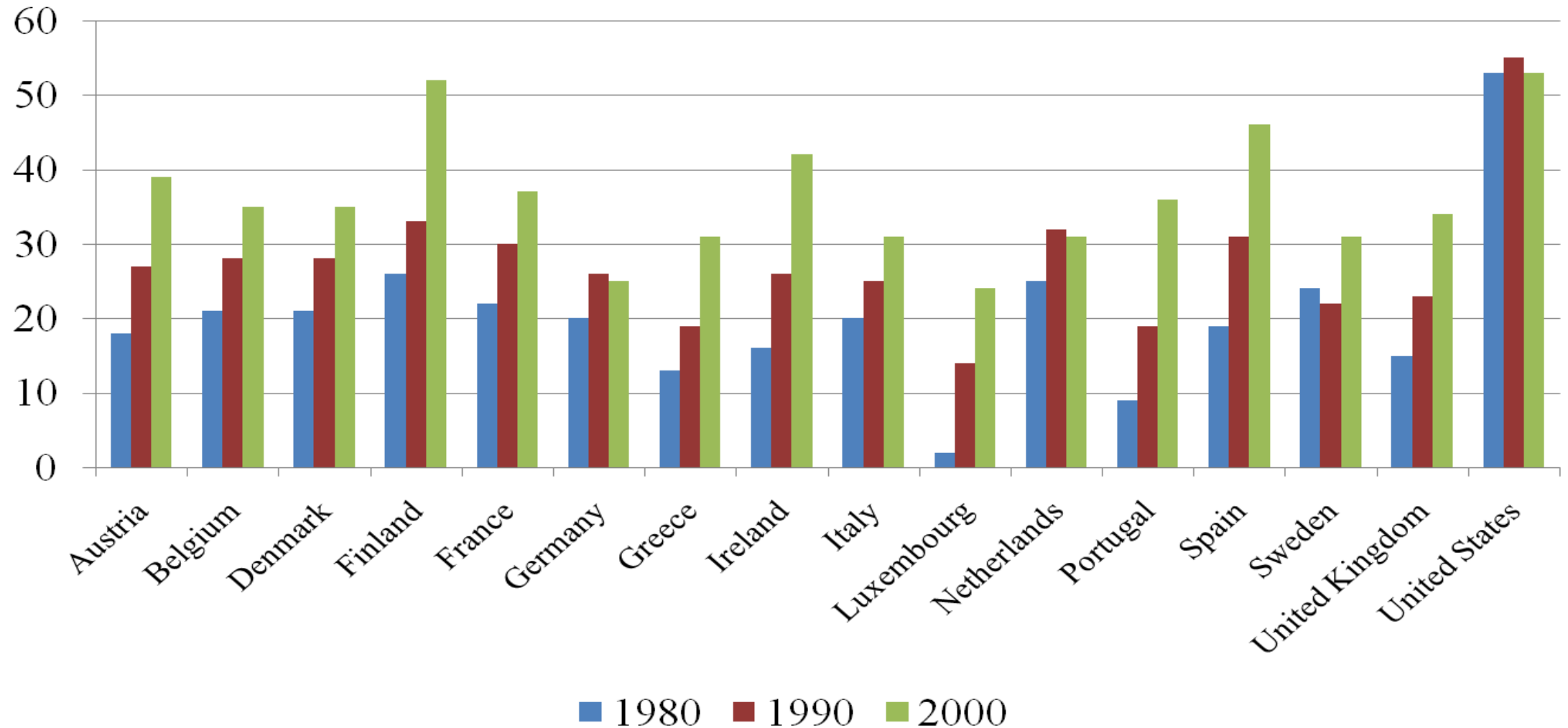


Notes: Data are from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series extracts (IPUMS) of the 1960 and 2000 U.S. Censuses. Men are defined as financially independent if they are in the labor force; women who have completed all transition except employment in the labor force are considered financially independent.

Driving Factors

- Demands for greater human capital and the rise of post-secondary education
- Education expansion in almost all countries

Students enrolled in higher education, per 1,000 population, 1980-2000



Other Driving Factors

- **Globalization** - created economic and spatial reorganization, new opportunities and changes in social structures that make the temporal arrangement of the lives of young people more complex
- A difficult **labor market** for younger and unskilled workers – financial crises and increasing value of human capital, new demands for specialized skills
- **ideological changes** have accompanied the structural changes in economy – growing gender equality, individualism
- Changes in family formation (2nd Demographic transition)
 - Reliable methods of Contraception
 - Smaller families
 - Cohabitation of as an option
 - Changing sexual practices
 - Greater tolerance for non-marital childbearing
 - Increasing divorce
- **Parent-child relation** - greater flow of **resources from parents to children**

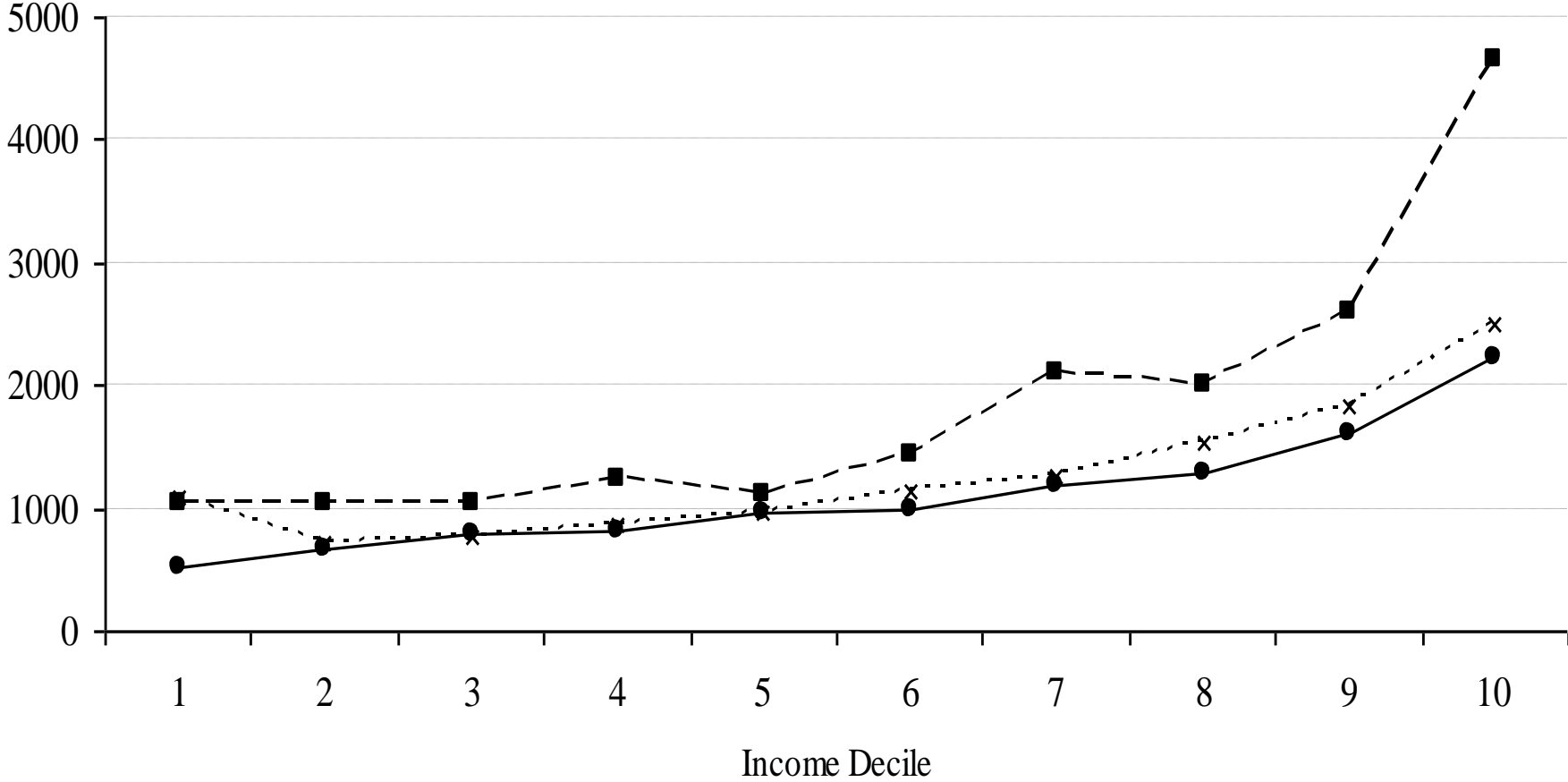
Changes near universal in Western Europe & Anglo-speaking nations

- Appear to stem from similar “causes”
- Yet, marked **cross-national and within-nation differences** in the pace and packaging of TTA, related to
 - historical and cultural differences
 - labor market differences
 - social and economic policies
- Empirical research on cross-national differences is growing but still limited

Growing Inequality in The Transition to Adulthood

- Inequality has been growing steadily in most wealthy nations
- Differences in investments by family (parents & grandparents) are becoming more critical for youth – help in education, housing, network for job search, and family formation
- parents are being asked to help out more. A study over time in the U.S. (Schoeni) reveals that parents are providing more for their children--- roughly ten percent of income among all American parents goes to children over the age of 18.
- Class differences have widened in the amount of support provided to youth over the age of 18.

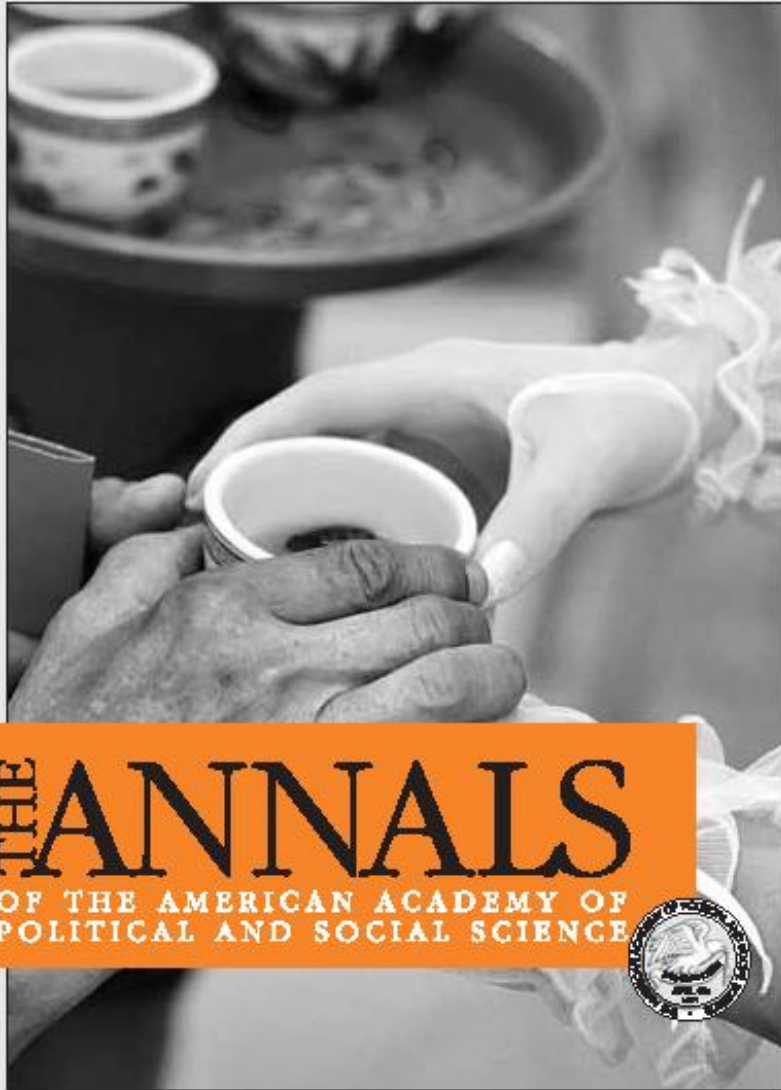
Parental Spending by Income Deciles



---■--- 1999-2000 ···×··· 1980-81 —●— 1972-73

Transitioning to Adulthood in Asia:
School, Work, and Family Life

Special Editors: Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, Cheryl Alipio, and Frank F. Furstenberg Jr.



Volume 646 March 2013

Youth- in 2017 - 15.5% of the world's labour force.

East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia – together accounted for more than half (54%) of the world youth population and have one of the world's highest unemployment rates

Yeung et al. Transitioning to Adulthood in Asia, (2013), ANNALS

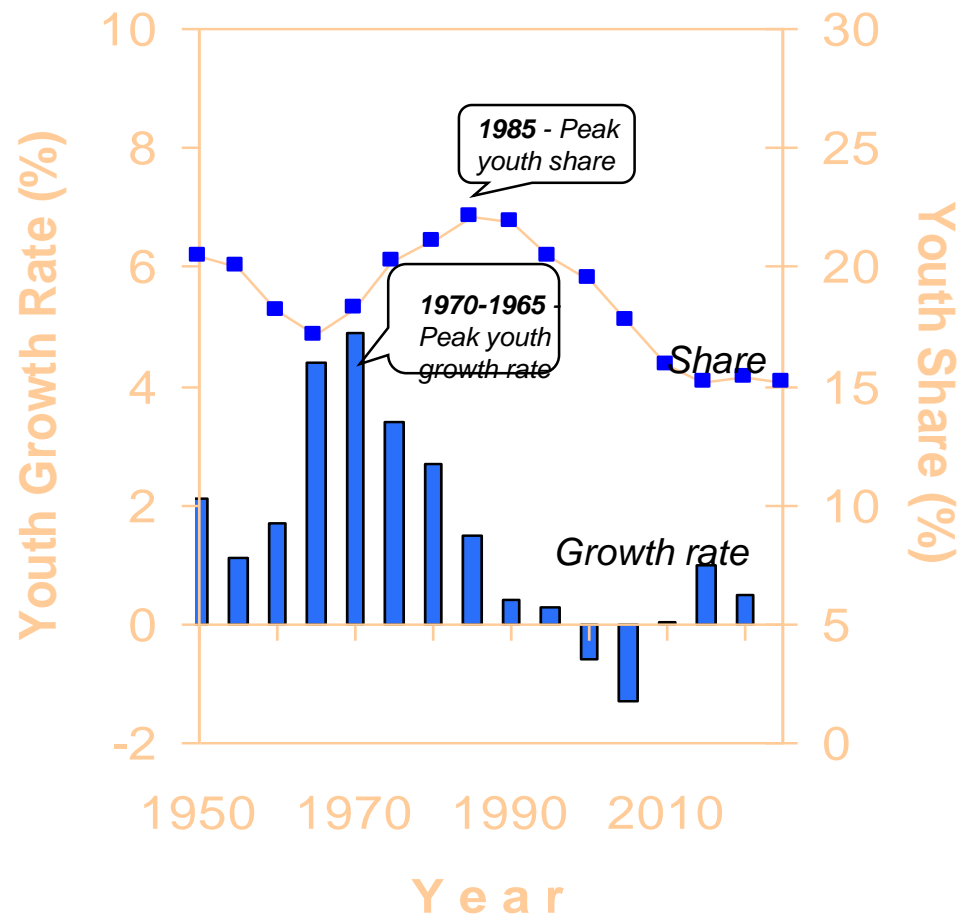
Asia – unique contexts

- Diverse – demographic, culture, economic, policy contexts
- Timing of change – faster, “Compressed modernity”, globalization
- economic uncertainties – Asian financial crises, global recessions
- Lower economic development in many countries
- Deep seated patriarchy – Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Confucian teachings & decreed – greater gender inequality
- Stronger family ties? Extended family play an important role – influence leaving home, marriage issue, etc.
- Large scale migration – cross-border education, marriages - nation-bound research is no longer sufficient
- Generally weaker social safety net than in the West

Demographic - the “Youth Bulge” in Asia

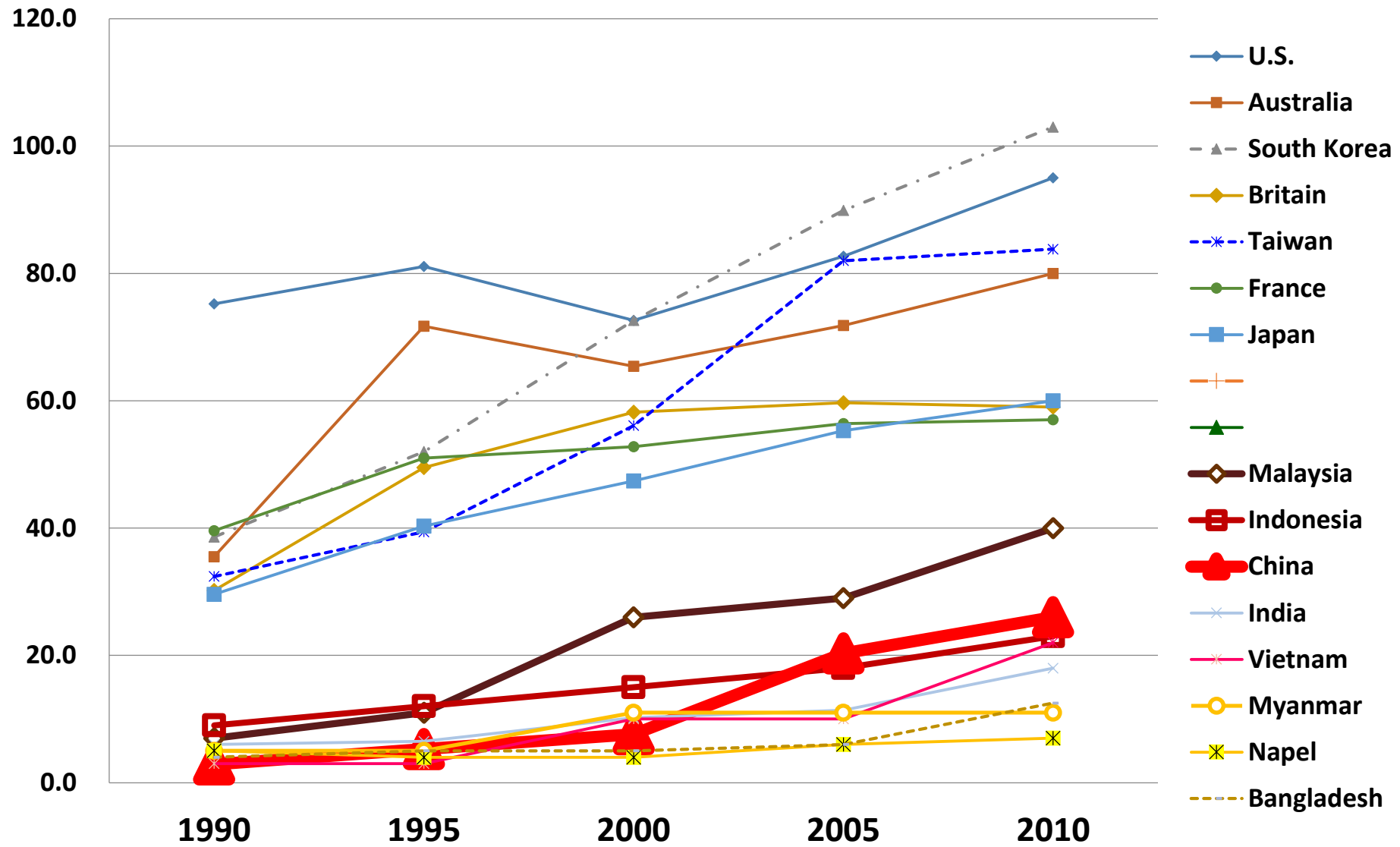
- “Youth bulge” - the number of young adults doubled or more than doubled in nearly every country in Asia between 1960 and 2000, as a result of children born during the high fertility periods, (East-West Center 2002).
- This increase was followed by a dramatic decline by the beginning of the twenty-first century due to the rapid decline of fertility rates in Asia. By the beginning of the 21st century, the youth population was in decline.
- These rapid changes in the number and proportion of youth populations have created challenges for Asian countries’ education and health systems and labor markets, as well as tensions for intergenerational dynamics.
- Reaping “youth dividend” – a source of productivity, innovation?

The Thailand Youth Transition (Xenos, P., 2013)



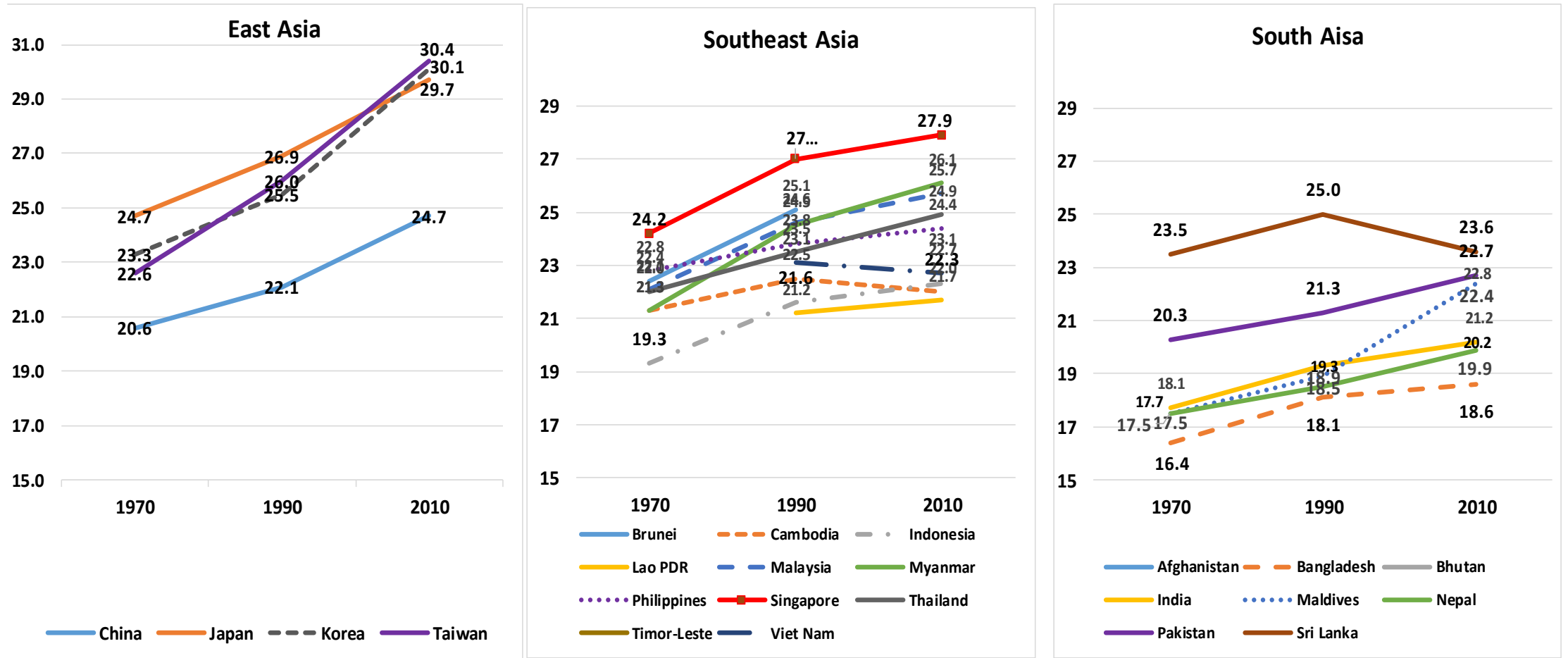
- Growth in the number of youth has surged and dipped like a roller-coaster.
- The youth share of the population exhibits a similar roller-coaster pattern typical of countries in the region.
- But the demographic transition has brought with it a surge in the numbers and share of youth in the population followed by dramatic decline in both measures.
- By the beginning of the 21st century, the youth population was in decline.

International Comparison, Gross College Enrolment Rate, 1990-2010



Source: Yeung, W. J. 2013 "College Expansion Policy and Social Stratification in China". *Chinese Sociological Review* 45(4)

Figure 2: Singulated Mean Age at First Marriage for Females, 1970-2010

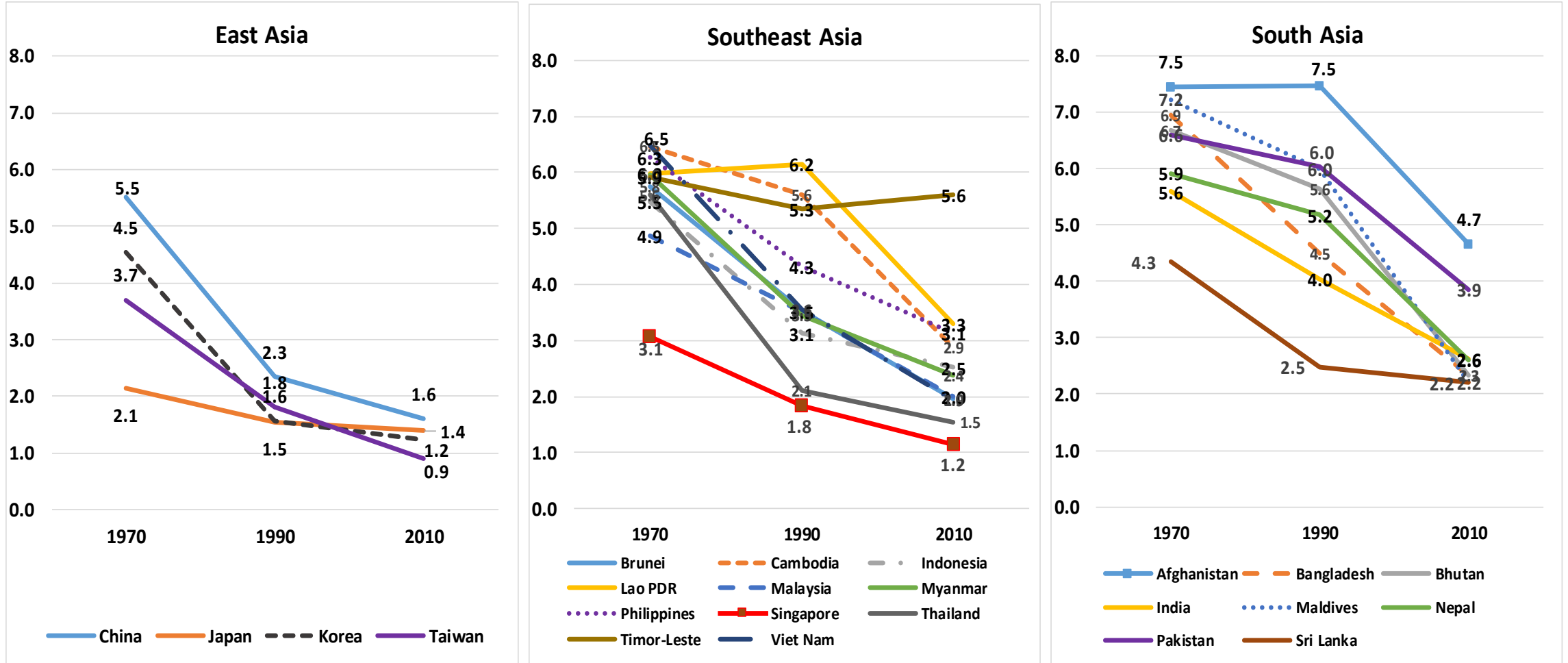


Note: 2010 data of Afghanistan are missing, 2015 data are used.

Source: UN World Marriage Data 2012, accessed on 26 October 2016.

Source: Yeung, et al., *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2019 forthcoming

Figure 1: Total Fertility Rates in East, Southeast, and South Asia, 1970-2010



Note: 2010 data of Afghanistan are missing, 2015 data are used.

Source: World Bank database on Health Nutrition and Population Statistics accessed on 25 October 2016. Data for Singapore sourced from UN Population Division (UNPD) World Fertility Data accessed on 2 November 2016.

Source: Yeung, et al., *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2019, forthcoming

**Yeung and Yang, Labor Market
Uncertainties for Youth and
Young Adults, forthcoming,
ANNALS**

National University of Singapore



9-10 NOVEMBER 2017

**LABOR MARKET
UNCERTAINTIES
FOR YOUTH AND
YOUNG ADULTS**

Why do we care about school-to-work transition?

The impact of early employment

At the individual level:

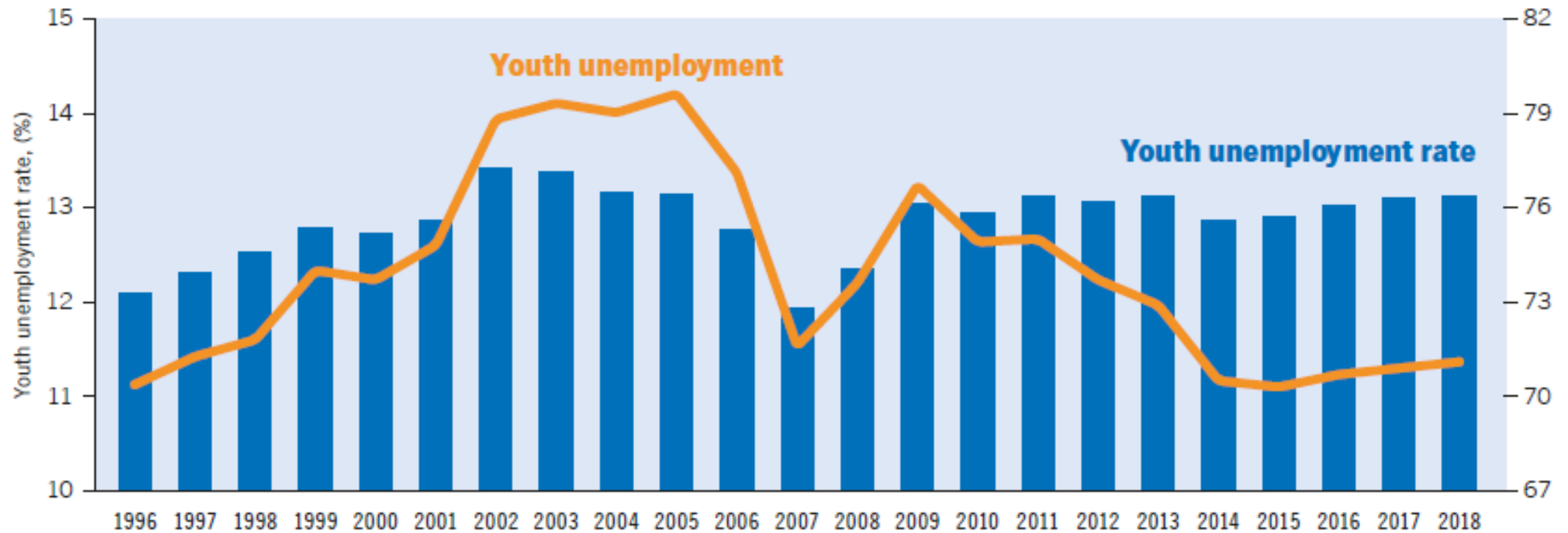
- early employment – **human capital and social network pathways** to Adulthood (Yeung & Rascher, 2014)
- Early unemployment - long-lasting scarring effects on the **chaotic and fragmented career trajectories** for future unemployment and **wages** (ADB, 2013; Greeg & Tominey, 2005; Schmitten & Umkehrer, 2013).
- **Behavioral & sociopsychological impact**: poor health (Physical & mental), suicide, and violence-related mortality in later life (Gunnell, Lopatazidis, Dorling, Wehner, Southall, & Frankel, 1999; Roelfs, Shor, Davidson, & Schwartz, 2011)

The impact of youth unemployment

At the societal level:

- Social impact: potential political and social unrest (HK, Taiwan, Europe, Egypt, Tunisia, etc.), poverty, crime and violence, etc.
- Negative impact on economy in the long run as it represents a waste of human resources that aging societies desperately need

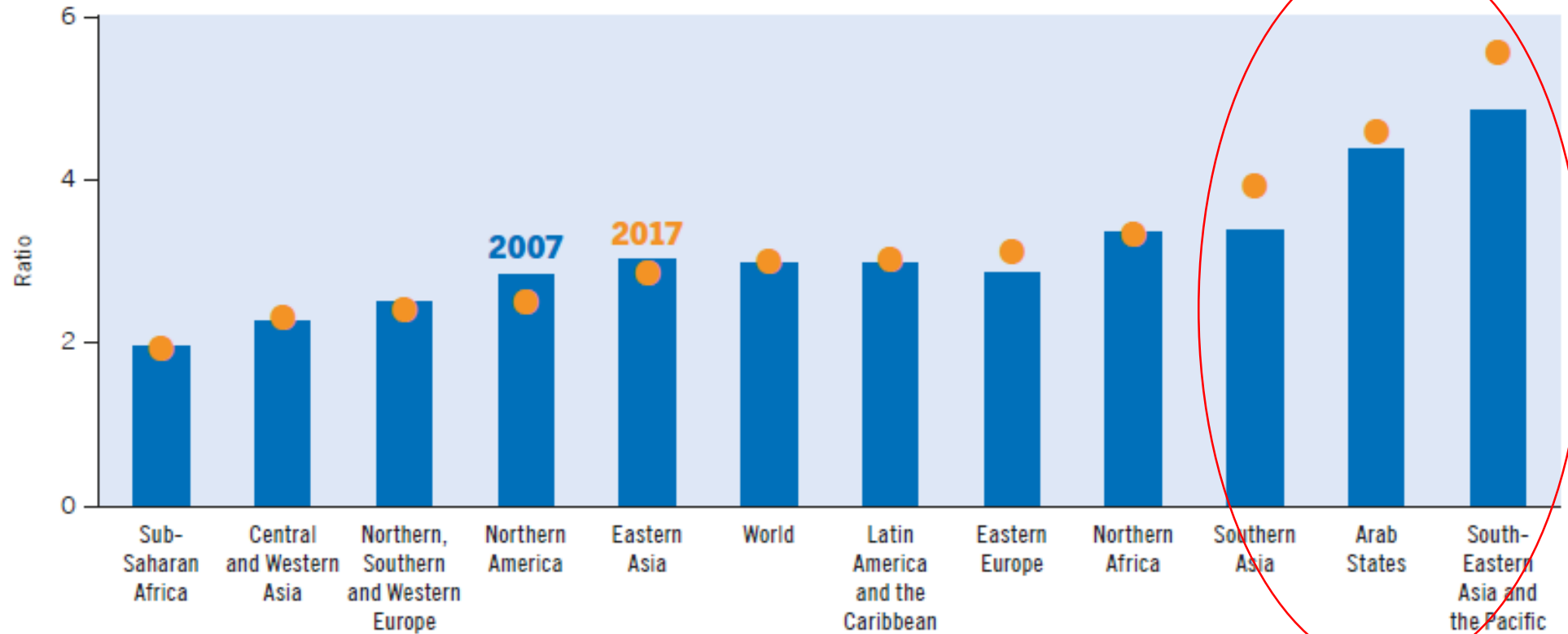
Figure 2.4 Global youth unemployment and unemployment rate, 1998–2018



Source: Calculations based on ILO Trends Econometric Models, April 2017.

- World youth unemployment rate up after Asian financial crisis, with the most dramatic increases were in **East & Southeast Asia and the Pacific** where the rate increased to 15.8 per cent in 2003
- Up again after global financial recession
- The global youth unemployment rate stabilized at 13% in 2016 but it is expected to rise slightly to 13.1% in 2017 (Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017 report).

Figure 2.5 Youth-to-adult unemployment rate ratios by region, 2007–17



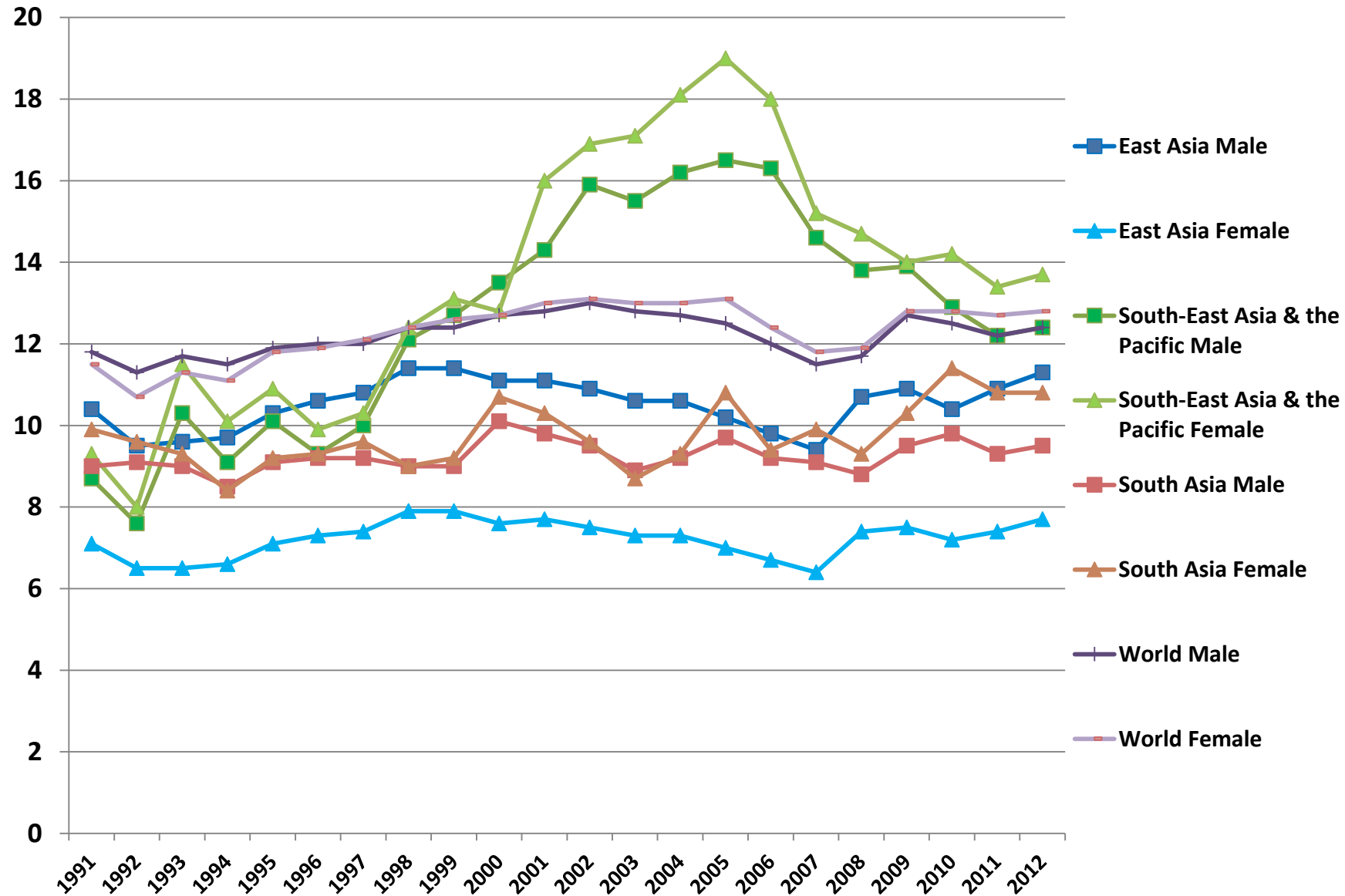
Source: Calculations based on the ILO Trends Econometric Models, April 2017.

- Youth unemployment is the highest among all age groups (~ 3 X adult unemployment)
- Youth are more likely to be affected by the recession, especially those from lower class, with limited (or no) education.
- Regions with highest and increasing ratio – Southeast Asia, Arab States, & South Asia

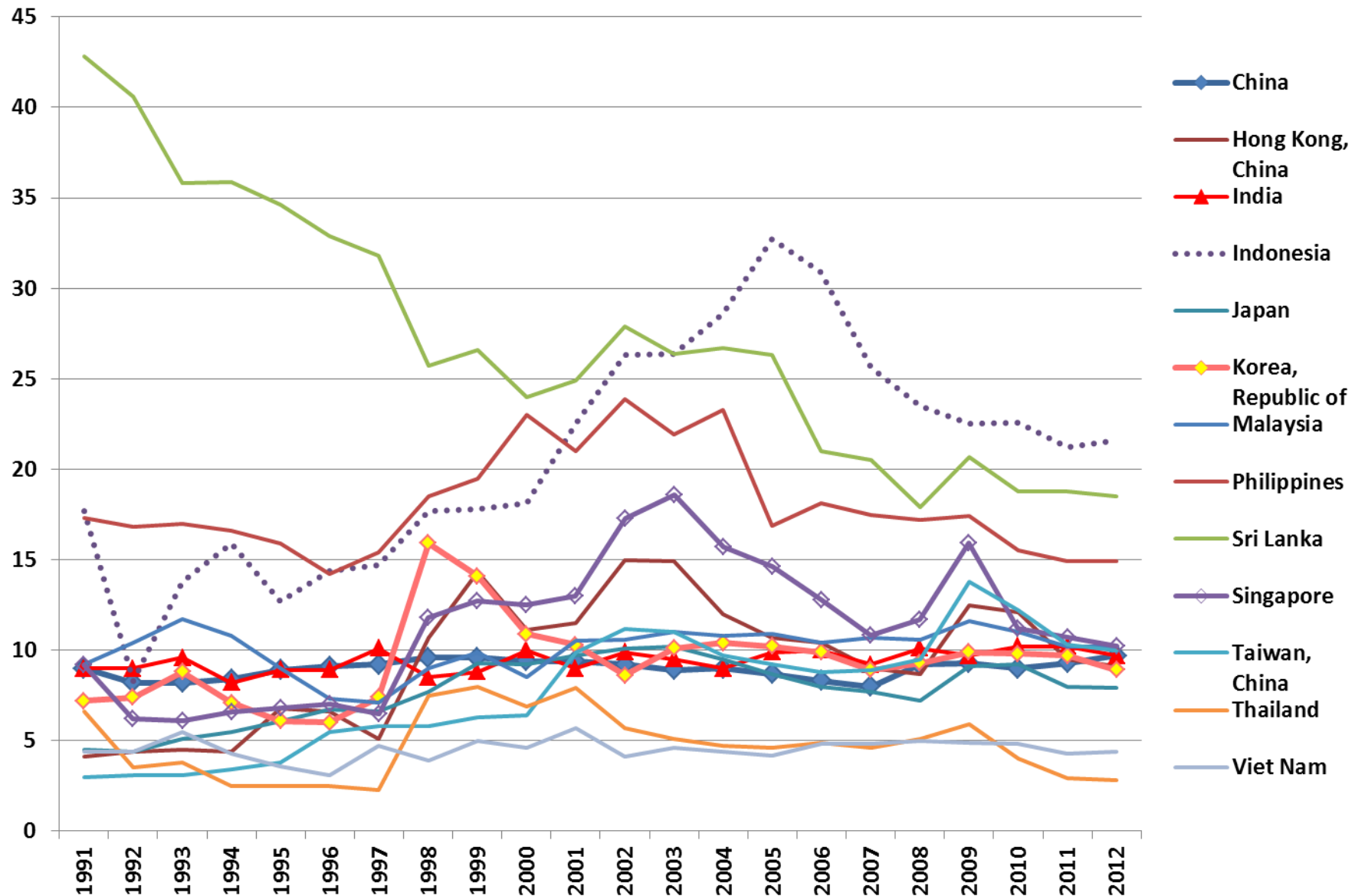
Diverse Regional patterns & challenges

- **Southeast Asia** – highest unemployment, in particular Indonesia, Philippines (young populations), females higher
- **South Asia** – highest working poor, particular females, e.g., India, Sri Lanka
- **East Asia** – unemployment for highly educated a particular challenge (Korea, Japan, Hong Kong Taiwan)
 - China: half of youth has no high school education, most in rural, or rural migrants

Youth unemployment rate World and Asia, by sex

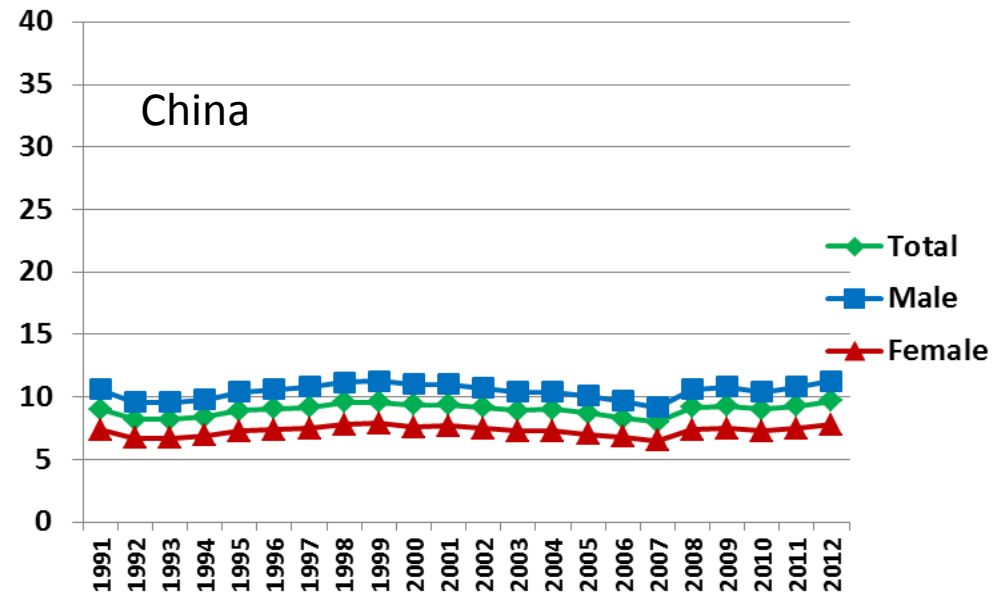
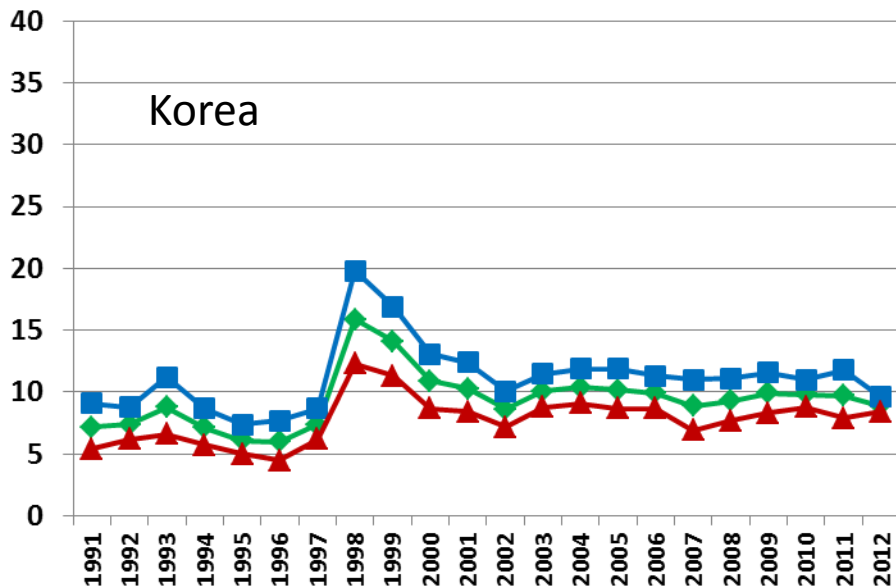
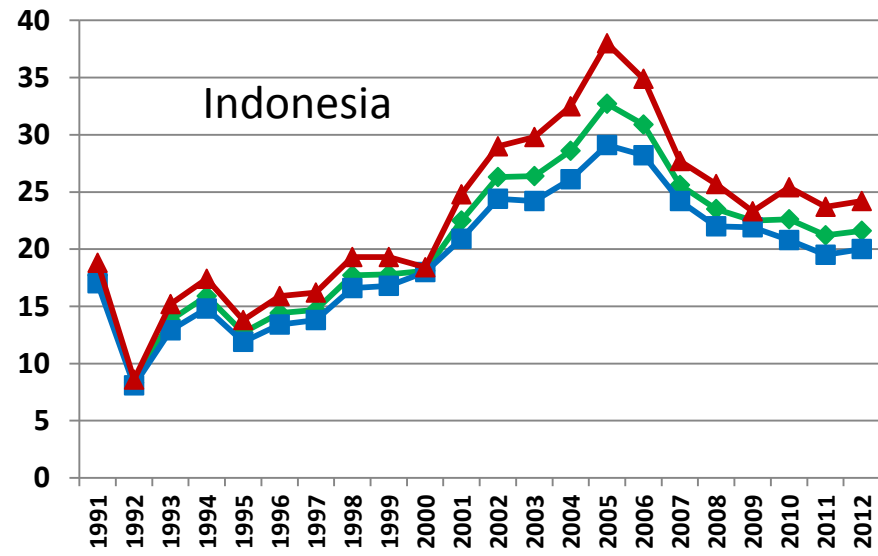
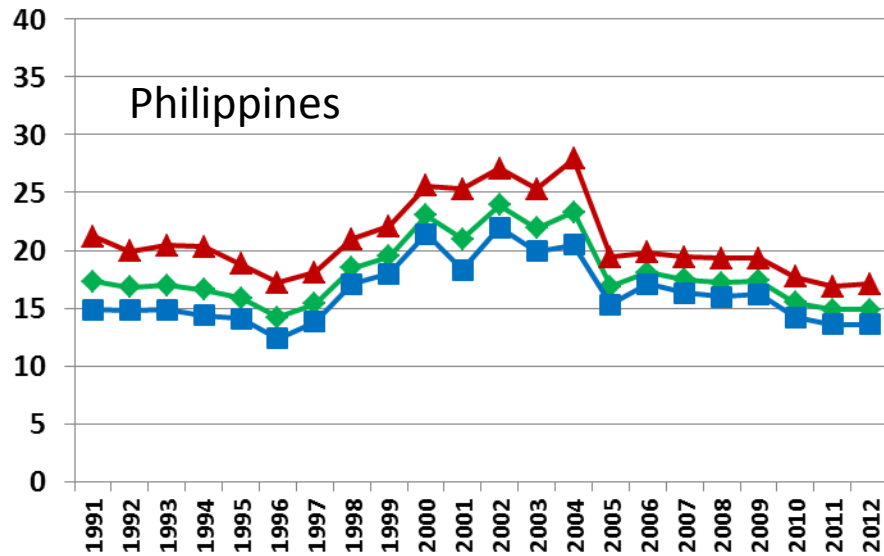


Youth Unemployment rate in Asia, by country



Source: ILO, *KILM Data 8th edition*, http://www.ilo.org/empelm/what/WCMS_114240/lang--en/index.htm

Youth unemployment Rate by sex (ILO estimates)



Youth unemployment among skilled

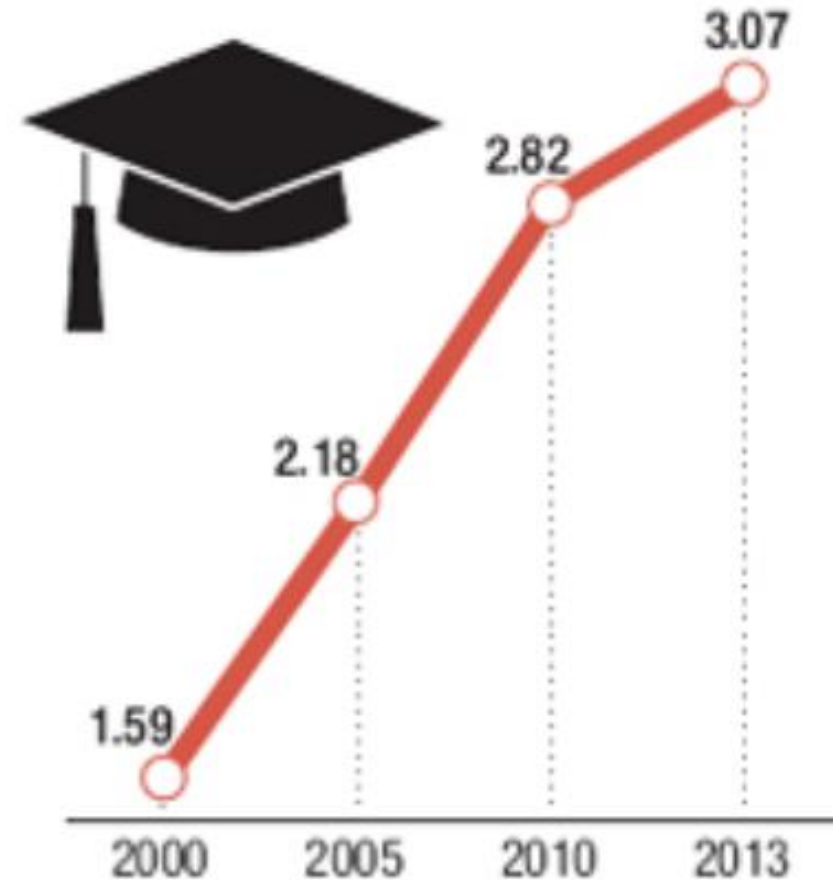
- School-to-work transition: skills mismatch on youth labour markets has become a persistent and growing trend (ILO, 2012).
- The expansion of tertiary education but lack of adjustments in the labour market



South Korea

- The highest university participation rates in the world ≈ 80%
- The number of 'economically inactive' graduates has passed 3,000,000 for the first time (government figures released on 3 February)
- NEET among women
- Korea Times: the oversupply could last for as long as 10 years, until demographic decline reduces the numbers.

No. of economically-inactive with college degree (Unit: million)



Source: Statistics Korea

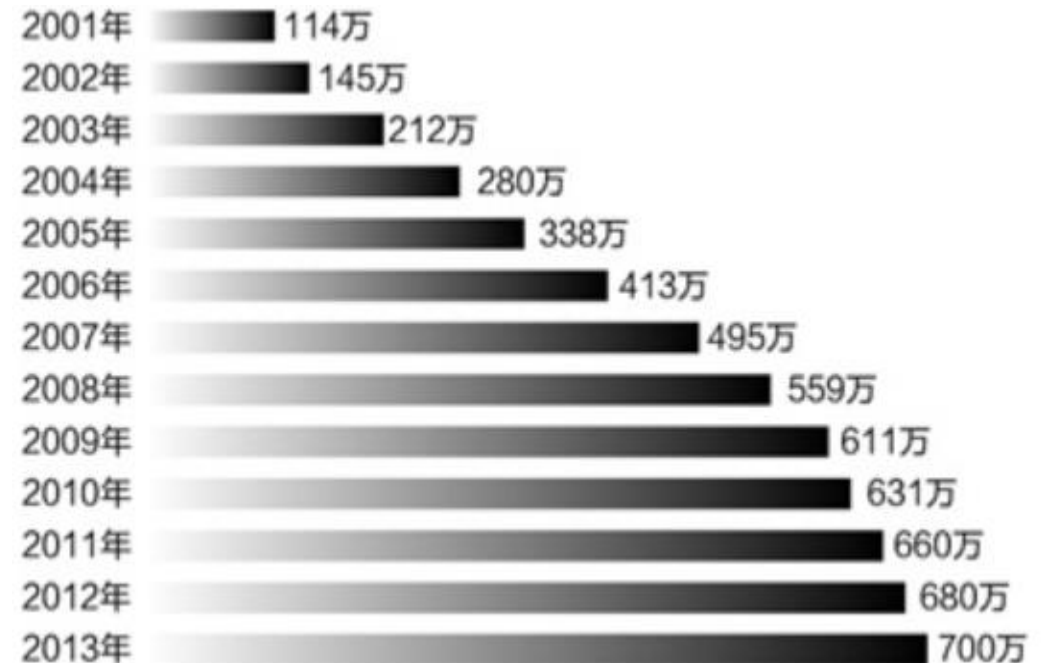
China

- The number of graduates is 'outrunning' economic growth. 7.27 million graduates in 2014, increased by 0.28 million compared to 2013.

Numbers of college graduates (million)

- Unemployment rate for college graduates:
Rural *hukou* origin: 30.5%
Urban *hukou* origin: 12.3%
(CASS, 2013)

Hao (2018) – increased time to land a first job



NEET Rate

- The number of youth aged 15 to 24 who are **not in employment, education or training** as a percentage of the youth population (ILO,2016) - an estimated 21.8 per cent of young people
- **Female** NEET rates are much higher. Globally, the female NEET rate is 34.4 per cent, compared to 9.8 per cent for males.

long-term unemployment, working poor (precarious jobs, low wage)

- 1/3 youth in the world is either seeking but unable to find work, has given up the job search entirely or is working but still living below the US\$2 a day poverty line.
- continued vulnerabilities of young women in the labor market.
- Globally, three out of four employed young women and men are in informal employment. In developing countries, this ratio is as high as 19 out of 20 for young women and men.
- After the recession, the economic structure is changing. Skill mismatch, obsolete skill and over supply of college graduate in some countries also contributes the high unemployment rate for youth.

increasing polarization

- vulnerable groups face a sharper rise in unemployment,
 - youth with least **education** and lowest skills
 - low family SES**
 - disability**
 - ethnic minorities**
 - migrants**
 - females**

Factors affecting transition to work

- economic development – strength of labor market
- How well organized is the labor market, involve private sectors to integrate youth workers
- Poverty, Education level and quality, invest in teachers
- Skills and work experience – internship, tech & vocational trainings, Work-study combination
- Mismatch of skills – overeducated in mid-income countries, undereducated in low-income countries
- How well adapted to new technologies –AI (artificial intelligence), machine learning, robotics, internet of things, etc.
- **Disadvantaged families** - resources, network (financial, social and cultural capital), & family obligations
- Parental expectations and parenting behavior