Changing Marriage Patterns in Southeast Asia
Economic and socio-cultural dimensions

Edited by
Gavin W. Jones, Terence H. Hull and Maznah Mohamad

Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series
Changing Marriage Patterns in Southeast Asia

Various forms of partnering—such as officially registered marriages, cohabiting relationships, and other kinds of relatively stable relationships—are crucial in the formation of families throughout the world. Although, today, forms of partnering in the region are not restricted to formal marriage, the norm remains for couples to marry—to establish a new family, and to accept the cultural requirement to have children.

This book provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of partnerships and marriage in the Southeast Asian region using quantitative data alongside qualitative approaches. Through the research of demographers, sociologists and anthropologists, it examines the way trends in the formation and dissolution of marriages are related to changes in the region’s economy and society; illuminating both the broad forces affecting marriage patterns and the way these forces work out at the individual and family level.

Presenting the variety of contemporary marriage patterns in the region, with an emphasis on the ways in which marriage issues impinge on the welfare of those concerned, this book will be essential reading for students and scholars of Southeast Asia and the sociology of the family.

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Economic and socio-cultural dimensions

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Preface

This book is the result of a long process of collaboration between the editors, the chapter authors and the Ford Foundation office in Jakarta. Our conviction as editors was that marriage and partnering in Southeast Asia has been under-researched, and that this is unfortunate, given the close relation between marriage and wellbeing. Originally, we had hoped to cast the net of this book wider, to cover all of Southeast Asia, but this was prevented by funding issues. Happily, through the good offices of the Ford Foundation’s Jakarta office, we were able to proceed with the studies planned for Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Ford Foundation funding supported the fieldwork conducted for some of the chapters, and enabled us to bring the authors together on three separate occasions at workshops in which drafts were presented and discussed.

The process of conducting this research, of editing the highly varied studies conducted by different researchers using a range of methodological approaches and in preparing the resulting manuscript for publication has been time consuming, partly because it has been only one of many activities of the three editors. However, we believe it has been worth it, and that this volume, by helping to reveal the fascination, complexity and policy relevance of marriage issues in the region, may stimulate colleagues to engage in further much-needed research.

There are many people who deserve our thanks. First of all, Dr. Meiwita Budiharsana and her staff at the Ford Foundation office in Jakarta, without whose financial and moral assistance this research and the resulting book would not have been possible. The Ford Foundation was particularly concerned with the relevance of our studies to poverty issues, and as far as possible, we have tried to maintain a poverty focus in our studies. Second, we thank Dr. Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, Director of the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies at the Graduate School, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and his staff for assisting us in holding one of the workshops in Yogyakarta. We also thank the events team at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (ARI), for their excellent work in helping us arrange the other two workshops. Finally, we thank the two research assistants at ARI, Deborah Chua Fengyi and Saharah Abu Bakar, who helped with the copy editing of the manuscript.

Gavin Jones, Terence Hull, Maznah Mohamad
Singapore and Canberra, November 2010
Map 1  Insular Southeast Asia, indicating study areas
1  Marriage trends in Insular Southeast Asia

Their economic and socio-cultural dimension

Gavin W. Jones, Terence H. Hull and Maznah Mohamad

This book is about changing marriage patterns, including other forms of partnering, in a major region of Southeast Asia. Changing marriage patterns are an integral part of broader changes in family institutions, which are, themselves, part of a broader matrix of social change. Though the book focuses on marriage, it should be viewed in the context of fundamental and far-reaching changes in the societies of this region. To set the scene, later in this introductory chapter, a brief survey of the changing socio-economic context will be provided.

The term, ‘marriage’, carries with it various legal and normative connotations. It is important to note that legal marriage is not the only form of partnering. Officially registered marriages, cohabiting relationships and other kinds of relatively stable relationships are all, to varying degrees, present as routes to the formation of families in different parts of the world. In Southeast Asia, marriage is the normal form of partnering, as contrasted with, say, the West Indies or Scandinavia, where more informal arrangements are far more common. Marriage in Southeast Asia defines the establishment of a new family, and serves as a kind of gatekeeper into the possibility of having children. Indeed, crossing the threshold of marriage not only opens the possibility of having children, but signals a cultural requirement to produce children.

The geographical scope of this book is the region defined as ‘The Malay World’ (by an ethno-linguistic definition) or ‘Archipelagic Southeast Asia’ (by a geographic definition). Neither term is precisely correct as a blanket term covering the countries included in this book, i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore. While these populations have historically shared similar kinship and cultural features (Reid 1988: chapter 4), in Indonesia and Malaysia, they have primarily adopted the Muslim religion, while in the Philippines, they are predominantly Catholic. However, the region is also home to significant Chinese and Indian populations, the latter of whom mainly live in Singapore and Malaysia. Thus, studies on marriage in insular Southeast Asia can actually cover the major populations of Asia, including two populations, i.e. the Indian (mainly Tamil) population, and the Chinese (mainly from coastal Fujian and Guangdong province) population, characterized traditionally by patriarchal systems. This book does not cover the predominantly Buddhist countries of mainland Southeast Asia, i.e. Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.
Patterns of marriage and its dissolution reflect kinship systems, influenced by religious influences on laws and customs related to the formation and dissolution of marriages, and by changing socio-economic conditions. There can be significant friction lines as these different influences interact. In this region of Southeast Asia, bilateral kinship systems prevail. Women have historically enjoyed relative autonomy and this is reflected in the pattern of sexual relations, i.e. ‘relative premarital freedom, monogamy and fidelity within marriage (which was easily dissolved by divorce), and a strong female position in the sexual game’ (Reid 1988: 156). Reid notes that this pattern ‘conflicted in different ways with the practices of all the world religions which were increasing their hold on Southeast Asia in the age of commerce’. In major parts of Indonesia and Malaysia, though, it must be kept in mind that after Islamization, up to the mid-twentieth century, the majority of girls were married off by age 16 or 17, leaving little scope for ‘relative premarital freedom’ to express itself (Jones 2001). The desire to protect the family honour by marrying off girls at a young age was strongly evident. However, women could inherit, albeit following the Islamic allocation of half shares, and they could fairly readily leave an unsatisfactory marriage, often in its very early stages, through divorce without excessive loss of face to either the woman or her natal family. Also, while patriarchy as a principle was supported by the Muslim religion, in practice, spousal relations were much more egalitarian than in South Asia. As a result of the bilateral kinship system, the North Indian pattern of cutting off young wives from their natal family was absent. In Catholic Philippines, choice of spouse was more relaxed than in Muslim Southeast Asian societies.

Compared with other parts of Southeast Asia, it could be generalized that the bilateral kinship system made for many similarities in marriage patterns between the countries considered in this book and those in Buddhist Thailand, Burma and Cambodia, though the age at marriage in the latter countries was, on average, higher than in the Malay-Muslim world. Vietnam was different in that it was greatly influenced by Confucian principles, and therefore lay more in the realm of China and Korea. Comparison between archipelagic Southeast Asia and South Asia showed starker contrasts, as in India (both north and south, despite the greater prevalence of cross-cousin marriage in the south), patrilineality and patrilocality were governing principles, leading to the greater prevalence of joint families, stressing filial and fraternal solidarity (Mandelbaum 1970), and the isolation of in-marrying females from their kin (Das Gupta 2010; Dumont and Pocock 1957; Dyson and Moore 1983).

In archipelagic Southeast Asia, a broad generalization was that in the mid-twentieth century, arranged marriage, with varying degrees of consultation with the individuals marrying, remained the norm, but by the end of the century, it had virtually disappeared. To qualify the generalization, it must be noted that in the mid-twentieth century, self-choice was greater in the Philippines than elsewhere, and that currently, parent-arranged marriage remains more common in certain rural parts of Indonesia than elsewhere.

The history of arranged marriage among Malay-Muslim populations in the region reflects trends in gender and inter-generational relations. Traditional
arranged marriage placed considerable power in the hands of parents, and, in particular, the father. The weakening of the system reflects at a deep level the abdication of this power by the older generation and in particular by males of the older generation. It can be seen as a largely voluntary abdication, rather than one brought on by revolutionary means. It is clearly related to the remarkable developments in education, increasing urbanization and involvement of women in economic activities outside the household, among other things—which in the public perception are often referred to in the vernacular as ‘changing times’ (e.g. in Indonesian, *perobahan zaman*), a term which some social scientists may consider excessively vague, but which on the contrary captures the breadth and pervasiveness of the changes referred to.

(Jones 2008: 4–5)

The weakening of the arranged marriage system in archipelagic Southeast Asian countries is not hard to explain. As these countries are characterized by bilateral kinship systems and not, except for the Chinese populations, subject to Confucianist influences, there is less of an underlying structural need for an arranged marriage system. The system therefore crumbled in the face of changing reality, in the form of extended education for girls, the effect of this in raising ages at marriage, and the lack of a compelling reason why parents should continue to be the ones making the choice of spouse for later-marrying daughters.

We will trace briefly here some of the major socio-economic changes in the countries covered that may be expected to have close links to trends in marriage patterns. These include changes in the structure of the economy, which is linked to urbanization, changing patterns of migration and the changing nature of work, the expansion and extension of schooling, and the changing roles of women. A summary of these trends is given in Table 1.1.

One thing that is clear is the enormous difference in levels of economic development between Singapore and the two large countries in the study, i.e. Indonesia and the Philippines. Malaysia is in an intermediate position, but with levels of real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) that are three to four times higher than in the Philippines or Indonesia. In terms of urbanization, Singapore is totally urban, while two thirds of Malaysia’s population live in urban areas, though as recently as 1970, only one third did. In all three countries, the level of urbanization has increased markedly over time, though less rapidly in the Philippines. The Philippines and Indonesia are currently about 50 per cent urban. High rates of rural–urban migration have been responsible for increasing urbanization, as young people, females prominent among them, move to the cities in search of better education and employment opportunities in the expanding manufacturing and services sectors. This has also broken down the possibilities of tight control over young women in the traditional rural setting, although it would be incorrect to assume that most young women migrating for urban education or employment are thereby completely cutting the fetters to the control mechanisms exercised by rural families.
Table 1.1 Insular Southeast Asia—change in some economic and social indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average annual growth rate, 1960–2000 (%)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual growth rate 2000–2010 (%)</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (PPP) 2008</td>
<td>3,689</td>
<td>13,129</td>
<td>3,244</td>
<td>45,553</td>
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<td><strong>% employment in agriculture (males)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td><strong>Net secondary school enrolment ratio</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Female labour force participation rate</strong>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>42.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female labour force participation rate, ages 20–39</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>43.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of urbanization</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Ages 15–64.

Crucial trends influencing marriage in the region are the sharp increases in the proportion of young people who complete secondary education and continue on to tertiary education. In 1970, the Philippines and Singapore were well ahead of Malaysia and Indonesia in secondary school enrolment ratios, but the increases in these ratios by 2000 were most marked in these two lagging countries. Lengthened time in school influenced marriage in many ways. For one thing, it meant that many girls were still in school at an age at which their own mothers were already married. This direct effect in raising ages at marriage was accompanied by changes in role expectations of young women. It became much more common for them to enter the formal workforce, as evidenced by the rising labour force participation rates for women aged 20–39 in all four countries shown in Table 1.1. It also meant that they were having more chance to meet and establish friendships with young men they met in school, in the workplace, or elsewhere, who might be unknown to their parents—again, a sharp change from the situation faced by their mothers and grandmothers in countries such as Indonesia. This altered situation went along with a withdrawal of parents from their traditional role in choosing a spouse for their children.
The age pattern of marriage in Malaysia and Indonesia has shifted from predominantly teenage marriages for females to much later marriages, and the age gap between spouses has tended to narrow. In the Philippines, teenage marriage has not been common even half a century ago, and the proportion of women completing their fertile years without marrying has been the highest in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, average age at marriage has increased there as well, though not as sharply as in Malaysia.

Despite the strong trend towards later marriage in insular Southeast Asia, some teenage marriage remains. Interestingly, the incidence of teenage marriage in the Philippines has barely changed over the past half a century, whereas elsewhere, it has become less common, resulting in the Philippines shifting from having the lowest incidence of teenage marriage to having one of the highest. In both Malaysia and Indonesia, teenage marriage has not only become less common over time, but the bulk of such marriages have shifted from the mid-to-late teenage years to the late teenage years. Due to the many issues in documenting changes in teenage marriage, and interpreting their implications for well-being and policy, one chapter in this book focuses specifically on teenage marriage.

While patterns and trends in marriage can be discussed at the national level, and through international comparisons, there are enormous differentials within the countries being discussed in this book. These differentials can be observed between regions, between urban and rural areas, between ethnic groups, and between socio-economic groups. They are highlighted in many of the chapters in the book.

In East Asia, the trend towards later and less marriage has been striking in recent decades (Jones and Gubhaju 2009), and has been a major factor in the drop in fertility to ultra-low levels, which has been of great concern to governments in the region. The trend has not been as extreme in Southeast Asia, though in Singapore and among Chinese Malaysians, patterns of delay in marriage match those in the East Asian countries, and the same is true of the urban population of Thailand. Delay in marriage is much more pronounced in insular Southeast Asia than in South Asia, where parent-arranged marriage and teenage marriage for girls remain distinguishing characteristics.

While concern about men not marrying until their 30s or 40s is present in these societies, it has never been as strong as the concern over women who remain single when they reach these ages. In Malaysia, there is moral panic every time a new census appears documenting the sizeable number of Malay women remaining single into their 30s, and this usually occasions comments by some religious officials on the virtues of polygyny in such circumstances. The underlying assumption is that to remain single is a disaster for a woman, an assumption by no means shared by all the women remaining single beyond the ‘normal’ age at marriage. The religious officials’ case is bolstered by the argument that it is a duty for Muslims to marry and raise a family. In any event, single women at these ages are pioneers, both in Malaysia and Indonesia, and although their numbers are growing rapidly, societal acceptance of this fact lags, as does adjustment of the way family
affairs and community activities are conducted. Thus, singles are often made to feel that they have no accepted role in society.

This book also deals, though to a lesser extent, with issues of divorce and polygamy in insular Southeast Asian societies. These are very fraught issues. It is not necessarily the objective incidence of these events that is important, but rather, the perceptions about them. Thus, the (correct) perception that the incidence of divorce is increasing is likely to colour the decision-making process of young single people about marrying, and serve as another factor creating a hesitance towards marriage. Also, the ‘possibility’ of polygamy, and the threat of some husbands to engage in it, in the Malay-Muslim societies in the region serve to make polygamy a much greater issue in marital well-being than its relatively infrequent incidence might suggest. Poverty accentuates many of the problems associated with divorce and polygamy. So too does the fact that the laws and regulations pertaining to divorce and polygamy are sometimes flouted, adding further to the disquiet felt by many women about their vulnerability.

Issues on marriage across boundaries are dealt with to some extent in this book. Of course, it can be argued that most marriages cross boundaries of some kind, whether they be regional, ethnic or socio-economic boundaries, or simply boundaries of different family customs. However, the more significant boundaries are probably those with some legal implications, as is the case with international marriages and marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims in this region. The latter are not dealt with in this book, but have been considered in detail in a recent book (see Jones et al. 2009). One chapter in the present book, i.e. ‘International marriages in Malaysia; issues arising from state policies and processes’ by Chee Heng Leng, does deal with issues facing international marriages in Malaysia resulting from legal and administrative policies and procedures.

There are different ways of approaching the issues included in this book. One is the quantitative approach to assess trends in marriage and its dissolution, and factors affecting these trends, relying on census, survey and registration data. A number of chapters in the book are based on this approach. The other way is the qualitative approach, relying on ethnographic studies, intensive interviewing and case studies to illustrate the dynamics of the situation and a more nuanced understanding of the processes at work. There are many studies of this kind in the book, some of which serve to further illustrate the point already made in the quantitative studies, namely, that there are enormous regional differences in marriage patterns within the countries discussed in the book. More detailed studies are needed in different places, of course, in order to build up a more comprehensive understanding of marriage patterns, and the socio-cultural and economic factors that underlie them.

We believe that by meshing quantitative and qualitative studies, i.e. the research of demographers, sociologists and anthropologists, in this book, we have provided a richer and deeper understanding of the broad forces affecting marriage patterns, and the way these forces work out at the individual and family level, than would otherwise have been possible.
The structure of the book

The first part of the book deals with trends in entry into marriage in a broader regional context. The first chapter, by Terence Hull, provides an overview of the trends, and at the same time, raises important issues in utilizing the available statistical data on marriage in the region, given the complexity of the progression into marital unions. It is based on a comprehensive database developed over a long career, and on fieldwork-based understandings of marriage in the region. It is followed by a chapter by Gavin Jones on trends in teenage marriage in the whole region, placing them in a broader context. While marriage before the age of 16 was very common in parts of Malaysia and Indonesia some decades ago, it was never as prevalent as in South Asia, and it has become progressively less frequent over time. Nevertheless, teenage marriage remains quite common in some regions, and it raises important policy concerns.

The second part of the book contains six chapters on Indonesia, providing data on trends in marriage as well as more qualitative studies of aspects of marriage in this vast and diverse archipelago. Indonesia is simultaneously experiencing delayed marriage for many, especially the better-educated city dwellers, and continuing early, parent-arranged marriage, mainly in the rural areas, in some parts of the country. In Chapter 4, Gavin Jones and Bina Gubhaju examine regional differences in marriage patterns in the 32 provinces of Indonesia in the twenty-first century, based on a detailed analysis of the 2005 Inter-censal Survey, focusing particularly on three age groups, i.e. teenagers, those in their late 20s and those in their late 30s.

The complexity of Indonesian marriage patterns, so evident in the regional differentials discussed in Chapter 4, are even more striking when differences in socio-economic status, religion and religiosity are taken into account. The following five chapters provide examples of this complexity. All of them are detailed case studies of particular sub-groups of the Indonesian population. The acceptance of elements of arranged marriage, in which religious mentors serve the role traditionally assigned to parents, is characteristic of some of the Islamic movements among Indonesian tertiary students (see Smith-Hefner, 2005). Chapter 5 by Setiawati Intan Savitri and Faturochman shows the way marriage arrangements have developed among activists in the Tarbiyah movement, a movement that became the foundation of one of Indonesia’s main Islamic political parties, the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera or PKS.

Chapter 6 focuses on an area in West Java noted for early, parent-arranged marriage. Sri Endras Iswarini has studied forced marriage and its corollary, forced intercourse, in relation to poverty in one such village. Forced marriage is unfortunately not restricted to this area, but remains common in certain other parts of Indonesia as well. It is in violation of the United Nations declaration on human rights, to which Indonesia is a signatory. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the chapter presents a compelling and troubling account of the phenomenon of forced marriage and its effects on young women.

In Chapter 7, Augustina Situmorang examines delayed marriage among the lower socio-economic groups in an Indonesian industrial city, Tangerang, on the
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outskirts of Jakarta. The author has previously published on issues facing single Indonesian women in their 30s, but her earlier studies, and most other studies of this kind in Asia, had focused on well-educated women in the cities. The present study breaks new ground by focusing on the issues facing women from the lower socio-economic groups who remain unmarried. The nature of the issues they face differs in some important respects from those facing those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

The Bugis are one of the major ethnic groups in Indonesia. Nurul Ilmi Idrus’s Chapter 8 on marriage, Adat and Islam among the Bugis in South Sulawesi, discusses Bugis notions of marriage (between adat and Islam), marriage partner (between the ideal and the pragmatic), ideal age at marriage, the stigma of delayed marriage, and the role of the female in maintaining and strengthening family social status by marrying up. In a like manner, in Chapter 9 Peter Hagul addresses issues facing a Catholic population in the eastern island of Flores, which are specific to this population and others in the same province, i.e. East Nusatenggara. The issue addressed is the dowry system, which places a heavy burden on families in Flores. Yet, common reactions to this system by researchers and officials fail to place the system in context, or to examine how dowry payments are dealt with in practice. This paper has found that most people interviewed believe that the dowry tradition should be continued. The system contains important elements of reciprocity, and some stimulus to the local economy.

Chapters 10 to 13 focus on Malaysia. In Chapter 10, Tey Nai Peng portrays the fascinating differences between the different ethnic groups and regions of Malaysia. The chapter draws on a range of evidence, from census and survey data to marriage registration data. It also provides evidence on trends in divorce, a subject which has been extensively analysed previously for the Malays, but not for the non-Malays.

Fieldwork in rural Kelantan and elsewhere by Maznah Mohamad and Rashidah Shuib has resulted in Chapter 11 on ‘Marriage among the “urbanized” rural poor: return-migrants in Northwest Kelantan’. This study finds that the rural-based family now acts more as a lifeline of survival than as a support system for social mobility or transformation for many of the ‘urbanized rural poor’, that poverty is intimately linked with divorce and polygamy, and that religious teachings on marriage have little practical bearing on family life in this area. Chapter 12 by Maznah Mohamad, ‘Gender battles and the Syariah: translating Islamic marital law into everyday practice in Malaysia’, deals with gender battles related to marriage, divorce and polygamy in the Syariah courts of Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown, Johor Baru and Jeli. The actual way in which the Syariah courts operate, and the way in which gender battles related to sensitive marital issues bearing on divorce, polygamy and custody are played out, are portrayed in this chapter, thus filling a major gap in the literature on gender, family and marriage in Malay-Muslim society.

Chapter 13 turns to another issue of increasing importance, not only in Malaysia, but throughout Southeast Asia, namely, international marriage. International marriages are increasing throughout the region, and as Chee Heng Leng
emphasizes in Chapter 13, they raise multiple issues that remain unresolved and have hitherto been inadequately addressed. Specifically, with regard to Malaysia, state action and inaction with regard to the rights and entitlements of foreign spouses are discussed, with particular attention to the gender, cultural and class dimensions. The author sees race (ethnicity), patriarchy and class as the three principles underlying Malaysian policies on marriage and migration.

Cohabitation, which is relatively common in the Philippines, but is probably increasing in importance elsewhere in the region, is analysed in Chapter 14. While cohabitation is increasing throughout the Western world, it remains ‘out of bounds’ in Southeast Asian societies. This does not mean that it is necessarily rare, but rather, that it is difficult to get good information about it. Cohabitation is not approved of by the Philippines state or by the dominant religion in the country, i.e. Catholicism, but it is nevertheless fairly common. This study finds that many young people claim lack of economic resources as reasons for living together before (instead of?) marrying. Through case studies, Maria Midea Kabamalan, the author of this chapter, identifies some of the factors that appear to condition whether cohabiting couples do eventually enter formal marriage.

Singapore provides a laboratory for studying marriage among some of Asia’s major ethnic groups. In Chapter 15, Eng Chuan Koh traces the trends in marriage in Singapore in detail, utilizing Singapore’s wealth of data from marriage registration sources and censuses. Singapore has been characterized by much later and much less marriage than elsewhere in the region. The author utilizes data from a survey he has conducted to analyse the factors making the choice to marry a difficult one for many Singaporeans.

This book, then, presents a rich mosaic of studies on marriage in the region, with an emphasis on the way marriage issues impinge on the well-being of those concerned. While presenting as comprehensive and updated a picture as possible of marriage in the different countries, it also highlights the wide regional variation in marriage patterns and issues, and raises many questions requiring further research.

Bibliography


