

Were Baby Girls More Likely To be Killed for
Birth Control in Pre-Modern East Asia?:
Evidence from Colonial Korea

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1. Introduction

- Infanticide or Murder of a newborn baby by his or her parents
- Traditional View: Positive Check
 - a desperate reaction to extreme poverty or great famine
- Revisionist View: Preventive Check
 - For reducing population pressure, parents of pre-modern China deliberately killed their babies.
 - Female babies were killed more – **Sex-biased infanticide**

1. Introduction

“infanticide was mainly committed to female babies”.

(Massimo Livi-Bacci, 2006)

“[female infanticide] was consciously and deliberately practiced”

(Gregory Clark, 2007)

1. Introduction

- The Goal of this paper
 - To examine whether the reinterpretation of infanticide is relevant.
 1. To consider the theoretical problems of the hypothesis
 2. To examine whether the revisionists provided relevant evidence
 3. To pursue a reasonable data to test the hypothesis.

Content

1. Introduction
2. Sex-Biased Hypothesis of Infanticide: A Critical Review
3. Test Strategies
4. Sex Ratio of Murdered Infants
5. Sex Ratio of Surviving Infants
6. Selective Abortion vs. Selective Infanticide
7. Conclusion

2. Review: Infanticide as A Preventive Check

- **Thomas Malthus (1826)**
 - Preventive Check: Birth Control
 - Positive Check: Death-side adjustment (including infanticide)
 - Positive check was the driving force in the pre-modern society
- **T. Wrigley and R. Schofield (1981)**
 - Preventive check was actively performed in pre-modern England
 - “a fertility-dominated low-pressure system”
- **David Weir (1984)**
 - Old Regime France was, like England, a low-pressure system

2. Review: Infanticide as A Preventive Check

- **The Revisionists: James Lee, Camerol Campbell, Wang Feng**
 - Even in China birth side control was deliberately performed.
 - Infanticide worked as a precautionary device
 - ⇒ Infanticide as a preventive check
- Japan: *Mabiki*
Kito (2006) claimed that pre-modern Japan had a similar pattern.

2. Review: The Sex-Biased Infanticide Hypothesis

- The revisionists claimed that female babies were discriminated in the infanticide.
- The Hypothesis

$$\bar{R} \gg R_{\text{inf}}$$

$$\bar{R} \ll R_{\text{sur}}$$

2. Review:

The Sex-Biased Infanticide Hypothesis

- The Hypothesis was not proposed as a corollary from the prevalence of infanticide
- They utilized the low sex ratio of murdered babies as the evidence corroborating the prevalence of the precautionary infanticide.
- They claimed that the sex-bias in infanticide originated from the rational decision making of the parents.
 - Boy preference
 - Economic Burden such as dowry

2. Review:

The Sex-Biased Infanticide Hypothesis

- The Sex-Biased Infanticide Hypothesis
 - In some pre-modern societies, parents killed newborn babies to lower the burden of rearing.
- If anyone of them had strong boy preference, members of these societies might kill female babies intensively.

Infanticide as a preventive check

Sex-Biased Infanticide Hypothesis

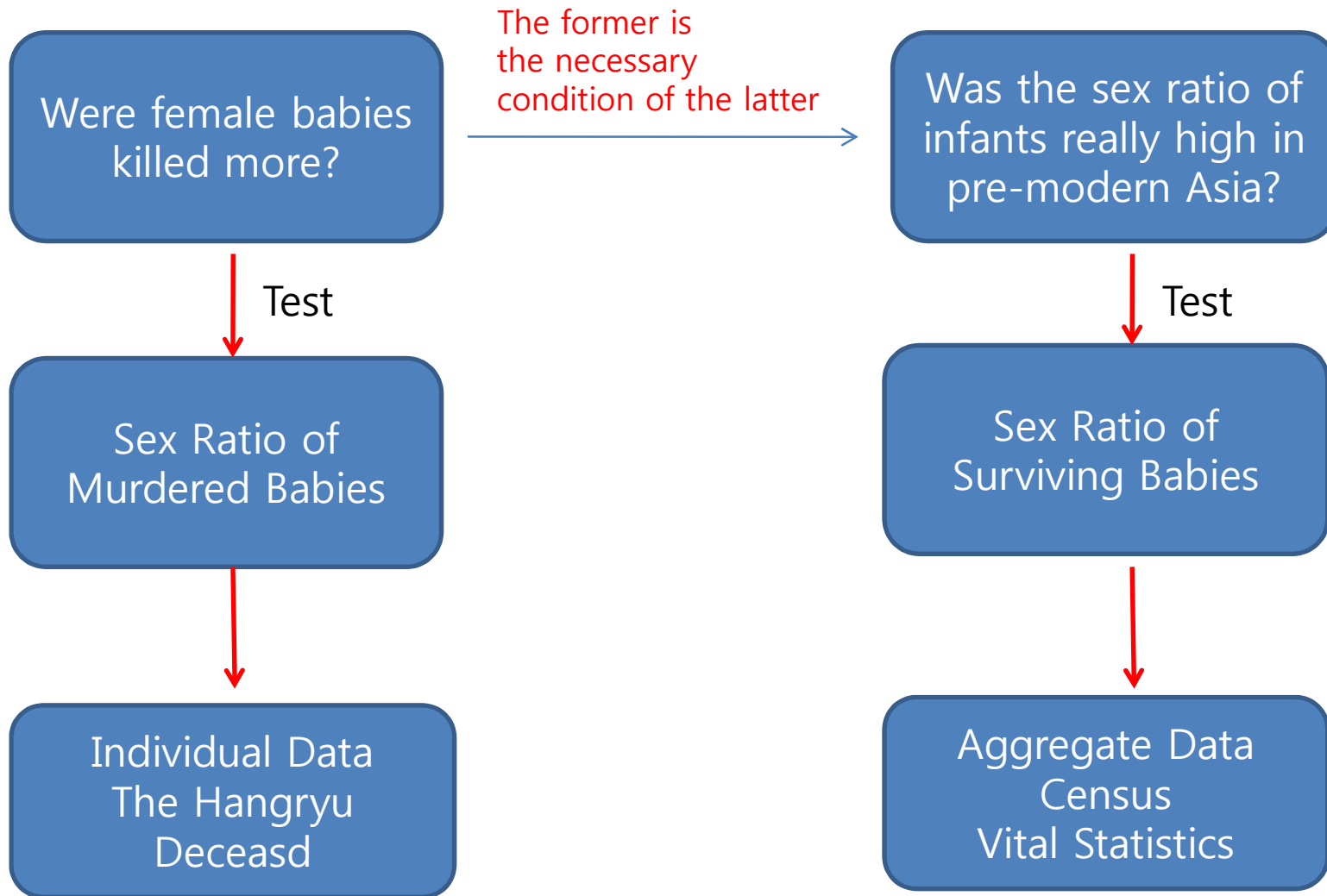
2. Review: Problems of the Hypothesis

- Theoretical Problem
 - Dowry is not unique in China
 - Boy preference can be an incentive. However, High sex ratio should lower the relative value of male babies, which will weaken incentive to kill female babies.
- Data Problem
 - Is the high sex ratio the reality or data problem?
 - Two data
 1. A small military village in Manchuria
 2. Genealogy of the Qing Dynasty

3. Test Strategies

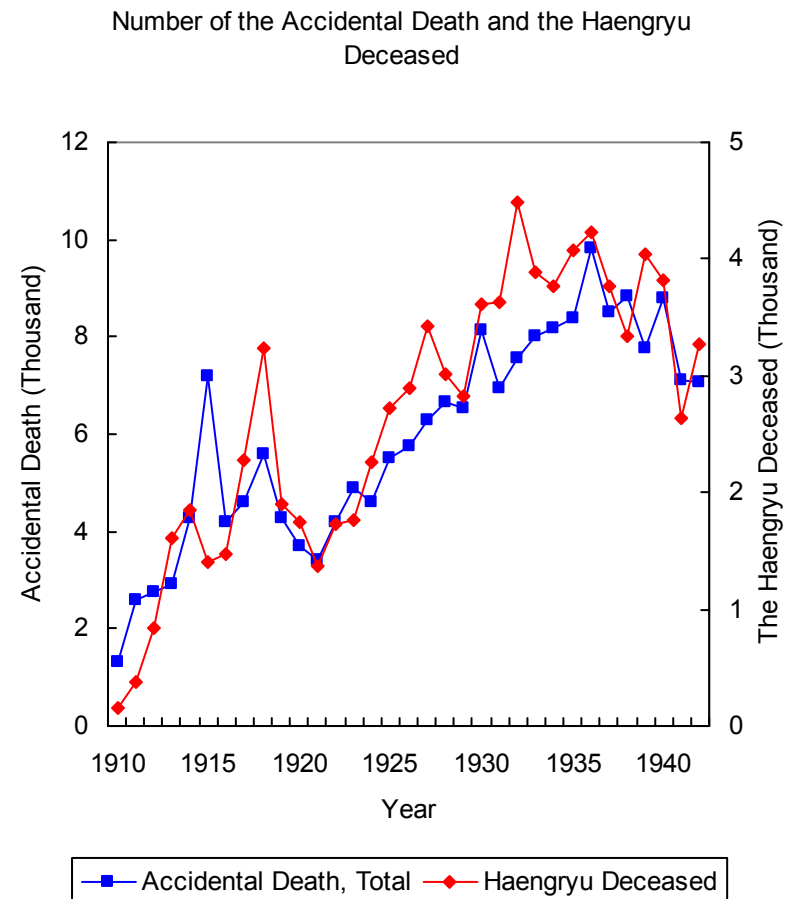
- Examine the hypothesis using the data from Colonial Korea (1910-1945)
- Environments
 - High Population Density
 - Strong Boy Preference
- Good Data

3. Test Strategies



4. Sex Ratio of Murdered Infants

- The *Haengryu* Deceased (行旅死亡者)
 - the accidental deceased who were not cared by families or acquaintances



4. Sex Ratio of Murdered Infants

- The *Haengryu* Deceased
- The *Official Gazette* from December 1912 to 1945

○ 收容貨物

品名	数量	備考
紙製品
...

大正元年十二月十一日 京城税關出張所

○ 收容貨物

品名	数量	備考
紙製品
...

大正元年十二月六日 朝鮮總督府警務總監部

住所不詳 朝鮮人女 氏名不詳 推定年齢六十年位

人相 丈四尺八寸位、顔長、鼻高シ其他並

著衣 鮮衣白ノ綿入ヲ著ス

所持品 ナシ

死因 營養不其ノ結果凍死

死亡場所 忠清南道懷德郡山内面木尺里

右大正元年十一月二十八日死亡セルヲ發見シ死體ハ忠清南道懷德郡山内面木尺里ニ於テ假ニ埋葬ス
心當ノ者ハ大田警察署又ハ山内面長ニ届出ツヘシ

大正元年十二月六日

朝鮮總督府警務總監部

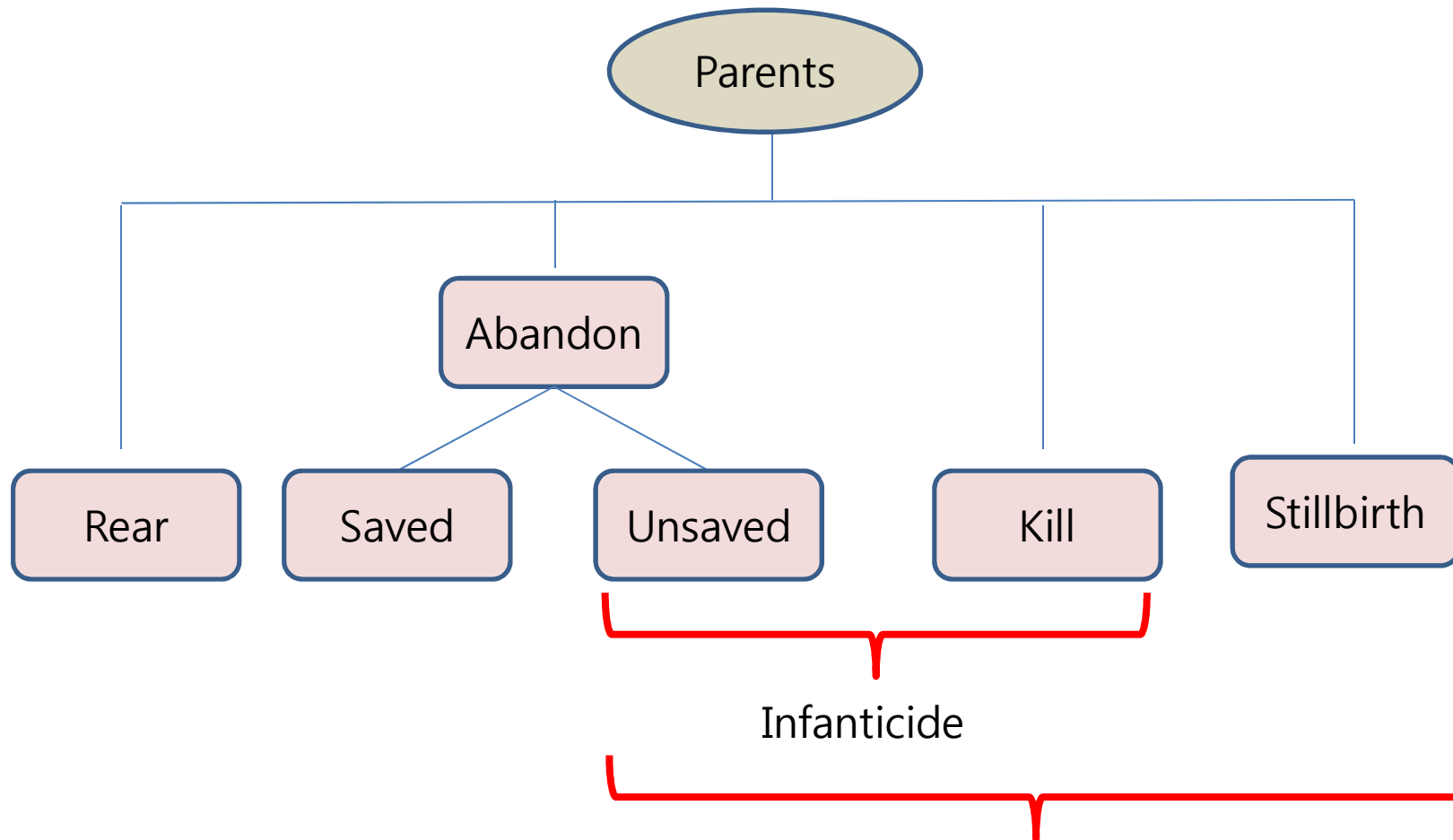
4. Sex Ratio of Murdered Infants

- The *Haengryu* Deceased
- The *Official Gazette* from December 1912 to 1945

人 相 大 四 尺 八 寸 位、 顔 長、 鼻 高 シ 其 他 並
 著 衣 鮮 衣 白 ノ 綿 入 ナ 著 ス
 所 持 品 ナ シ
 死 因 營 養 不 良 ノ 結 果 凍 死
 死亡場所 忠 濟 南 道 懷 德 郡 山 內 面 木 尺 里
 右 大 正 元 年 十 一 月 二 十 八 日 死 セ ル ナ 發 見 シ 死 體 ハ 忠 濟 南 道 懷 德 郡 山 內 面 木 尺 里 長 ニ 於 テ 假 ニ 埋 葬 ス
 心 當 ノ 者 ハ 大 田 警 察 署 又 ハ 山 內 面 長 ニ 届 出 ツ ヘ シ
 大 正 元 年 十 二 月 六 日
 朝鮮總督府警務總監部

Address
 Sex
 Name
 Age
 Appearance
 (Height)
 Clothing
 Cause of Death
 Place of Death
 Municipality

4. Sex Ratio of Murdered Infants



If found, recorded, as the *Haengryu* Deceased

5. Sex Ratio of Murdered Infants

- The records of the infants in the *Haengryu Deceased* Data contains only a part of the total infanticide
 - We cannot infer how many babies were murdered.
- However, the sex ratio from the the *Haengryu Deceased* Data is a good estimate of the sex ratio of infanticided babies.
 - It is free from the bias related to registration.

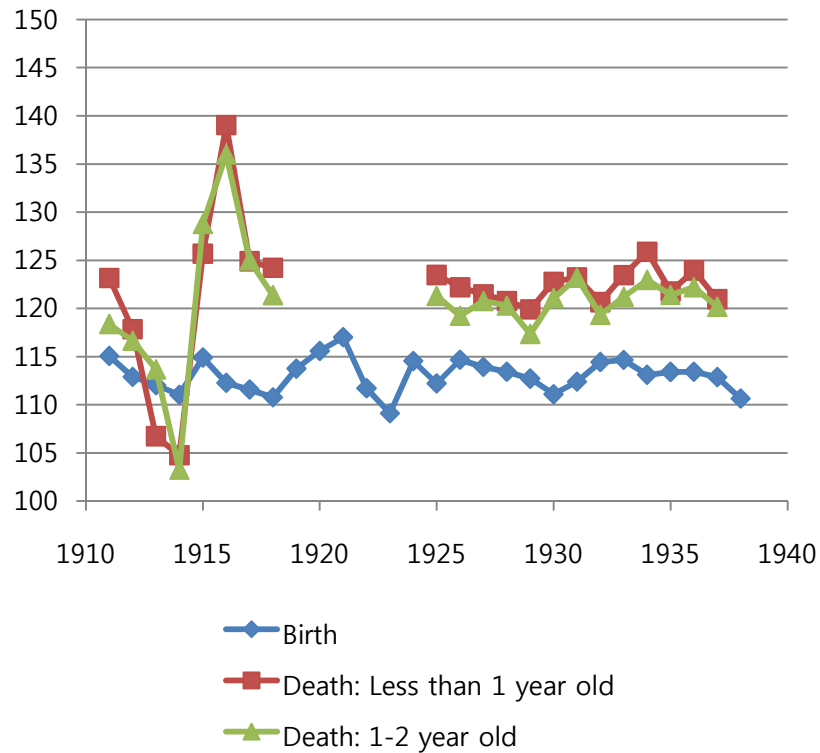
$$E(R_{\text{infanticide}}) = R_{\text{Haengryu}}$$

4. Sex Ratio of Murdered Infants

	Less than 1 month		1-6 months		7-12 months		Total	
	Sex Ratio	#	Sex Ratio	#	Sex Ratio	#	Sex Ratio	#
Total	114.5	163	105.0	123	86.4	151	101.4	437
Year								
1910s	114.3	15	200.0	6	120.0	22	126.3	43
1920s	91.4	67	123.5	38	89.7	55	97.5	160
1930s	133.3	70	90.0	76	65.7	58	94.3	204
1940s	175.0	11	200.0	3	128.6	16	150.0	30
Region								
middle	111.8	72	90.9	42	91.3	44	100.0	158
north	173.3	41	85.7	26	84.2	35	112.5	102
south	81.5	49	129.2	55	84.2	70	95.5	174

5. Sex Ratio of Surviving Infants

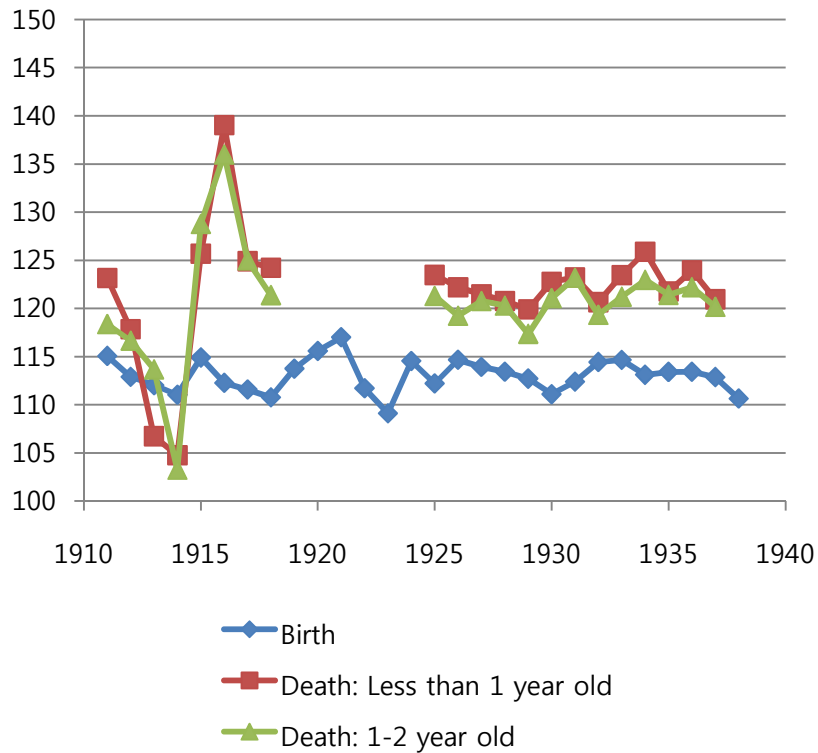
Vital Statistics



- Residence Statistics
- Basically Registration-Based System
- Omission should be sex-biased.

5. Sex Ratio of Surviving Infants

Vital Statistics



Census

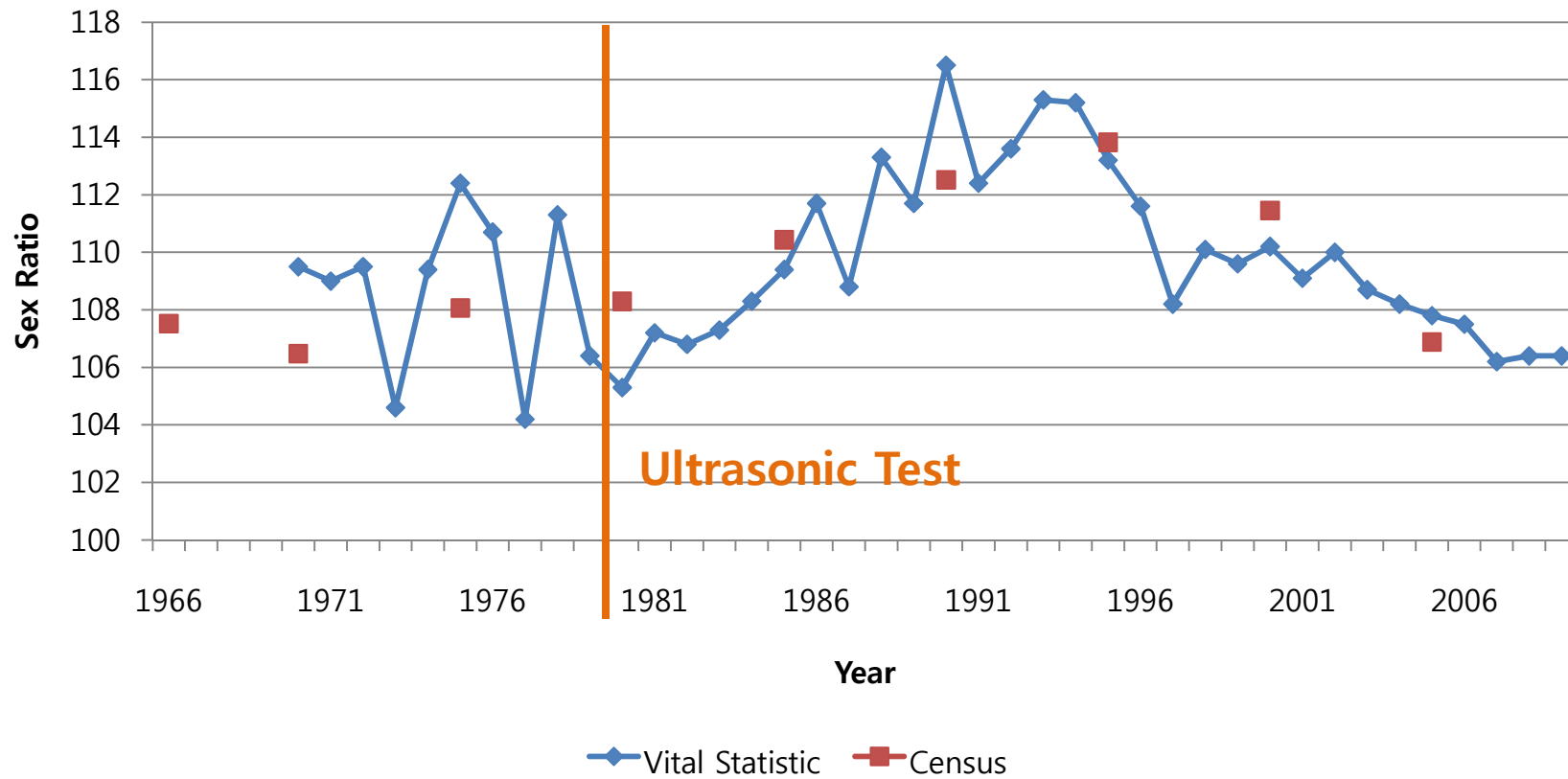
Age	Year		
	1930	1935	1940
0	101.5	103.6	103.6
1	102.3	102.5	101.7
2	102.0	102.2	101.8
3	102.9	103.9	102.7
4	104.2	103.2	103.5
0-4	102.5	103.1	102.7

6. Selective Abortion vs. Selective Infanticide

- Selective Abortion from the 1980s in Asian countries
 - the Ultrasonic Test of fetus
- The Revisionists interprets selective abortion as a variation of long tradition of selective infanticide
- Is it simply a variation of long tradition or a new phenomenon from the technology shock?

6. Selective Abortion vs. Selective Infanticide

Sex Ratio at Birth: Korea, 1970-2009



6. Selective Abortion vs. Selective Infanticide

- According to the long run pattern of sex ratio, the high sex ratio from the 1980s can be considered a new phenomenon due to technological shock rather than a different appearance of the same behavior.

7. Concluding Remarks

- **Did infanticide occur in premodern world?**
 - Yes. We guess that it occurred all over the world at any time.
- **Is it relevant to redefine infanticide as a preventive check?**
 - No. No evidence has been given showing this argument.
- **Did parents discriminate female babies in infanticide?**
 - Maybe, but no strong evidence so far.
- **If the discrimination existed, was it so large that the sex ratio goes up very much (like 130)?**
 - No. No Chinese data persuasively support this possibility. The Korean data simply rejected this argument.

Thank You