

Gender Values in Vietnam—Between Confucianism, Communism, and Modernization

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It is regularly claimed that Communism and Confucianism shape gender-related norms, practices, and institutions in Vietnam. Some scholars emphasize the ongoing relevance of Confucian traditions, while others hold that Communist rule led to more gender-equal norms, practices, and institutions. By contrast, I suggest that broader socioeconomic modernization processes should be considered. I use data from the World Values Survey to investigate the question of the relative influence of Communism, Confucianism, and modernization processes on gender attitudes. The results show that modernization is a crucial factor in understanding gender attitudes, but that Communism and Confucianism likewise have an influence.

Keywords gender, values, Vietnam, Confucianism, Communism, modernization

Introduction

Vietnam is an interesting case where questions of the relevance of culture, politics, and socioeconomic modernization to aspects of gender are concerned. Culturally, Vietnam belongs to the group of countries with a Confucian heritage. Politically, it is a country under Communist rule. In terms of socioeconomic modernization, it is one of the Asian countries that have recently undergone a process of rapid development. These various traits of Vietnam are especially interesting in relation to aspects of gender—the norms, practices, and institutions which influence the relative life changes of women in comparison to men—because they are considered to be in opposition to one another: Confucianism is said to foster and preserve gender-conservative relationships, while Communism and modernization are said to lead to more equal gender relationships.

However, researchers do not agree regarding the relative influence of Confucianism, Communism, and modernization. One discussion concerns the influence of Communism; another concerns the prevalence of Confucianism.

Researchers of Communist and post-Communist countries highlight the fact that, for example, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) only partly changed gender relations away from traditional models despite the official position of gender equality (Montgomery 2003; Gal and Kligman 2000; Rueschemeyer 2010; Stiehm 1981). Likewise, researchers of Vietnam disagree about the actual influence of Communism (Eisen 1984; Werner 2009; Bélanger and Barbieri 2009; Rydstrom and Drummond 2004). Another discussion concerns the influence of Confucianism in Confucian Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Concerning these countries, researchers disagree upon the influence that Confucianism presently has on gender relations (Pascall and Sung 2007; Sung 2013; Dalton et al. 2002; Bélanger and Barbieri 2009; Rydstrom and Drummond 2004).

The ongoing debates indicate that there is still a need to decipher the influence of Confucianism and Communism in Vietnam. Furthermore, I regard a mere focus on the relevance of culture in the form of Confucianism or of politics in the form of Communism as too narrow: in addition, broader societal processes such as modernization should be considered. According to modernization scholars, modernization influences gender relations because modern ways of life provide for more individual responsibilities, opportunities, and capacities, especially for women (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2003; Wilensky 2002; Bergh 2006; Nussbaum 2011). A deeper investigation into the influence of modernization, Communism, and Confucianism on gender attitudes provides information about the specific path to modernity which Vietnam has taken (Eisenstadt 2000). In addition, a deeper knowledge of Vietnam also gives us an insight into other countries with similar traits.

Empirically, I use representative data from the World Values Survey to analyze the different influences of modernization, Communism, and Confucianism on gender attitudes. The results reveal a complex picture of how gender attitudes are influenced: the influence of modernization on gender attitudes is as expected, but the influences of Communist and Confucian attitudes on gender attitudes are to some extent not as expected. This paper is an attempt to provide evidence of the complex influences on gender attitudes in Vietnam.

I will first of all present the historical background to developments concerning Confucianism, Communism, and modernization in Vietnam. Thereafter, I will turn to the theoretical ideas of Confucianism, Communism, and modernization. In the third section, a scholarly debate concerning the relevance of these three factors with respect to gender relations in Vietnam will be presented. The following sections will focus on methods and results. Finally, I present a conclusion.

Historical Background

Confucianism was introduced to Vietnam through the Chinese occupation (circa 111 BC-AD 938) and was officially adopted and dominant between circa AD 1000 and 1919 (Rydstrom, Trinh, and Burghoorn 2008; Zhang and Locke 2001). However, in Vietnam, Confucianism was mixed with other influences, e.g., Buddhism and Taoism, and was further weakened by the French occupation (1883-1945), which brought the influence of Western thinking, including nationalism, Communism, and Catholicism (Thi 1999; Bélanger and Barbieri 2009; Tucker 1998). As a result, Vietnam is regarded as having been under the influence of Confucianism to a lesser degree than other Confucian countries (United Nations 2002; Zhang and Locke 2001; Croll 1998).

Since 1945, Vietnam has been under the political rule of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). This period may be divided into three phases of Communist rule. The first phase started with independence in the North of the country in 1945. It lasted until the establishment of a unified, Communist-ruled Vietnam in 1975. This first phase is characterized by a stepwise introduction of Communist rule and several wars. First, the CPV came to power in the North after a war of independence against France (1945-54). During this phase, initial attempts were made to restructure the North according to Communist ideals. This was followed by a civil war between North and South Vietnam (1955-75), with heavy U.S. involvement between 1964 and 1973 (Tucker 1998).

A second phase of Communism may be said to have started with the unification of the country in 1975. Communist policies were then also implemented in the South. Due to the fact that Communist rule was established much earlier in the North (1945/1954) than it was in the South (1975), Communist policies are regarded as having affected the North several decades earlier than the South (Teerawichitchainan et al. 2010; Werner 2009; Eisen 1984; Fahey 1998; Tucker 1998).

A third phase of Communism started with the introduction of liberal market reforms in 1986, the so-called *Doi Moi* (renovation) policies. With *Doi Moi*, Vietnam entered into a new phase of economic, political, and social development which can be seen as similar to the economic liberalization that took place in China. It allowed for more international trade, foreign investment in specified economic zones, and private business initiatives. State-owned factories and agricultural cooperatives were closed or privatized. This process invigorated family-run private agricultural production which became the backbone of economic development (Rama 2002; World Bank 2011; Long et al. 2000).

Rapid economic development ameliorated the life situation of many Vietnamese. Since the adoption of *Doi Moi*, Vietnam has had one of the highest growth rates in the world, the economy is shifting from being dominated by

agriculture and farming towards light industrial production (employment in agriculture dropped from over 70% in the 1990s to 48% in 2011; World Bank Data 2014), migration is ongoing from the countryside to urban areas (the urban population increased from 22% in the 1990s to 32% in 2012; World Bank 2014), and the poverty rate has dropped from 37% in 1998 to 14% in 2008 (Long et al. 2000; World Bank 2011; Riedel and Turley 1999).

In sum, Vietnam has been influenced by the ideas of Confucianism and Communism and has been exposed to the process of modernization. The question is how influential these different traits have been on attitudes regarding gender.

Confucianism, Communism, and Modernization

According to the textbooks, Confucianism, Communism, and modernization are expected to shape gender attitudes in diverging directions: Confucianism is said to lead to gender-conservative relationships, while Communism and modernization are said to foster more gender equality. These expectations become clear when we consider the core ideas of Confucianism, Communism, and modernization.

Confucianism is not a religion in the narrow sense, but a system of ethics derived from the writings of Confucius and his disciples (Sung 2013; Krieger 2004). Confucianism is a catch-all term used to describe similar cultural characteristics in “Confucian” countries. On the individual level, a Confucian culture may be combined with other religious orientations.

Among the Confucian ideas which became influential is the idea of “five sets” of social relationships with related ethical properties (Krieger 2004). The five sets are those of the sovereign and his ministers (in which the sovereign should display benevolence and the ministers loyalty), father and son (kindness on the part of the father and filial piety on the part of the son), husband and wife (righteousness on the part of the husband and compliance on the part of the wife), elder brother and younger brother (respect on one side and goodness on the other), and a social relationship between friends. The centrality of these relationships and values in Confucian thinking indicates a focus on the (wider) family in terms of authority. Concerning women, Confucianism emphasizes women’s roles as daughters, mothers, and wives. The moral code for women comprises, for example, three obediences: towards the father before marriage, the husband when married, and the eldest son when widowed (Rydstrøm, Trinh, and Burghoorn 2008; Schuler et al. 2006).

In practice, Confucianism tended to lead to patrilineal, patrilocal family arrangements, including polygamy, extended households, arranged marriages, and an obligation for wives to care for their husbands’ parents instead of their

own parents. These features are usually regarded as circumscribing a woman's individual manoeuvring space and leading to disadvantages in comparison to men (Volkman 2005; Luong 1989; Long et al. 2000; Werner 2009; Rydstrom, Trinh, and Burghoorn 2008).

By contrast, the Communist ideal of gender relations—as stated by Friedrich Engels—is aimed at economic and political equality. This equality should be realized via the abolition of private property and the collective organization of (domestic) work. The abolition of private property would make control over inheritance unnecessary, and control over reproduction and women also unnecessary. The collective organization of, so far, domestically organized tasks, such as child minding, cooking, cleaning, etc., would free women from such “unproductive” work and would enable them to work productively like men (Engels [1884] 1985; James 2003).

Confucianism and Communism are widely discussed with regard to their influence on gender relations, but I think that a focus on only cultural heritage and political steering is too narrow. Following the tradition of modernization theory, culture and politics are seen as only parts of a broader, interdependent social change which shapes the ideas, norms, practices, and institutions of societies. Besides cultural heritage (Confucianism) and ideological-political steering (Communist rule) socioeconomic aspects of modernization—such as urbanization, technical advancement, rising living standards, and rising levels of education—should be taken into consideration (Eisenstadt 2000; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Therborn 1995; Bergh 2006).¹

The most convincing evidence, in my view, is provided by Wilensky, who regards technological development as central to several other economic, social, cultural, and political developments (Wilensky 2002). He argues that technological development is central because it fundamentally raises the standard of living by enhancing the capacity to use resources and energy. In turn, enhanced technological capacities lead to restructuring of the economy, politics, and culture, implying changes in work life, living conditions, and life conduct.

Wilensky directly addresses questions concerning gender equality (Wilensky 2002). According to him, gender relations are affected by technological development primarily via a restructuring of economic conditions, most central of which is the decline of agriculture. The decline of agriculture leads to the development of new forms of work organization and new occupations, including a separation of work from home, urbanization, and an increase in occupations demanding education.

These shifts are accompanied by a new family structure: the nuclear family with fewer children is better suited to modern economic conditions. The reason is that the costs associated with children rise due to urban housing conditions, the necessity to educate children, and the implications for parents of staying at home in terms of foregone wages. Families become increasingly neolocal and kinship

Table 1. Features of Modernization

Area	Development
Workforce	From agriculture to industry and services; diversification, specialization
Living conditions	Rising standards of living, longevity
Population	Urbanization, migration, mobility
Human capital	Mass education
Communication	Mass media
Culture	Secularization, universalization, individualization, value diversification
Government	Expanding franchise, bureaucratization
Social protection	Growth of formalized welfare
Family	Nuclear families, falling fertility
Sex roles	Female nondomestic labor

Source: Wilensky 2002; Inglehart and Norris 2003.

ties weaken.

Concerning gender relations, both the new family structure and the demand for an educated labor force increase the opportunities and necessities for women to join the work force. According to Wilensky, these new experiences in work and family life make women more independent and foster new ideas of gender equality (Wilensky 2002, 5-14). Table 1 provides an overview of some of the features of modernization.

Based on the idea of modernization, an alternative interpretation of the ongoing changes in gender roles and attitudes in Confucian and/or Communist countries since the beginning of the 19th century can be formulated: the decline of agriculture gave rise to the nuclear family, falling fertility rates, rising education levels for women, and rising levels of female nondomestic labor. In turn, this changed and continues to change gender relations. Confucianism and Communism were important insofar as they emphasized or catalyzed some aspects of modernization (and traditionalism), but were eventually less central than has been claimed by various scholars. However, the scholarly debate over Vietnam, which I will present in the following section, focuses mainly on the roles of Confucianism and Communism.

The Role and Situation of Women in Vietnam: Confucianism, Communism, or Modernization?

Researchers tend to discuss the relative influence of Confucianism and Communism both in general and specifically with regard to the case of Vietnam.

In general, Confucian countries—Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong—are described as being more gender-conservative than, for example, Protestant or Catholic countries, but the relevance and prevalence of Confucian values and gender-conservative relations is the subject of debate (Pascall and Sung 2007; Sung 2013; Dalton et al. 2002).

In addition, researchers of Communist and post-Communist countries have discussed the influence of Communist rule on gender equality. They have highlighted the fact that countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), to varying degrees, changed gender relations away from traditional models. Despite the official Communist ideal of equal participation of men and women in production and public life, in reality practices usually departed to some degree from the ideal standard. On the one hand, policies often supported female education, female labor participation, and public welfare arrangements. On the other hand, women remained, to a higher degree than men, responsible for household tasks and raising children. Women were underrepresented in top level positions in society in CEE countries (Montgomery 2003; Gal and Kligman 2000; Rueschemeyer 2010; Stiehm 1981).

Concerning the case of Vietnam, scholars usually agree that the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) was officially committed to Communist gender equality, but they differ over whether this changed the norms and behavior in society (Fahey 1998; Croll 1998; Goodkind 1995; Rydstrom and Drummond 2004). The CPV officially established equal rights for men and women with regard to education, work, suffrage, running for political office, property, and marriage in 1930. It founded the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) as an auxiliary organization for women. After seizing power it issued a resolution proclaiming equal rights between the sexes in all areas. Likewise, the Law on Marriage and the Family of 1959 put forward the ideal of nuclear and monogamous families, prohibited arranged marriages and the mistreatment of women, and gave women the rights to divorce and to own property. The law was intended to build "happy, democratic, and egalitarian families." Another resolution in 1967 stated that women were to fill at least 35% of all jobs and 60-70% of jobs in education, medicine, and light industry. Resolutions in the 1970s and 1980s stated that domestic tasks were to be socialized via the establishment of crèches, maternity homes, and community dining halls (Fahey 1998). Recent policies include, for example, a national strategy for gender equality, an action plan, and a new Law on Gender Equality in 2006 (World Bank 2011).

However, several authors also point to ambiguities within the CPV concerning the Communist ideal for women. Researchers usually comment that official policies not only followed Communist ideals but at the same time coincided with practical needs, such as the need for more female labor in times of severe shortage of male labor. This was particularly true during the war(s) (Fahey 1998; Rydstrom, Trinh, and Burghoorn 2008; Teerawichitchainan et al. 2010;

Werner 2009). In addition, several authors have pointed to shifts in the portrayal of men and women since the adoption of Doi Moi, which indicate that the Communist ideal of equality is, to a minor degree, the main aim of the CPV (Giang 2004; Bélanger and Barbieri 2009; Werner 2009; Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004; Schuler et al. 2006).

Besides the debate over official policies and the standpoint of the CPV, there is also a debate as to whether Communist policies led to a break with Confucian gender roles. On some aspects, researchers agree. Most scholars note a decline of traditions such as arranged marriages, polygamy, and patrilineality (Rydstrøm, Trinh, and Burghoorn 2008; Volkmann 2005; Werner 2009). The nuclear, monogamous family form has become the most widespread form in Vietnam (Oudin 2009; Luong 2009). Political participation among women is relatively high—for example, around a quarter of the representatives in the National Assembly are female (World Bank 2011). These findings indicate some influence of Communist policies on family change. On other aspects, researchers do not agree.

On the one hand, authors like Eisen (1984) and Werner (2009) claim that gender attitudes were changed during this era by policies that deliberately strove to break with the “feudal” past and Confucian tradition. They point to differences between the earlier Communist North (1945/1954) and the South (1975): the North had higher levels of literacy and education of women, child care and other social facilities, female labor force participation (especially in agricultural cooperatives after collectivization), war participation, political participation, and female representation in political organizations and institutions (Werner 2009; Eisen 1984; see also: Teerawichitchainan et al. 2010; Fahey 1998). Werner regards collectivization of family businesses, female labor participation, the encouragement of political participation, and war participation as providing important experiences for women and men which led to a change in attitudes. Education and social policy programs are regarded as having supported these changes (Werner 2009). She argues that poverty and war were reasons for the shortcomings with regard to the implementation of official Communist policy goals. Attempts to accomplish mass education, for example, failed during the 1970s and 1980s, and social facilities for domestic work were short-lived (Teerawichitchainan et al. 2010).

On the other hand, several social anthropologists claim that Confucian values continued to exert a considerable influence under Communist rule. Luong, for example, claims that the male-centered, gender-unequal model of family organization persisted, despite the official Communist gender equality ideology (Luong 1989; 2009). He provides the examples of polygamy, households with more than two generations living under one roof, and practices of gender separation during meals and concerning rooms in the 1980s. Luong also cites examples from the Doi Moi era which show that patrilocality is predominant

among households in most parts of the country. Likewise, Bélanger and Barbieri (2009) question whether, due to families' resistance, the new socialist ideal of the family became the reality for women. They point out that patriarchal and gender-based unequal practices were usual in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Field studies find that higher salaries for wives often lead to tensions in families (Bélanger and Pendakis 2009). Additionally, Vietnamese respondents regard women's occupations as conflicting with traditional family duties (Truong 2009). Likewise, other scholars consider that Confucianism—or at least patriarchal thinking—is still central to gender values (Rydstrøm, Trinh, and Burghoorn 2008; Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004; Binh 2004). Zhang and Locke (2001) show that conservative attitudes towards single mothers, premarital sex, and female sex still persist. Household work remains the task of women (Teerawichitchainan et al. 2010; World Bank 2011).

There is no direct debate about the relevance of modernization to the development of gender roles in Vietnam. However, one could interpret changes in gender roles as being rooted in modernization processes instead of being based on Communist politics. Weak economic development until Doi Moi has been identified as a reason for the failure of mass education. Since Doi Moi, the gender gap in education has been closed at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Long et al. 2000; World Bank 2011). Other aspects, such as the rise of the nuclear family, falling fertility rates, and rising levels of female participation in the labor market, could be interpreted as being triggered by socioeconomic changes, such as the decline of agriculture and ongoing urbanization, as much as by Communist policies (Rama 2002; World Bank 2014).

If modernization plays a crucial role in changing gender relations one would expect the especially strong economic development that has occurred since Doi Moi to have led to the biggest changes in gender roles and attitudes. Some studies indicate that this could be the case. Younger generations, for example, seem to experience fewer restrictions: they reportedly experiment to a higher degree with premarital sex (Zhang and Locke 2001; World Bank 2011). In addition, male authority in conjugal negotiations is questioned by wives (Rydstrøm and Drummond 2004).

In order to investigate the relative influence of Communism, Confucianism, and modernization, I will now turn to an analysis of survey data concerning gender attitudes.

Method: Gender Attitudes Index and Variables

I will use the *Gender Attitudes Index* as the dependent variable and draw heavily on a gender index developed by Inglehart and Norris (2003). The Gender Attitude Index, GAI, has scores of 0-100, with 100 indicating the highest support

for gender equality positions. It consists of four items: “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do,” “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women,” “University education is more important for a boy than a girl,” and “If a woman wants to have a child as a single parent but she does not want to have a stable relationship with a man, do you approve or disapprove?” Inglehart and Norris report a Cronbach Alpha at 0.54. The GAI captures the attitudes of respondents concerning gender roles.

In order to explain differences in gender attitudes, I will use several independent variables which are intended to capture a respondent’s point of view and way of life with regard to the concepts of Communism, Confucianism, and modernization.

Respondents with a high level of education, membership of a professional organization, residence in an urban area, regular internet usage, and a nonagricultural occupation are thought of as leading a *modern life style* and holding modern beliefs concerning gender roles. Respondents with a modern life style are expected to have higher scores on the GAI according to modernization theory.

Respondents with a higher level of religiosity and conservative family values are here interpreted as having stronger *Confucian convictions*. There was no direct question concerning Confucianism, but the expectation is that questions concerning religiosity and traditional family values capture in a wider sense the Confucian culture in Vietnam. Confucianism is usually used as a catch-all term for similar cultural characteristics in Confucian countries. On an individual level, Confucian convictions may be combined with other religious orientations. In other words, some respondents may belong to other religions and traditions—such as ancestor worship, Taoism, Buddhism, or Catholicism—but they would still espouse the predominantly Confucian culture in Vietnam. Higher levels of religiosity and conservative family values are expected to lower scores on the GAI according to the thesis that traditional Confucian values are related to more traditional views on gender roles.

In order to capture a more or less *Communist orientation* at the individual level, I use respondents’ answers concerning party membership, union membership, and left-right orientation as indicators. In accordance with the hypothesis that Communist ideals are related to more gender-equal attitudes, it is expected that respondents with a more left-wing orientation and affiliation with a Communist organization will have higher scores on the GAI.

In addition to investigating the beliefs of individual respondents, I will try to capture the influence of modernization, Communism, and Confucianism by looking at *cohort* and *regional* differences. I expect that respondents born before 1960 will be the most traditional and Confucian oriented and will therefore have low scores on the GAI, because they were born before the nationwide establishment of Communism, female mass education, and the decline of the

agricultural sector. Respondents born after 1980, the Doi Moi cohorts, are expected to have the highest scores, because they experienced the most modern and developed time span in Vietnamese history. Cohorts born between 1960 and 1980 are expected to have experienced the most outspoken policies according to traditional Communist ideology. 1960 and 1980 are chosen as time points to ensure a reasonable number of available respondents and relevant times.

Furthermore, I will investigate regional differences, because several authors highlight the relevance of North-South differences. Respondents from the South are expected to have lower GAI scores because of the later establishment of Communism (including female rights, female education, family services, the female labor market, and female war participation) in the South.

Additionally, gender and marital status are included as control variables, because previous gender studies show that these can have an effect on gender attitudes.

The overarching question is whether the inclusion of a modernist perspective provides for a better, meaning more comprehensive, model for understanding differences in attitudes with regard to gender equality than a mere focus on differences in culture (Confucianism) and politics (Communism).

Results

The findings are presented in four steps: (1) Vietnam is compared to other countries with respect to approval rates for single items of the GAI (% of individuals per country); (2) single items concerning Confucianism, Communism, and modernization are tested with regard to their influence on the GAI scores (bivariate correlations or tests of differences in the means) of Vietnamese respondents; (3) different cohorts and regions are compared, utilizing the GAI scores of Vietnamese respondents; (4) a multivariate regression is performed.

Step 1: Vietnam in Comparison

Vietnam has, by comparison with other countries, rather conservative gender attitudes which are expressed in low scores on the GAI. Together with other Confucian countries, Vietnam has scores below 50 (the GAI ranges from 0-100), while Western countries have scores of around 60 or higher. For example, Western countries such as Spain (80) and Sweden (79) have very high scores, while Poland (59) and the United States (67) have somewhat lower scores. Confucian countries usually have low scores: Japan has 51, South Korea 46, and China 42. The findings suggest that Confucian countries have indeed lower gender equality values as suggested by some authors. Does this finding—i.e., a strong influence of Confucianism—hold true with regard to the point of view of

Table 2. Respondents' Communist, Confucian, and Modernization Levels

Items	Percentage gaps	Correlation with GAI score
	Differences (+/-) between means of GAI	Pearson's correlation coefficient
Communism		
Party member (CPV)	5.5***	
Union member	6***	
Left-right scale		0.14***
Pro-state ownership		-0.07**
Competition harmful		0.02
Pro-government responsibility		-0.12***
Pro-income equality		-0.14***
Wealth accumulation a problem		0.04
Confucianism		
Main goal to make parents proud/ no	-9***	
Child obedience/no	-3*	
Attend religious services/never	-2	
Religious person/not	-4***	
Modernization		
Agricultural occupation	-9***	
Secondary or higher education	7***	
Used IT last week	9***	
Professional organization/not a member	7***	
Habitat: urban/rural	7***	
Regions and cohorts		
North/South	-1	
Cohorts born 1980 or later	5***	
Cohorts born 1960-79	-2*	
Cohorts born before 1960	-1	

Source: World Values Survey 2005-7.

Note: Significance levels at * 0.05 ** 0.01***0.001.

individual Vietnamese respondents?

Step 2: Confucian, Communist, and Modern Orientations: Differences between Vietnamese Respondents

Table 2 shows the results concerning the relationship between gender attitudes and the Communism-related items (for further information about the items used see Appendix).

Party membership and official union membership are significantly related to higher scores on the GAI, indicating that an official commitment to the party leads to more gender-equal attitudes. However, these items are rather weak indications, because only a small proportion of the population is affiliated

and, more importantly, since Doi Moi the ideological stance of the CPV and the official unions is no longer one of “pure Communism.” Therefore, I also looked at left-right attitudes, which arguably reflect a “Communist” orientation (e.g., questions concerning a preference for “more income equality” or that “competition is harmful”). The results are rather inconclusive: pro-Communist attitudes are sometimes related to lower and sometimes to higher scores on the GAI. For example, on the one hand, respondents preferring more government responsibility have lower GAI scores. On the other hand, respondents who consider themselves as “left” have higher GAI scores. In sum, Communist attitudes show no clear positive correlation with the GAI.

The question of the influence of Confucianism on the GAI tends to be affirmed (see Table 2): being a “religious person” or agreeing that “a main goal in life is to make one’s parents proud” are associated with lower scores on the GAI. Both items are used to capture respondents’ Confucian beliefs, because direct questions concerning Confucianism are lacking. The items used are considered to be informative based on the assumption that most Vietnamese respondents are influenced by Confucian thinking and that Confucianism supports strong family obligations.

Modernization indicators display clearer results (see Table 2). Respondents with a non-agricultural occupation, a middle to higher level of education (at least secondary education), who live in urban areas, use the Internet, and hold membership of a professional organization all have significantly higher scores. The more modern a respondent’s life style, the higher his/her scores on the GAI.

In sum, the chosen individual characteristics for modernization most often display a clear relationship with higher scores on the GAI. In comparison, the relationship between Communist and Confucian attitudes and the GAI is mixed. So far, this would seem to offer more support for modernization theories concerning gender attitudes than for theories on the influence of Confucianism or Communism. However, for more certainty about relative influences, a regression analysis is necessary. This will follow in step 4 below. Before that, I will turn to a closer examination of respondents from different cohorts and regions.

Step 3: Cohorts and Regions

Here, I looked into the effects of the different historical legacies of, firstly, regions and secondly, cohorts.

According to the literature, there should be regional differences, especially between the North and the South. The North was ruled earlier (after 1954) and for a longer period by the CPV than the southern part of the country (after 1975). Therefore, one would expect lower scores in the South than in the North after 1954. Again, however, the actual scores do not follow the expected pattern: there is no significant difference between the North and the South (see Table 2).

Secondly, cohorts born between 1960 and 1980 have experienced a more

ideologically “pure” form of Communist rule and were affected by more pure Communist policies. If Communist ideology and policies have the effect of increasing gender equality, then these cohorts should show higher scores on the GAI than other cohorts. Cohorts from before 1960 should show lower scores. Also, cohorts born after 1980 should show lower scores if there has been a revival of conservative Confucian values as claimed by some authors. By contrast, if there is an ongoing process of modernization affecting GAI scores, cohorts born after 1980 should show the highest scores.

The results for cohorts are shown in Table 2. Those born after 1980 have the highest scores, and they differ significantly from the other cohorts. Surprisingly, the cohorts born between 1960 and 1980, the Communist era cohorts, have the lowest scores. Cohorts born before 1960 do not have significantly lower scores. These findings indicate once again that modernization processes seem to have the clearest effect on raising GAI scores.

In sum, the findings on regions and cohorts do not support the idea that either Communism or Confucianism has a direct effect on the development of attitudes regarding gender equality. By contrast, cohorts born after 1980, which have a relatively good level of education and experienced the increased wealth and cultural diversity of the Doi Moi era, stand out as the most gender-equal cohorts. This indicates a strong influence of modernization on gender attitudes.

Step 4: Multivariate Regression

Finally, I ran a multivariate regression analysis in order to determine if and how all items taken together influenced the respondents’ GAI scores. Disappointingly, the overall explained variance of this model remains low (R square), which indicates that the items for Confucianism, Communism, and modernization taken together do not satisfactorily explain all the variance in GAI scores (see Table 3). Furthermore, some of the variables which were significant in the group comparisons are no longer significant. “Party membership” and “Cohort (1980-)” are no longer significant, indicating that the influence of these variables was based on other factors already included, i.e., it was spurious. The modernization variables which are significant are “urban area” and “agricultural occupation,” leading, respectively, to higher and lower scores on the GAI as expected. Significant indicators for Confucianism, such as agreeing that “a main goal in life is to make one’s parents proud” and being a “religious person,” are both associated with lower GAI scores as expected. The variables for Communism are partly significant, but they do lead mostly to lower GAI scores, contrary to expectations. The reason why politically left-oriented people hold less gender-equal values can only be speculated upon here: most left-oriented people belong to the industrial working class which has been reported to be more gender-conservative (Inglehart and Norris 2003).

The control variables are not significant, which is interesting but not

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Gender Attitudes

Items	Coefficients	Beta coefficients
Control		
Gender (male)	-1.59	-0.04
Marital status (married)	0.60	0.01
Modernization		
Urban area	4.77***	0.11
Cohort (1980-)	1.79	0.36
Agricultural occupation	-5.61***	-0.14
Education (secondary or higher)	2.37*	0.059
IT usage	1.77	0.03
Membership of professional organization	2.93*	0.05
Communism		
Northern region	-2.31*	-0.06
Party member	2.39	0.05
Income equality (pro)	-0.79***	-0.13
State ownership (pro)	-0.46*	-0.068
Government responsible (pro)	-0.53**	-0.08
Confucianism		
Religious person	-4.7***	0.11
Parents proud	-6.24**	-0.08
N=1219		
F (15,1203)=13.87		
Significance: 0.000		
R-squared=0.15		

Source: World Values Survey 2005-7.

Note: Significance levels at * 0.05 ** 0.01 ***0.001.

surprising. Gender, for example, as an independent variable, is not always related to values of gender equality: women and men in the same culture often share views about proper gender roles (Inglehart and Norris 2003).

In sum, the findings from the World Values Survey concerning gender attitudes in Vietnam tend to support the idea that attitudes regarding gender equality are related to modernization. The hypothesis that Communism has a positive influence on attitudes towards gender equality is not supported: more Communist attitudes are related to lower GAI scores than are related to higher scores. The hypothesis that Confucianism leads to less gender-equal attitudes is supported: Confucian attitudes are related to lower scores on the GAI.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this article shed some new light on the ongoing debates concerning the relevance and influence of Communism and Confucianism. In the case of Vietnam, Confucianism still seems to play a role in less gender-equal values, despite the country's long history of Communist rule. This lends support to the results of field research carried out by, for example, Luong, Bélanger, Barbieri, Rydstrøm, and Drummond, all of whom found conservative norms and habits to be still in existence in Vietnam despite its long history of Communism.

By contrast, the influence of Communism is not in line with the expectations of some authors: respondents with a more leftist political orientation tend to be more gender-conservative. This runs counter to the expectations of researchers like Eisen and Werner, who claim that Communism had the effect of liberating women from traditional gender roles in Vietnam. It also runs counter to the official ideology of the CPV. Instead, the findings lend support to all those researchers who claim that Communism did not have a decisive influence on gender relations in Vietnam or elsewhere (e.g., in China and the Central European countries).

In addition to the ongoing debates about the relevance of Communism and Confucianism, the author took modernization processes into account. Modernization processes are supposed to support gender-equal values as they reduce the relevance of female housework, based on a shrinking agrarian sector and increasing costs associated with having children. The findings of this study support this idea: modernization items lead to higher GAI scores, meaning that respondents with a modern lifestyle are more oriented towards gender equality. Modernization processes should be taken into consideration when discussing gender-related values. This is in line with claims made by authors such as Wilensky, Inglehart, and Norris.

In sum, all three theoretical perspectives, Confucianism, Communism, and modernization, are relevant to understanding the formation of gender values, because they all show significant results. Thus, a combination of all three would seem to be the most fruitful direction for further research. In addition, it should be kept in mind that Communism may work in the opposite direction to that indicated by the official ideology.

That said, some caution is necessary concerning the findings of this study. The overall explained variance remains low and the effects are small, indicating that more or better explanatory factors are needed. New ideas concerning how to explain the formation of gender values are needed. Additionally, better indicators which directly measure Confucianism and Communism may improve the level of explained variance. Furthermore, the data of the World Values Survey may not reflect the real norms and values of the Vietnamese respondents, because

Vietnamese people are not familiar with such surveys and may hesitate to reveal their true opinions. In other words, more research is needed in order to further develop the understanding of gender value formation.

Notes

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1. For an overview of modernization theories, see *Britannica Academic*, s.v. “social change,” accessed June 28, 2014, <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/550924/social-change>.

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Appendix

Table of Variables

Concepts	Variables		
	Variable name	Reference category (coded 0)/ Range for interval scale variables	N
Gender Attitudes	GAI (Gender Attitude Index)	1 (least) - 100 (most gender equal)	1428
Confucianism	Religious person	Not religious	1463
	Main goal to make parents proud	Not a goal	1422
Communism	Party member	Not a member	1495
	Union member	Not a member	1495
	Left-right scale	1 (right) - 10 (left)	1408
	State or private ownership	1 (private) - 10 (state)	1384
	Competition harmful	1 (not harmful) - 10 (harmful)	1424
	Government responsibility	1 (less) - 10 (more government)	1464
	Income equality	1 (less) - 10 (more income equality)	1455
	Wealth accumulation	1 (not a problem) - 10 (a problem)	1393
	Area of living: North	South	1495
Modernization	Agricultural occupation	Non-agricultural occupation	1427
	Education	Primary education	1489
	Used IT last week	Not used IT	1495
	Professional organization member	Not a member	1495
	Habitat: Urban-Rural	Rural	1495
Cohort: Modernization	Cohorts born 1980 or later	Cohorts born before 1980	1495
Cohort: Communism	Cohorts born 1960-79	Cohorts born before 1960 and after 1979	1495
Cohort: Confucianism	Cohorts born before 1960	Cohorts born in and after 1960	1495
Control	Civil status: Married	Not Married	1495
	Sex: Male	Female	1495