INTRODUCTION

Protestant Christianity in Asia is diverse not only in terms of denominations but also in terms of its accommodation of women at the leadership level. Two typical examples of the latter are the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) and the Toraja Church in Indonesia. Both churches were established more or less at the same time during the early twentieth century, and they had the same starting point regarding women’s position in the church. Women were excluded from leadership participation in the beginning. However, after several decades, the Toraja Church has been dramatically transformed to accommodate women’s leadership; whereas the ECVN has persistently barred women from this position. The Toraja church started to ordain women in 1984, whereas the ECVN has been refusing to ordain women. There are 320 ordained female pastors out of active 700 ordained pastors in Toraja church, while the ECVN has only 37 female pastors without ordination compared to 1,073 male pastors.

It is widely acknowledged by social theorists that any social structure is not static...
and timeless but is always under restless contestation of both internal and external forces. This means social change constantly happens whether it is expected or not. Attempts have been made to theoretically explain social change by focusing on structuration and agency typically represented by Anthony Giddens and Marshall Sahlins. However, why social change takes different forms or is in different motion has been a puzzle for social scholars. This paper assumes that the uniqueness of each context plays an important role in the differential process of social change.

Furthermore, feminist scholars have recognized that the success of women’s movement for leadership in religious organizations depends on both agency and the openness of the church structure. Ana Maria Munoz Boudet and co-researchers, based on a study of norms and agency in 20 countries around the world, show that structures of opportunities and contraints are important to diagnose change in agency. Without resources or opportunities, agency is passive and empowerment is not possible. The paper assumes that the context has a role to play in the dynamics of church openness and the empowerment of agency.

Based on both primary and secondary data, this paper aims to explore the cultural, political and religious contexts of the ECVN and the Toraja Church to explain their different process of transformation toward women-inclusive leadership by comparing how these contexts of the two churches are different regarding women’s roles and how they contribute to the openness of each church and the empowerment of women. This paper is just exploratory and not final in the investigation of this topic.

WOMEN IN VIETNAMESE AND TORAJA CULTURES

In cultural studies, scholars are more aware of the dynamic of cultural structure in a given society. For instance, Geertz admits that “[c]ultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is”. As for Bourdieu, what is understood as culture is actually “produced by authorised discourses, practices and institutions”. Thus, the field of cultural production is always a contested field of competing discourses and values. In gender studies, this reality is rightly marked by Howell (quoted by Waterson) that “[i]t is no longer valid to assume that there is one single model of gender in any one society and that the job of the anthropologist is to elicit it.” Therefore, this part of the paper attempts to present and compare the available cultural discourses of women’s roles in Vietnam and Toraja. Existing discourses and literature show that despite competing discourses within each society, the dominant discourses in Vietnamese society prescribe women low social position; whereas those in Toraja society give women quite a high position in the society.

a) Discourses of Women’s roles in Vietnamese Culture

Specifically regarding discourses of women’s roles in Vietnamese culture, there have been debates among scholars. Several Vietnamese and foreign feminist scholars have

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argued that Vietnamese women maintained a high level of autonomy even among Southeast Asian countries before the coming of Confucianism during the Chinese invasion that occurred over a thousand-year period. They point to the *Au Co* myth of the origin of Vietnamese people which testifies to the matriarchal system in northern Vietnam. They use archaeological, textual, and ritual materials such as goddess worship codes to support this unique feature of early Vietnamese society. They also appeal to historical evidence of Vietnamese women as heroines and warriors, such as the Trung sisters (14-43 CE) and lady Trieu (226-248 CE), in the struggles against Chinese invaders. Vietnamese people have been proud of these female heroines in their pantheon of brave patriots. Based on this, feminist scholars argue for a different position of Vietnamese women from the subordinate one as seen in the present. These feminists argue that women’s autonomy and high social status in early Vietnamese societies gradually changed due to the successive invasions of the Chinese and the reinforcement of Confucian values during the tenth and fifteenth centuries by Vietnamese kings and elites.

During the nineteenth century, the first Nguyen emperor (1808-1819) drastically reduced women’s rights due to the influence of a Qing Legal Code. He forbade women from taking the Mandarinate examination, and instead promoted a Confucian-inspired book of ‘manner’ the *Gia Huan Ca* (Family Training Ode). A woman was taught to keep their virginity before marriage and be absolutely faithful to her husband whether he is alive or dead. From birth to death, a woman had to submit to three male authorities called “Three Submissions.” She had to submit to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage, and to her eldest son after her husband’s death. Additionally, a good woman must master the “Four Virtues”: *cong* (work), *dung* (physical appearance), *ngon* (appropriate speech), and *hanh* (proper behavior). Normally these included cooking, sewing, and embroidering but not reading or writing. This long process of indoctrination by Chinese colonial administrators and subsequent Vietnamese monarchs have substantially altered general Vietnamese perception of women’s roles in the society.

During the French imperialism (1858-1945), Marr shows that discourse of women’s rights started to emerge; however, it was restricted to upper- and middle-class people. He noticed at least three perspectives toward women’s roles: reactionaries, moderates, and radicals, evidently during the period up to 1930. The reactionaries were those of a generation earlier, who took for granted the traditional morality for the females or the Confucian teachings of female morality and found no reason to discuss it. The moderates believed that equality was a long process of empowering women through public work skills and education. For the radicals, gender equality required a radical change in the society.

During the next period (1945-1975), several Vietnamese women adopted Marxist feminism arguing that women’s equality and liberation could not be obtained without the liberation of the country from the colonial powers. Women started to fight side by side men against the French (1945-1954) and the Americans (1954-1975). The north gained independence in 1945 and the communist government was established. The Vietnamese communist party constructed a new image of womanhood, which was in fact a combination of Marxist and traditional values. It promoted gender equality by encouraging women to be excellent in both public and private spheres. Though

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15Marr, “The 1920s Women’s Rights.”
Vietnamese women enjoyed improved rights, such as voting, divorce, abortion, education, wage equality, outlaw of polygamy and child marriage, they were burdened with workload and responsibilities.

The latest report on gender situation in Vietnam by Asian Development Bank in December 2005 also stated that Confucian gender norm had strong influence among the Kinh majority and Chinese ethnic group in Vietnam. It reads as follows:

Most Vietnamese people, both men and women, expect women to behave in a socially constrained way. As such, women often do not exercise the rights accorded to them by law and policy. This traditional and restrictive way of thinking contributes to most of the gender inequalities outlined in this report: from women’s lack of representation in leadership positions to vulnerability to trafficking for prostitution.\[16\]

Not only Confucian discourse of women’s morality has achieved a popular position in the life of Vietnamese people, it has been promoted and defended within religious community such as the Evangelical Church of Vietnam. A very recent study guide book for Christian women in this church, which was published in 2013, stated:

When mentioning women’s virtue, we cannot ignore the Vietnamese thousand-year heritage. The Vietnamese moral tradition for women is “Three Submissions” and “Four Virtues.” These are beautiful and unique characters of Vietnamese culture for thousands of year... As Vietnamese women, we are proud to grow up in such a culture which has a good view about women’s virtues. These are unique features that need to be practiced in order to show the beauty of Vietnamese women. As Christian women, we not only demonstrate these unique manners of our people, and
good virtues of Vietnamese women, but we also show the female virtues according to the biblical teachings.\[17\]

Strangely enough, even within this one book written by one author, there are conflicting ideas of women’s roles. While the author defends and promotes women’s submission to male authority, she also argues for gender equality in public spheres such as church leadership and economic and social participation.\[16\] It is hard to understand how the author can reconcile between her support for Confucian teaching of women’s submission to male authority and her argument for gender equality in church, family and society.

In short, despite the existence of various discourses of women’s roles in Vietnamese culture, the dominant discourses obviously authorize the Confucian model of womanhood which prescribes women a subordinate position to men. The discourse of women’s rights also play an important role in public debate especially among the intellectuals. It seems that these two types of discourses will continue to exist side by side as the old values and new values compete and negotiate their position and power in the society.

b) Discourses of Women’s Roles in Toraja Culture

While gender is a clear mark of unequal social organization in Vietnamese society according to existing discourses, it cannot be used to describe social organization in Toraja society because it is deemed not important or unnecessary.\[19\] Roxana Waterson’s study and other scholarly writings of women’s roles in Toraja culture testify to a dominant egalitarian cultural system in Toraja society which even gives women a higher social position. Nevertheless, like what occurs in Vietnam,


\[\text{\footnotesize 17}Thi Ly Tran, Phu Nu Co Doc Trong Gia Dinh, Hoi Thanh va Xa Hoi [Christian Women in Family, Church, and Society] (Nha Xuat Ban Ton Giao, 2013), pp. 66–67.\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 18}Thi Ly., Phu Nu Co Doc., pp. 73–75, pp. 131–137.\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 19}Waterson, Paths and Rivers., p. 226.\]
there are also opposite trends of thinking and practices.

Concerning local custom or adat, Waterson states that “so far as adat is concerned, ..., where I could discover no point of adat law which discriminates against women”.20 In family organization, there is no gender preference or discrimination among children. Both boys and girls are valued and share equal inheritance rights; however, women are given strong positions in several aspects. For instance, in the Toraja custom of marriage, a man has to move to stay with and contribute his labor to his wife’s family after the wedding. In Toraja culture, each big family or clan is represented by a tongkonan.21 Women are the ones who represent the tongkonan and manage the rice barn. Men are not allowed to interfere women’s management of this family property or else they will be ridiculed. Since women own property and men stay with their wives’ families, domestic violence rarely happens and women can maintain their livelihood and care for children in case of divorce. In terms of death ritual, women are given more honor than men in the sense that the number of animals sacrificed for their funeral is higher than that for their husbands’ who had passed away.22 Thus, women can be said to have a special position in Toraja culture of kinship.

In terms of religious rituals, Waterson observes that there is no concept of female pollution such as rule against intercourse during a woman’s period or any idea of female menstruation as a threat to men’s spiritual or mental health in Toraja culture. Women participate in all Toraja rituals and their participation is even a must. According to Aluk to dolo tradition, women even played the role of a ritual leader. However, this tradition later became rare and has almost died out after Dutch evangelists came and converted the majority of Torajanese to Christianity.23 Hence, at the symbolic level of Toraja custom or adat, women are bestowed with high social status.

Beside this discourse of women’s high status in Toraja society, there are also conflicting discourses and practices. For example, Paulus Tangdilintin criticizes that women’s special position as the representation and owner of tongkonan is also their own prison. This creates inequality between men and women in their freedom and opportunity for marriage and self-development. In Toraja society, it is not gender but class status that divides the society. Women from upper class are not allowed to marry men of lower class; whereas this is not applied to men. Because women represent tongkonan and manage family property, they are attached to the home and household responsibilities, which limits their opportunities for self-expressions and capacity development beyond this domestic world as their male counterparts. Tangdilintin argues that men’s opportunity to widen their network and self-development leads to their dominant role in rituals such as death ritual and their ability to contribute more sacrificed animals for their parents’ funerals. This also means that their portion of inheritance is bigger than women in the family. This has occured in several places in Toraja.24

In addition to that, Waterson sees that women play a little part in Toraja politics and they rarely speak authoritatively in public. When she asked people for an explanation, they said, “men are superior, but actually men and women are equals”.25 However, Waterson also

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20Waterson, Paths and Rivers., p. 229.
21Tongkonan, which means “sitting place,” is “origin houses,” where important matters such as disputes, marriages, or inheritances are discussed by family members or relatives (Forshee, 2006:98).
25Waterson, Paths and Rivers., p. 240.
finds evidence that women became leaders of villages and districts during the pre-colonial or colonial times. The coming of Christianity to Toraja and the New Order Policy also restricted women’s roles to wifehood and motherhood. While the local religious tradition gave women important roles in rituals, the Calvinist version of Christianity, which came to Toraja, subordinated and even excluded women from religious leadership. Similarly the New Order Government established women organizations which were composed of wives of civil servants and army officers to promote domestic orientation for Indonesian women notably since 1974. In Toraja, this organization was headed by the Bupati’s wife.

Like Vietnam, gender and women’s roles in Toraja have been influenced by various forces in history, which altered women’s roles in a certain way. With the mass conversion of Toraja people to Protestant Christianity due to the threat of aggressive Muslim guerillas in the 1950s, the conservative Calvinist Christian tradition was able to control the majority of the population and excluded women in Toraja from church leadership for several decades. However, unlike the case of women in the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, this control of women’s roles in religious domain finally failed in 1984 when women were recognized equal rights with men in all areas of religious life especially church leadership. The transformation of the Toraja Church’s perspective toward women’s roles is well-captured by Priyanti Pakan Suryadarma, an anthropology professor at Indonesian University in Jakarta when she discussed this transformation process as follows:

It is worth to note that from the process of struggle and success mentioned before, deep down in the heart of both men and women in Toraja, especially in the Toraja Church, the best part of Toraja culture is still kept. It is the culture that has no discrimination of the rights, roles, and positions between men and women, which is today known as gender equality.

Suryadarma recognizes the Toraja’s egalitarian cultural heritage as an important factor that facilitated the transformation of the church structure toward women-inclusive leadership.

In summary, the cases of Vietnam and Toraja have shown that women’s roles in these two societies have been shaped and reshaped in different historical periods. Conflicting values and practices exist side by side in each society. However, the long-standing dominant discourse of Vietnamese culture has authorized a subordinate position for women in the society; while that of Toraja culture has given women a high position in family and religious life. This can help to explain, to some extent, why the Christian Church in Vietnam can persistently keep its patriarchal view toward women’s role while the Toraja Church has been transformed to accommodate the egalitarian gender values of Toraja culture.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXTS OF THE ECVN AND THE TORAJA CHURCH

Beside the cultural factor, political context also plays in role in the transformation of religious structure toward women-inclusive leadership by offering resources for agency empowerment. Regarding the cases of the ECVN and the Toraja Church, their political contexts present different levels of opportunities for women’s empowerment for church leadership. Particularly, the political context of Vietnam, especially under the Communist Government,
has marginalized religion and restricted opportunities for women’s religious education and professional development; whereas the political context of Toraja offers more religious freedom and opportunities for women’s religious education and religious profession.

a) The Political Context of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN)

The political context of the ECVN can be divided into two periods: colonial period before 1975 and Communist government period after 1975. Each period restricts women’s opportunities for religious education and profession in a different way. The period before 1975 was marked with the two successive wars against the French imperialism (1911-1954)32 and the American War or Vietnam War (1954-1975). This period of political turmoil was characterized with severe exploitation, suffering, and death. During the French colonial period, Vietnamese people suffered famine, starvation, and disease due to the exploitative policies of both the French and Japanese colonizers (1942-1945). In 1954, the Communists liberated the North and the country was divided into North and South. The South was ruled by Ngo Dinh Diem government, supported by the U.S. to fight against the expansion of the northern Communists. There was a massive exodus of almost one million people from the North to South to escape Communist rule. Two thirds of them were Catholics and around 1,000 were Protestants.33 The U.S. sent aid and human resources to the South to help the Southern government resettle the refugees and build a new nation. Starting in 1959, the northern Communists started a war against the Southern government and the U.S. troops to try and reunify the country. The war with the Americans between 1954 and 1965 took away the lives of an estimated number of more than 250,000 women. Besides fighting in the front, women took the central role in farming and family care.34 In such a situation and a culture which already discouraged women’s literacy as mentioned above, women’s opportunities for education became even more limited. Within the ECVN before 1975, men were given priority to get theological education; while single women were barred from having it.35 Some pastors’ wives only started to learn to read and write in order to join the Bible School after getting married to their husbands.36 Hence, women’s religious education and religious profession were very restricted during this period.

After 1975 the entire country was under the rule of the Communist government. Before the Renovation Period in 1986, the government’s religious policies treated religious people especially Christians as target of repression, and as second-class citizens to be strictly controlled after 1986. Before 1986, the Communist government viewed traditional rituals and religious activities as backward superstition, wasteful of resources, antithetical to national construction, and incompatible with Marxist-Leninist ideology.37 Based on this understanding of religion, the government started to “impose anti-religious (especially anti-Christian) policies”.38 Chu describes that Catholic church repression spread from north

32The year 1911 is the year of the establishment of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam; whereas the French colonizers came to Vietnam in 1858.


to south. The state confiscated church property, closed religious schools, arrested priests and sent them to re-education camps.\textsuperscript{39} For the ECVN, the state dismissed all missionaries, sent 90 pastors to reeducation camp, and closed all theological schools and ninety-nine percent of churches of ethnic Vietnamese origin. The state also tried to control the leadership of the ECVN hoping that this would help it control the whole Protestant church in the south.\textsuperscript{40}

Although the state’s attitude toward religion is more relaxing after 1986, it has maintained a strict control of religious activities through regulation of worship places and registration of religious activities. Religious practices can only be done at regulated places. Religious institutions must ask permission for their operation, training, ordaining and assigning leadership; but the permission depends absolutely on the power of the local authorities.

This political situation severely affected the ECVN’s theological education and church leadership. Women tended to be the most affected. The government’s religious policies have led to the impoverishment of the ECVN’s church leadership by causing the drain of leadership and the lack of theological opportunities. Due to the fear of the Communist government, many pastors and laity from the ECVN migrated to the U.S. by boat after 1975.\textsuperscript{41} Many of the remaining pastors were jailed and later migrated to the West after having served their term in the prison. Hence the church suffered the loss of prominent leaders.

Moreover, the state religious policies have also impoverished the ECVN’s leadership by depriving its members of theological education opportunity through closing its only seminary in Nha Trang and isolating the church from the outside world. The ECVN’s only seminary was established in 1921 by the Christian Missionaries and Alliance missionaries to train local pastors for church planting. Later this Bible School was moved to Nha Trang in 1959. By 1975, this seminary had equipped the church leadership with 500 pastors, 276 Bible students in Nha Trang and 900 laypeople trained by theological training by extension.\textsuperscript{42} However, after 1975 the Communist government closed this seminary and forbade theological education until 2003.\textsuperscript{43} During this period, both men and women from this church were deprived of theological education which is important to provide leaders for the growing church. Furthermore, the government also closed the country from the outside world before 1990s. This means that theological education opportunity abroad for church members was not possible.

However, since 1990s, Vietnam changed its policy on domestic and international issues. Vietnam normalized its relationship with China in 1991 (after the war in 1979). In 1994, the US lifted its embargo on trade against Vietnam and normalized its diplomatic relations with Vietnam a year later. Vietnam became a member of ASEAN in 1995 and a member of World Trade Organization in 2008.\textsuperscript{44} This integration of Vietnam into the world started to open opportunities for international travel, work, and education.

As a result, only after 1990s was overseas theological education possible for Christians from Vietnam. For example, the Union University of California (UCC), established by overseas Vietnamese evangelicals in the U.S. has offered theological education both bachelor and master levels for Vietnamese students in Vietnam by distant training or sending them to other countries such as Cambodia and Thailand.


\textsuperscript{43}Truong, “Vietnam: The Emergence of Protestant Churches and Theological Education,” p. 96.

Though women could access overseas theological education after 1990s, it is hard for women to improve their status within a short time period after being deprived of educational access for 27 years by the state. Additionally, since religion is privatized, a religious or theological degree can only be utilized by religious institutions. In Vietnam, religion is not allowed to be taught at public schools and universities as it is in Indonesia. In the inputs to the draft report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief in 2015, the Vietnamese Government explains that:

For the purpose of harmony and equality among religions, the Education Law as well as other laws prohibit the preaching of religion in schools to guarantee that all students and pupils have the independence and freedom to choose to follow a religion or to follow none. This is popular in many countries in which no religion is chosen as a national religion, and this is absolutely not contrary to the international standards on human rights.46

Not only religious degrees are rejected from public institutions, they also face challenges from religious institutions since churches such as the ECVN have been strict filtering these degrees based on their own religious orthodoxy. The ECVN also has its own rules regarding women. One of the rules is that women with theological degrees are required to be celibate if they want to enter the cleric order. This has created a double marginalization of Christian women regarding opportunities for religious education and religious profession first in the wider society and second in the religious community itself.

b) The Political Context of the Toraja Church

Regarding the same issue, the Toraja context offers more religious freedom and opportunities for women's religious education and religious profession. In contrast to the context of Vietnam in which religion is marginalized or privatized, the Indonesian political context in general and the Toraja political context in particular give religion, especially major religions, a public role and religious people opportunities to actively participate in political and social life.

Since Independence in 1945, Indonesian political stance toward religion has been based on the philosophy of Pancasila established by the founding fathers of the nation. This Pancasila includes five pillars, namely, “Belief in One God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, the democracy guided by the Consultative Representative Policy Lessons, and social justice for all Indonesian people”.47 Though Muslim community accounts for more than 90 percent of the population, the founding fathers of the Republic of Indonesia chose the nation-state governance system based on constitution, democracy, plurality, equality and protection of human rights, instead of Islamic theocracy.48 Despite this non-confessional political model, religion has been given important roles in the political and social life of Indonesia. Religious groups can participate in the government through forming their own political parties such as the Islamic party Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the Christian political party Parkido, and Catholic political party Partai Katolik.49 Confessing one’s religion is not something to hide as it is in

48Abdullah, “Islam and Local Expression.”, pp. 7–9.
Vietnam 50 but it is a requirement in Indonesia and must be stated in one's identity card. Students from kindergarten to college are required to study their religion for two hours a week in government classrooms. 51 Religious groups can open their own universities and hospitals. Students with religious degrees can seek employment in both religious and public institutions. Though tensions have remained within Indonesian politics of religion such as the resurgence of religious fundamentalism, religious violent conflicts, and the marginalization of local religions, to name a few, this intermingling of religion, politics and social life have given religious Indonesian people more opportunities to actively participate in public life.

Located in south Sulawesi of Indonesia, Toraja has been influenced by the overall political context of Indonesia and its own political situation. In general, though there are political disruptions and tensions between Muslims and Christians and those between the majority Christians and indigenous religious adherents, the Toraja’s political context since the colonial period to the present has facilitated more opportunities for Christian women in education and religious leadership.

In 1906, Toraja was subjected to the rule of the Dutch colonial government and a portion of the population was Christianized by Dutch missionaries. By 1945, Toraja land was again under the rule of the Japanese. Though the Japanese provided protection to the Christians from the low-land Muslim aggression, the Toraja population was required to contribute to the war effort. 52 The period 1950 – 1965 was marked with violent attacks by Darul Islam guerrillas against Toraja highlands, which led to the mass conversion of Toraja people to Christianity as a strategy to protect themselves from potential attacks by the Muslims. 53 According to the 2000 census, 70.6 per cent of Toraja population was Christian. 54 The fear of being attacked by Muslim lowlanders has been the topic of conversations in Toraja today and this has also reinforced the Christian identity allegiance instead of preserving the Alukta local identity. 55 As Christians become the dominant identity and politics, the local Alukta religious group has become target of Christianization.

Despite all these political disruptions, Christian women in Toraja enjoy more opportunities for education and religious profession compared to the Vietnamese female Christians. During the colonial period (1900-1942), the Dutch colonial government soon invested in education for female children and protected women. The Dutch government opened two public schools which used Toraja and Melayu language in 1908. They also opened another school that used Dutch language in 1929 and one more with the name Christelijke Torajase School in 1938 in Rantepao. Since the beginning, female kids were admitted to these schools. 56 Regarding theological education, women in Toraja were not allowed to have theological education during the missionary period. Only in 1967 were women allowed to take Christian education in STT Rantepao. Several women became teachers of Christian education during this period. Even though women were not given the right to ordination before 1984, few women had already achieved higher theological education even before the STT Rantepao admitted women. For example, Damaris Pakan got her theological degree in STT Jakarta in 1959. 57

52 Aritonang and Steenbrink, A History of Christianity in Indonesia, p. 466, p. 471.
53 Aritonang and Steenbrink, A History of Christianity in Indonesia, p. 472; Waterson, Paths and Rivers, p. 353.
54 Waterson, Paths and Rivers, p. 353.
After Independence in 1945, unlike Vietnam which closed the country from the outside world, Indonesia opened the country to the outside world to boost the process of industrialization and international relations.58 This integration of Indonesia in the global context has facilitated exchange of liberal values such as gender equality, and educational opportunities in Western countries for Indonesian women. Women from the Toraja Church could join international women organizations such as Asia Church Women’s Conference (ACWC) as early as 1960s. For example, in 1966, Damaris M. Anggui-Pakan, who later became the first ordained pastor in the Toraja Church, was present at the ACWC in Japan. Later, in 1980, H. T. Hutabarat-Lebang became a committee member of ACWC.59 These women after coming back to Toraja have activized the process of women’s empowerment in Toraja Church.

With this openness of the Indonesian and Toraja contexts for women’s education, within a short period, Toraja women with qualified theological education had multiplied when they were finally recognized the right to ordination in 1984. Though the Toraja Church was slower than other Christian churches in Indonesia to ordain women, the number of ordained women in this church quickly increased after a short period of realizing the right. After twenty years since 1984, the number of ordained female pastors reached 185 out of 669 ordained pastors.60 In 2015, the number of female pastors almost doubles or 348 out of a total of 959 pastors within less than ten years’ time.61 Women have also been present in the church synod hierarchy. In 2001, a woman became one of the four chairpersons of the synod. In 2011, the synod has a female chairperson and a female general treasurer.

In brief, this section of the paper has shown that the political contexts of the ECVN and the Toraja Church have offered different levels of resources or opportunities for women’s empowerment for leadership. By offering or restricting resources or opportunities for agency, the political context can facilitate or slower down the process of transformation. Particularly the Indonesian and Toraja political context offers Christian women more opportunities for religious education and profession due to their openness to religion and to the outside world and positive values such as gender equality. On the contrary, the political context of Vietnam has marginalized religion and closed the country from the outside world for a long period. Opportunities for women’s religious education and career have been restricted by the government’s religious policies and the church’s patriarchal perspective toward women. Hence, the political contexts can be said to significantly contribute to the transformation of both churches’ perspectives toward women’s roles to a certain extent.

THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECVN AND THE TORAJA CHURCH

Beside the cultural and political settings, the religious contexts of the ECVN and the Toraja Church also play a role in their own transformation toward women-inclusive leadership. The religious context here means the internal development of the church and its interaction with other Christian bodies. Bourdieu shows that structural transformation depends on its internal practices and politics, and its convergence with other structures.62 In other words, the character of the structure is one of the determinants in structural transformation. Indeed, the ECVN and the Toraja Church seem to develop into different

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61 Sinode Gereja Toraja, 2015.
62Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, Understanding Bourdieu, p. 28.
directions regarding their openness for reform. To state differently, while the ECVN seems to become more conservative and resistant to change, the Toraja Church has been flexible and open to reform.

a) The Formation and Development of the ECVN

In the process of development, the ECVN has moved toward a conservative direction seen through its perspective toward culture, intellectualism and leadership, and participation in worldwide religious movements.

Protestant Christianity was successfully introduced to Vietnam first by the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) missionaries in 1911, though CMA missionaries made an attempt to enter the country earlier on February 10th, 1889 but unsuccessfully planted the religion.63 As a result, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) was officially the first Protestant denomination to be established in Vietnam in 1927. Other Protestant groups such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, Mennonites, the Church of Christ, and the Quakers came to Vietnam in the following decades. In 1921, the first Bible School to train leaders for the ECVN was established in Da Nang. By 1941, seventy-five percent of ECVN’s 121 congregations were self-supporting. When the Communist government defeated the French in 1954, the ECVN was divided into Northern and Southern churches.64 They have remained separated until now.

In 1975, the Communists took control of the whole country and religious persecutions started from north to south. The government closed 121 Protestant churches of Vietnamese ethnic and 171 of tribal minorities (ninety-nine percent), and confiscated many of the churches.65 The government also dismissed all missionaries and sent 90 pastors to reeducation camp.66 However, despite the tough situations since the reunification of the country in 1975, the Protestant church has developed dramatically in terms of membership especially among ethnic minorities in mountainous areas with a growth rate of 900 percent.67 The estimated membership of the ECVN in 2005 is 455,748 and that of house churches is 500,000 (2006-2007).68 The ECVN was recognized by the government in 2001 and was given permission to reopen its theological seminary in 2003. Today the number of Protestants in Vietnam is 1.5 million or 1.35 per cent of the total population of 90 million people.69

Over a hundred years of establishment, the ECVN has still maintained its conservative perspective toward Vietnamese culture through its doctrine and practices which demonize everything that belongs to the local culture. Truong commented that

Following the approach of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), Vietnamese Protestant Churches have negligently demonized almost everything that belongs to Vietnamese culture, seeing it as either Satanic or unclean. Many Vietnamese Protestants devalue and denigrate the human and cultural treasures of their community, considering their fellow countrymen and women and their cultures to be worthless or demonic”.70

Similarly Woods observes that due to its fundamentalist theology Vietnamese Protestants refuse to participate in any local traditions such as annual festival celebrations of municipality’s patron god and animistic-based rituals; thus social interaction is severely

70Ibid., 3.
disrupted between Protestants and local people.\footnote{Woods, Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook, p. 155.} Consequently the ECVN has been alienated to its own culture and people. There have been attempts from the ECVN’s scholars to inculturate the church through theological literature such as Rev. Dr. Le Hoang Phu, Rev. Dr. Huynh Thien Buu, Rev. Dr. Le Van Thien, and Rev. Dr. Truong Van Thien Tu.\footnote{Quang Hung Do, “MẤY VẤN DỄ VỀ THẦN HỌC TIN LÀNH Ở VIỆT NAM HIỆN NAY (Some Theological Issues of the Evangelical Churches in Vietnam),” Hoithanh.com: Vietnamese Global Christian Network, accessed May 1, 2014, http://hoithanh.com/Home/tin-tuc/2661-mot-cai-nhin-ve-than-hoc-tin-lanh-o-viet-nam-hien-nay.html#.UvOqxLRv50Y.} However, their approach is limited to intellectual conversations and most of them are residing in foreign countries except Rev. Dr. Le Van Thien who is still working with the ECVN in Vietnam.

In addition to its alienation to Vietnamese culture, the ECVN has also held an anti-intellectual attitude, which has led to a poor and conservative leadership. According to Rev. Dr. Truong, from the very beginning, the CMA missionaries aimed at missionizing the lower class. Consequently they have produced an “unhealthy church: poor and uneducated”.\footnote{Truong, “Menh Troi: Toward a Vietnamese Theology of Mission,” pp. 59–60.} By focusing on increasing membership and targeting at poor people, many churches are unable to pay salaries to their pastors on a regular basis. The ECVN’s anti-intellectual attitude was originated from the CMA missionaries’ fear of heresy and losing faith in the face of science and rationality.\footnote{Truong, “Menh Troi: Toward a Vietnamese Theology of Mission,” pp. 59–60.} Such a fear has resulted in the ECVN’s discouragement of young preachers for further education and its underestimation of knowledge and intellects. A serious consequence of this fear is that the quality of the present leadership of the ECVN and its theological education is very poor.\footnote{Truong, “Vietnam: The Emergence of Protestant Churches and Theological Education,” p. 100.} This also leads to the church’s unwelcoming of those graduates from outside the country. Consequently, the present leadership of the ECVN has remained conservative and resistant to change.

Finally the ECVN’s isolation from the wider religious movements in the world is another factor. Since its establishment, the ECVN has not joined any ecumenical movements\footnote{Ecumenical movement is a Christian movement attempting to unify Christians of all backgrounds for common witness and joint service for peace, justice, and equality (Tveit, 2013:ix-x).} such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), and Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). These are worldwide Christian movements to address contemporary issues in the world through other ways rather than evangelism or proselytization. Three of their agendas are to promote human rights, education, and interreligious dialogues.\footnote{Theodore Gill, “The WCC and the Ecumenical Movement in the Context of World Christianity,” in Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century: A Reader for Theological Education, ed. Melisande Lorke and Dietrich Werner (World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), pp. 3–6.} This isolation of the ECVN from the worldwide religious movements can be explained through the church’s theological understanding of mission and the political context of Vietnam. Since the beginning, the church has inherited and maintained the CMA missionaries’ understanding of mission as evangelism or converting people into the Christian faith.\footnote{Truong, “Menh Troi: Toward a Vietnamese Theology of Mission,” 59–67; Woods, Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook, pp. 155–156.} Thus, it is difficult for the ECVN to accept the view of the equality of all faiths and interreligious dialogue as being promoted by WCC and CCA. Beside this, the ECVN has been under suspicion and close observation by the Communist Government for any of its connection with the outside world since this church is historically connected to colonial powers.\footnote{Charles F. Keyes, “Being Protestant Christians in Southeast Asian Worlds,” Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 27, no. 2 (1996): p. 284; Woods, Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook, p. 155.} Therefore, this narrow understanding of mission of the ECVN and its disconnectedness to progressive Christian movements such as the WCC and CCA have strengthened its conservatism. As a result,
the system becomes stronger in its resistance to change, including the accommodation of women in leadership.

b) The Formation and Development of the Toraja Church

Unlike the ECVN, the Toraja Church has gone through a process of radical transformation in its perspective toward Toraja culture, intellectualism and leadership, and participation in worldwide ecumenical movements.

Protestant Christianity was first brought to Toraja by the Dutch missionary, van de Loosdrecht, in 1913. He proselytized through schooling and Bible translation with the help of the linguist H. van de Veen in Sa’dan Toraja. The Toraja nobility rejected Christianity, so he worked with the poor and slaves and struggled against social injustices. He baptized only 15 people during three years. In the mid-1917, he was killed by the uprising of the Toraja feudal lords. In the next 25 years, the Dutch mission established a network of schools, and hospital, and several hundred congregations. In 1938, baptized Christian converts numbered 13,000 out of around 250,000 non-Muslims in Toraja.

The Toraja Church declared independent from the Dutch mission in 1947; however, its leadership was chaired by a missionary. Only after 1950 was the church truly independent from the missionaries due to the break in relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands over western New Guinea (Papua) that drove all missionaries home. In 1945, the Toraja Church was protected from Muslim aggression by Christian Japanese. However, from 1950 to 1965, the Darul Islam rebellion invaded and killed seventeen church leaders and a number of Christians in Toraja-land and surrounding areas. Adherents of traditional religion were forced to choose between Islam and Christianity. Tens of thousands chose Islam; while many more chose Christianity, which trebled the church membership. In 2000, the membership of Toraja Church reached 375,000 or about 70 percent of Toraja population. In 2015, Christian population in Toraja – both Tana Toraja and Toraja Utara – was 369,730 or 71.34% of the total population of 518,245. Toraja Church particularly has a membership of 327,246 or 63.14% of the total population.

Since its establishment, the Toraja Church has gone through several reforms. One of them is the contextualization of Christianity into Toraja culture. Since 1923, the relationship between Toraja culture and the Christian faith has been the topic of discussion among the missionaries and Toraja church leaders. In 1929, they came up with specific restrictions regarding rituals. For example, it was forbidden to offer meat to the dead or to spirits, to sing song for the deceased in its narrative old version, and to believe that the souls of animals follow the dead.

After 1965, the Toraja Church no longer viewed traditional culture as something shameful to suppress. In contrast, various cultural aspects were adopted into the church such as costume, dance, music, and social stratification which means that office holders of regional and central boards were expected to come from upper social class. In 1980s and 1990s, the church even discussed whether or not to allow the practice of the tau-tau (statues of the dead) and the church reached a compromise in 1984. It strongly discouraged this practice; however, if the family of the dead wanted to have it, they should not have it paraded and displayed in the ritual.

In Toraja Christian community today, two kinds of rituals – funerals and house festivals are

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Kantor Kementerian Agama Kabupaten Tana Toraja, p. 2015.
Sinode Gereja Toraja, p. 2015.
lively practiced with “much of the old religious dramaturgy, including adornments, decorum, sacrifice of buffaloes and pigs, and certain dances and songs”.88 Hence, in this cultural respect, the Toraja Church is much more contextual and flexible than the ECVN.

Regarding intellectualism and church leadership, the Toraja Church leadership was open-minded and progressive. Unlike the ECVN which has persistently kept the imported Western theology and religious structure, and discouraged educational pursuit, the Toraja Church, after 1965, not only contextualized Christianity into Toraja culture but also made a number of changes in its religious structure by dropping some of the Dutch conservative Calvinist features inherited from the missionaries. In 1981, the church adopted a new confession which expresses the Christian faith in a more contextual way; this church completely eliminated the classic Calvinist forms six years later. In 1984, the church admitted women to full church leadership.89 According to Anggui and Hutabarat-Lebang, several male leaders of the Toraja Church were very open and supportive to women’s participation in church leadership even before the church became independent in 1947; however, their attempt was unsuccessful because women’s issue was suppressed by the dominant Dutch missionaries. Thanks to the continuous support and struggle of these progressive leaders through various church synods, women were finally recognized full rights in church leadership in 1984.90 Beside that, compared to the ECVN, the Toraja Church invested in women’s theological education much earlier (in 1967). Even before this, women were already admitted to theological education in STT Jakarta. Several female leaders have been sent abroad for further training on different issues so that they could come back and contribute to the development of the church and community. Many of them have held important offices in Toraja Church structure.91 Hence, the Toraja Church’s courage to contextualize its faith and its willingness to empower its leaders especially women through education show that this church is very open to reform.

Finally, the Toraja Church’s participation in wider ecumenical bodies is also a factor that pushes the process of the church transformation toward women’s inclusive leadership. The Toraja Church became member of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (former name “DGI” and present name “PGI”) in 1950. It joined the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) which later became Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) since 1964. In 1967, Toraja Church became member of the World Council of Churches and member of World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1973.92 Since these Christian ecumenical movements promote, among all, human rights and gender equality, the Toraja Church, as a member, cannot escape from their influence. In fact, the Toraja Church as been an active member of these ecumenical movements in both local, national and international levels. It has always sent women to attend ecumenical events and training, and participate in leadership of these worldwide bodies. For example, Rev. Lydia Tandirerung worked as a volunteer for the Asia Mission Conference in Korea in 1994 and as an intern for CCA in Hongkong for six months in 1995. She became the first female youth representative in the executive board of PGI from 1994 to 1999. Another prominent figure is Dr. H.T. Hutabarat-Lebang who became the first female Associate General Secretary for Program Coordination.

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89Aritonang and Steenbrink, A History of Christianity in Indonesia, p. 472.
of CCA (1991-2001), member of the Executive Committee CCA for the period 2005-2010, and General Secretary of CCA in 2010-2015. Recently she becomes the first female Chairperson of PGI. Therefore, the participation of Toraja Church in progressive Christian movements has benefited the church’s leadership resources especially women’s leadership competence and knowledge. This in turns pushes for the structural change of the church.

In summary, this part has shown that the character of the religious structure itself is also an important factor contributing to the transformation of the church toward women-inclusive leadership. Particularly, in the process of development, the ECVN and the Toraja Church have moved toward opposite directions. While the ECVN shows an alien attitude toward its own culture and a hostile view toward knowledge and progression, the Toraja Church has been flexible to ground its faith in its own culture and willing to invest in education and participate in progressive Christian movements. Perhaps there is no one explanation for these different levels of openness between the ECVN and the Toraja Church. However, it is obvious that the Toraja Church did make a difference when standing up to free itself from the Dutch missionaries’ theological and cultural control.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has explored and compared the cultural, political and religious settings of the ECVN and those of the Toraja Church regarding their contribution to the openness of the church structure and the empowerment of the agency in each church. Regarding cultural context, the long-standing discourse of Vietnamese culture prescribes a subordinate role for women; while that of Toraja gives women equal and even high position compared to men. The resonance between dominant Vietnamese cultural discourse and the ECVN’s tradition of women’s roles makes the church’s view more stable; while the Toraja Church had to tackle with the contradiction between the culture and religious tradition regarding women’s roles. This contributes to the Toraja Church’s transformation.

The paper also shows that the political context of each church provides different level of resources and opportunities for women’s empowerment. The political context of Vietnam is unfavorable for women’s religious education and profession since religion is marginalized and restricted. Additionally the ECVN has already marginalized women in such issues. On the contrary, the political situation of Indonesia in general and Toraja in particular has offered more opportunities for religious education and profession through giving religion public space and its integration into the world. This helps to improve Toraja women’s agency to push for structural change.

Regarding the religious setting of both churches, the paper has focused on their contextualization of the faith, leadership perspective, and the level of integration in progressive Christian movements to measure their openness to change. The paper shows that in the process of development the ECVN has been conservative and resistant to reform; while the Toraja Church has continuously been transformed in various aspects. It is more likely that Toraja church has a high degree of openness and flexibility.

Though these contexts are important for structural transformation of both churches, they alone cannot explain this transformation since structural change also depends on agency as internal push. This is also the limitation of this paper.]

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