

Economic and Institutional Factors for Widening Gender Ideological Divides: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis

Yueyi Jin

Shenghua Zizhu Academy, Shanghai, China
yometeor@163.com

Abstract. Increasing ideological divergence over gender norms among young men and women has become observable across multiple societies worldwide. This paper adopts a cross-cultural comparative approach to analyze how labour-market restructuring and formal institutional design shape diverging gender attitudes. This paper finds that economic shifts toward knowledge-intensive service industries improve women's educational advantages and economic independence. However, diverging gender ideologies trigger status anxiety among some male groups. Incomplete implementation of gender-equality policies without supporting social measures may unintentionally widen ideological divides, as illustrated by cases from East Asia. This study highlights prominent within-group heterogeneity: not all young women support egalitarian gender norms, nor do all young men rigidly adhere to traditional gender scripts; individual positions are shaped by education, household socioeconomic conditions and residential backgrounds. Future research should disentangle the two-way causal mechanisms between individual gender attitudes, algorithm-driven digital environments and multi-layered socioeconomic-institutional contexts, rather than treating youth groups as homogeneous units.

Keywords: gender ideological divide, cross-cultural comparison, labour-market restructuring, institutional design, socioeconomic-institutional contexts

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, the gender ideological gap between young women and men is gradually increasing under the influence of globalisation. Women tend to resist sexual harassment and widely recognise the diversification of gender discourses. By contrast, men are more inclined to endorse traditional family-role arrangements that assign women to subordinate domestic positions and hold critical attitudes toward feminist movements. Paradoxically, improvements in global gender-equality legal frameworks have gone hand-in-hand with the expansion of this gender ideological gap.

Nevertheless, generational divergence in gender perceptions is not merely a global trend but exhibits distinct regional heterogeneity. Since gender ideology is shaped by individual-level values, adolescent girls in most surveyed regions report higher educational expectations than boys. This phenomenon reflects a historic reversal of female self-perception and educational aspirations within modern societies [1]. At the macro level, national-level formal institutional arrangements and prevailing social norms jointly moderate gender-attitude differences among residents. National

contexts exert conditioning effects on teenagers' educational aspirations, and cross-national variation in youth academic ambition gaps can be partially explained by state-level gender-equality policy orientations [1].

Existing literature provides several mainstream interpretations for the above-mentioned patterns. For instance, the gap may stem from rising female self-consciousness and collective consciousness. Alternatively, men may develop frustration triggered by relative declines in their socioeconomic standing. Additionally, social-media-driven filter-bubble mechanisms constitute another prominent explanatory factor. Platform algorithms deliver differentiated content to female and male users: many female users encounter narratives centred on gender-based oppression, whereas male users are frequently exposed to discourses of "male victimisation" and "excessive feminism".

Even so, two core research gaps can be identified in existing literature. Scholars often overlook the joint interactive effects of economic-institutional forces and tend to homogenise youth gender-attitude groups. Furthermore, few studies disentangle whether behavioural discrepancies arise from pre-existing attitudes or external environmental reshaping.

This study investigates how labour-market restructuring and institutional transformation jointly produce widening gender-ideological divides across cultural contexts. It analyses regional variations in gender-attitude divergence. It draws on East-Asian cases to demonstrate the practical impacts of imbalanced institutional reforms. Additionally, this paper employs a cross-cultural comparative approach. It synthesizes secondary empirical findings and existing scholarly evidence to compare how economic and institutional forces shape gender ideological conflicts in Nordic, East-Asian, Middle-Eastern and South-Asian societies. In terms of practical implications, this paper facilitates understanding of modern gender-value frictions and offers insights for formulating complete, well-supported gender-equality policies instead of partial reforms. From the academic perspective, it reinforces the combined economic-institutional analytical perspective and provides a comparative reference for future studies on widening gender divide.

2. The overview of gender ideological divide in cross-cultural contexts

Widening gender ideological divides are not a uniform global outcome. Cross-cultural comparative analysis uncovers salient regional variations as elaborated below.

In Nordic welfare states including Sweden and Norway, long-standing systematic gender-equality institutions such as dual-parent shared parental-leave schemes and well-developed public childcare services maintain relatively narrow attitudinal gaps between young men and women.

East Asian societies represented by South Korea and Japan demonstrate substantially larger gender ideological divides. Multiple interlocking drivers include cut-throat educational competition, a youth labour market marked by scarce decent-quality employment, and persistent constraining forces from conventional family structures. These conditions fuel gender-value divergence. Certain social and institutional settings may slow the advancement of female self-awareness, and frictions between lingering patriarchal social legacies and modern women's pursuit of independence further aggravate ideological polarisation. One well-documented illustration is the intense confrontations between radical anti-feminist and pro-gender-equality social factions in South Korea.

Selected Middle Eastern and South-Asian societies also manifest gender ideological divides, which surface predominantly within private spheres such as household decision-making and attitudes toward premarital intimacy, instead of in public political domains. Moreover, survey data from these regions are highly vulnerable to social desirability bias, which undermines data objectivity for academic research.

Globally, gender ideological divergences are predominantly driven by clusters of forces: shifts in economic status and labour-market structures, and institutional evolution. Historically, trade unions, local communal organisations, and extended kin networks functioned as core societal intermediaries mitigating gender-related conflicts. Within modern societies, state-led gender-equality institutions and formal education systems have become primary regulatory forces, yet incomplete institutional implementation may also amplify rather than bridge gender ideological gaps.

3. Mechanisms of economic and institutional impacts on gender-ideological divides

3.1. The transformation of economic foundation: restructuring of labour market

The worldwide expansion of service-oriented and knowledge-driven economies has reshaped men's and women's employment opportunities and social status, laying material foundations for gender-attitudinal divergence. At the same time, national institutional frameworks and sociocultural norms moderate the extent of ideological polarisation across sexes.

McDaniel implemented cross-national analysis based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) datasets covering 29 economies [1]. Empirical evidence demonstrates that adolescent girls consistently hold higher educational aspirations than male peers. Women have achieved unprecedented advancement within higher-education systems, which in turn reorganises labour-market structures. Traditional manufacturing and physically demanding blue-collar sectors — historical domains of male competitive advantage — are undergoing relative decline. Less-educated men may accordingly experience intensified status-related inferiority [1, 2]. By contrast, knowledge-intensive industries and service sectors generate abundant job openings for women. Leveraging their educational advantages, women gain broader labour-market access and enhanced economic autonomy.

Yeganeh and May deliver further cross-country empirical insights after controlling for confounding economic variables [3]. Controlling for economic variables means researchers fix macroeconomic factors within statistical models, such as national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), labour-market composition, income inequality and aggregate employment rates. This analytical approach isolates the net effect of sociocultural and institutional factors on gender ideological gaps, avoiding the misattribution of value divergence purely to uneven economic development. When men widely internalise hierarchical traditional social norms intended to sustain dominant masculine social status, gender ideological divides enlarge significantly. Conversely, female-centred cultural values prioritising individual autonomy and social inclusiveness facilitate progress toward gender equality [3].

Highly educated and financially independent women increasingly reject binary gender ideologies rooted in conventional gendered labour division. They actively advocate equal treatment and greater social recognition for diverse gender narratives. Conversely, some men face contracting employment prospects and destabilised social standing. Embedded within lingering traditional gender-role frameworks, conventional masculinity is intertwined with conservative value orientations. Within societies where hierarchical social norms remain salient, segments of the male population may adopt increasingly rigid and radical stances to defend traditional gender scripts [1, 2].

Historically embedded social institutions and country-specific socioeconomic contexts produce cross-national heterogeneity in how men and women respond to economic restructuring. As a consequence, gender ideological divides display considerable regional variance alongside global economic transformation and labour-market reconfiguration [1].

3.2. Institutional transformation and the widening gender-ideological gap

In pre-modern societies, kinship systems, customary social norms and community conventions constructed widely accepted gender-role expectations. Patriarchal customary traditions codified gendered labour divisions, marital rules and household power hierarchies. These long-standing social conventions once mediated gender-related interest conflicts and alleviated ideological antagonism. In contemporary societies, however, the functional role of customary norms varies drastically across nations. The following section explores how formal legal systems, family-policy frameworks and educational institutional settings shape modern gender ideological divides.

3.2.1. Rigid customary norms and incomplete formal institution building amplifying gender ideological divergence

In multiple non-secularised social contexts, deeply entrenched customary norms are embedded within legal clauses, school education, kinship systems and public governance, reinforcing prescriptive traditional gender roles. In the course of institutional transformation, formal institutions often undergo partial reform rather than thorough restructuring. The old institutional system refers to the customary, patriarchally oriented institutional framework. It legitimises male hegemonic roles and restricts women's autonomy. The old institutional system was characterised by rigidity, homogeneity and path dependence. The new institutional system denotes the formal, gender-egalitarian legal and policy framework. It attaches importance to equal rights, openness and inclusiveness. However, the implementation of new systems like gender-equation policies is only partially implemented and lacks supporting social measures.

New institutional provisions advocate gender-egalitarian values, yet residual traditional customary rules remain unaddressed. This institutional mismatch creates a structural fracture. On one hand, formal institutional reforms open space for women's pursuit of individual autonomy and equal rights. On the other hand, unchanged informal institutional logics continue to validate conventional gender role expectations. Such incomplete institutional transition does not reconcile value differences; instead, it enlarges the boundary of ideological conflict and further exacerbates the gender-ideological gap among young cohorts. During periods of labour-market downturn, men who encounter downward social mobility may draw upon rigid customary social expectations to compensate for eroded social status, which fosters ideological push-back against gender-equality movements.

In several societies governed by strong customary patriarchal traditions, informal norms exert binding influences on household power distributions, spousal partnership arrangements and women's property-related entitlements [4]. These normative systems propagate the conventional ideology of male household breadwinners. Young generations face constrained household-role options, women encounter systematic barriers within labour markets, and pluralistic gender discourses struggle to take root. Under such conditions, value conflicts escalate sharply: women demand expanded personal autonomy, while entrenched social institutions sustain male-dominant status hierarchies.

3.2.2. Imbalanced institutional reforms and the expanding gender-ideological divide: cases of Korea and Japan

Both East-Asian nations are undergoing social transition away from rigid prescriptive traditional gender roles, accompanied by persistent tensions between female self-determination and anti-feminist viewpoints. This represents gender-ideology divergence within a context of advancing

secularisation, in which customary norms gradually decouple from social governance, public order and gendered labour divisions.

The institutionalised aggregation of misogynistic online communities in South Korea serves as a typical case illustrating ideological polarisation. According to Chan [2], anonymous male-dominated web forums such as Ilbe and FM Korea have consolidated into stable anti-feminist online collectives. These platforms circulate biased narratives claiming feminist advocacy generates new forms of gender inequity. Feminist demands for gender equality are framed as threats to traditional masculine identities. Online ideological hostility further spills into offline spheres via social mobilisation and political engagement: large cohorts of males aged 20-30 participate in electoral campaigns under the banner of "male-rights deprivation" [2].

Similarly, Japan and South Korea share core tensions between inherited patriarchal legacies and modern-era cross-gender conflicts. Although the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA) represented progressive legislation facilitating women's pursuit of workplace equality, partial and unbalanced institutional reform simultaneously acted as a force widening gender ideological rifts [5].

First, the Act mitigated structural economic disadvantages and enabled women to strive against workplace inequities. For Japanese women, the EEOA unlocked employment pathways toward economic independence. After policy implementation, formal-sector employment among highly-educated unmarried women under 40 increased substantially. Growing numbers of women accessed diversified corporate posts, breaking historical restrictions confining female employees primarily to clerical positions, which enabled women to secure stable higher-income jobs [5]. Meanwhile, the policy yielded fewer complementary supporting mechanisms to buffer identity-related shocks experienced by men, some of whom faced erosion of historical occupational privileges. Lacking accompanying compensatory social policies, a portion of young men adopted conservative and anti-feminist stances. The same piece of legislation generated divergent life trajectories for women and men, directly intensifying inter-sex ideological divergence.

4. Conclusion

Regional gender ideological divides are jointly moulded by labour-market restructuring and institutional evolution. Service-driven economic growth grants women greater economic empowerment, yet simultaneously triggers status-related anxiety among certain male subgroups. Incompletely designed gender-equality institutions and insufficient supporting social policies amplify gender-value divergence, a pattern especially prominent within East-Asian contexts. Expectations that women should simultaneously fulfil domestic care obligations and career-related responsibilities raise female demands for egalitarian treatment; meanwhile, groups adhering to traditional norms interpret these claims as threats and strive to preserve binary conventional gender ideologies. Despite these findings, this paper has several limitations. Relying mainly on comparative analysis of secondary source, it does not employ original survey or qualitative interview data to capture grassroots individual attitudes. Moreover, it does not investigate deeply into how intersectional factors such as class and ethnicity mediate the formation of gender ideological divides within each cultural setting. Future cross-national comparative research should further unpack the reciprocal causal links among individual attitudes, digital environments and multi-layered institutional contexts.

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