

# IDENTIFYING HOFSTEAD'S REGIONAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS REGARDING THE ASEAN COUNTRIES OF VIETNAM AND THAILAND

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## ABSTRACT

*This research investigated the concept to accurately identify, define, and describe specific regional ASEAN cultural and regional values (for this research between Vietnam and Thailand) which might more successfully assess the suitability, compatibility, and adaptability of regional cooperation, services, and economic initiatives within the region. The current research method represents a continuance and enhancement of the questionnaire by Hofstede's VSM-13 and measures six (6) cultural dimensions which he termed the National Culture Dimension Index. The thirty (30) question survey consists of four (4) questions per dimension, with the remaining six (6) questions of the survey gathering personal demographic data. The VSM-13 was given to matched undergraduate college students from both Thailand and Vietnam (N = 251). This research found significance using the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances below the ( $p = 0.05$ ) level for VSM-13 questions 02, 04, 05, 07, 09, 10, 13, 15, 16, and 21 indicating significantly different responses between the Thailand and Vietnam respondents.*

Keywords: ASEAN, identity building, regional integration, cultural identity, Hofstede cultural dimensions

## INTRODUCTION

Much research has been done in analyzing national cultural dimensions and values across many countries of the world (Pettrakis, 2014, p 250), but little or no attention has been paid to the social and cultural aspects specifically pertaining to the regional ethnic integration and cooperation among the collective ASEAN nations, namely Thailand and Vietnam.

The concept of *cultural identity* can represent many different things to both individuals and society and varies depending upon time and place (Deaux, 2001). Groups are defined by their cultural identity which is, among many things, comprised of the rich web of interrelating

stories, myths, narratives, and traditions held by the people and institutions of a given group (Shindler, 2014). In its simplest form, personal identity refers to *who you are* – or more precisely, who you *think* you are at a given moment in time and during a specific situation. This dynamic and personal construct helps us to make sense of our lives and relationships, and allows us to observe personal and distinctive characteristics in others that may be shared by some or all members of a particular social category, group, or nation state. There are two sides to identity –

- 1.) Identity allows us to determine others who are the *same* as us, and thus,
- 2.) Identity allows us to differentiate others who are *not* the same

Both of these types of identifications are extremely important, and are central in our decisional process of whether to associate or disassociate among certain individuals or groups (Weinreich and Saunderson, 2003, p 54-56). The research of this paper investigates two (2) of the ten (10) original ASEAN countries (Thailand and Vietnam) based upon the VSM-13 questionnaire to measure the six (6) dimensions of national character: Power Distance (large vs. small), Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance (strong vs. weak), Long- vs. Short-Term Orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint (Hofstede, 2013).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Regarding the development and maintenance of culture and intercultural relationships of the society with it, Neuliep (2003) has argued:

“that culture teaches people how to think, instructs people how to feel, and conditions people how to act; especially how to inter-act with others, and maintains that because intercultural communication is a symbolic activity where the ideas of one person from one culture are encoded into a verbal or nonverbal code then transmitted through a channel to another person from a different culture who must decode it, interpret it, and respond to it, the process is replete with cultural noise. The codes people use to compose messages are necessarily representations of their culture”. (p. 37)

In this same regard, Guan (1995) asserts that early cultural standards teach young people to use their own cultural standards to evaluate and communicate with others during what he calls "self-centered dialogue". Cultural values have been concerned not only in ethnic conflict (Chirot and Seligman, 2001; Brewer, 1979) and war (van der Dennen, 1995), but also consumer product choice (Klein and Ettenson, 1999) and political voting practices (Kinder, 1998). Interestingly, even the small and personal subjective distinction is enough to activate behavior favoring certain cultural values, even when personal and group self-interest and reciprocity do not appear to apply to the situation at hand (Ferguson and Kelly, 1964; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel *et al.*, 1971).

Shindler (2014) states that:

“Those aspects of a group identity which include a narrative, web of traditions, and myth are created and constantly revised by that group in order to further its own agenda and promote social cohesion. In the promotion of a modern agenda it is useful to the group to root its proposed “future” in its past. In doing so a group is able to evolve and adapt to an ever changing environment while still claiming that they belong to the same group as people who lived and died long before any one of them was born”. (p.2)

Regarding the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) planned to begin functioning in late 2015, the regional and globalization process, along with immigration and migration of intra-country ASEAN workers will carry with it important impacts and consequences due to cultural values of each country. Hobsbawm (1972) writes that, “When social change accelerates or transforms the society beyond a certain point, the past must cease to be the pattern of the present, and can at best become the model for it.” (p. 6) Conflict avoidance will undoubtedly play an essential role in each AEC country involved, with cultural and ethnic understanding becoming of great import for the proposed ASEAN initiative to be a success.

Much of the research in the area of cultural research began with Hofstede (1980), retired founder and director of the Personnel Research Department, IBM Europe. Current Hofstede research (VSM-13) measures six (6) cultural dimensions in what he terms *National Culture Dimension Index*. The six (6) cultural dimensions Hofstede (2013) refers to in the VSM-13 are:

1. **Power Distance** (large vs. small): focuses on the degree of equality or inequality between people in the country’s society (*VSM-13 Questions 02, 07, 20, 23*)
2. **Individualism vs. Collectivism**: focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships (*VSM-13 Questions 01, 04, 06, 09*)
3. **Masculinity vs. Femininity**: focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power (*VSM-13 Questions 03, 05, 08, 10*)
4. **Uncertainty Avoidance** (strong vs. weak): focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society (*VSM-13 Questions 15, 18, 21, 24*)
5. **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation**: focuses on the degree the society embraces long term devotion to traditional, forward-thinking values (*VSM-13 Questions 13, 14, 19, 22*)
6. **Indulgence vs. Restraint**: focuses on the degree of gratification of desires and feelings, leisure activities and consumption values (*VSM-13 Questions 11, 12, 16, 17*)

The work was originally based on research that was conducted in the 1960's and collected from matched samples of international employees of IBM Corporation. This research so far has been the most influential work in the field of cross-cultural modeling (Fang, 2009). Both similarities and significant differences in socio-economic and consumer related values were identified among and between countries and geographical regions. It was found that personal values could be both a powerful explanation of, and influence on, a variety of individual and collective behaviors, including consumer behavior (Henry, 1976; Vinson and Munson, 1976) and cross-cultural differences (Munson and McIntyre, 1978; Grunert and Scherhorn, 1990).

## METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION

The aim of this paper is to explore how might Hofstede's Values Survey Module 2013 (VSM-13) be used to identify, define, and describe specific regional ASEAN cultural and regional values pertaining specifically to Vietnam and Thailand which might successfully assess the suitability, compatibility, and adaptability of products, services, and economic initiatives within the region by comparing answers obtained from the VSM-13.

The major objective of the research is:

- To analyze the degree of variance in social and regional values by comparing culturally influenced values and sentiments of similar respondents from Vietnam and Thailand

The method of this study took the most current version of the Values Survey Module 2013 (VSM-13) and had each of the thirty (30) questions both translated and back-translated into a Thai language version and a Vietnamese language version. A matched survey of respondents were obtained from undergraduate university students from Vietnam (N = 111) and corresponding university students from Thailand (N = 140). The translated VMS-13 survey was administered, and an item analysis of each of the twenty-four (24) data questions generated and indicated in *Table 1 Group Statistics*. Regarding **Table 1** below, data shows the VSM-13 question number and a statistical analysis from each country regarding this question - such as the size of the sample population, the mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the mean per question.

Following this table, the **Table 2 Independent Samples Test** presents the calculations of Levine's Test of Equality of Variances for each respondent from Thailand and Vietnam regarding each question presented on the VSM-13.

**Table 1 Group Statistics**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>
Q1	Thailand	140	2.14	1.036	.088
	Vietnam	111	2.33	.966	.092
Q2	Thailand	140	2.51	1.096	.093
	Vietnam	111	2.21	.875	.083
Q3	Thailand	140	2.62	1.021	.086
	Vietnam	111	1.97	1.057	.100
Q4	Thailand	140	2.21	1.365	.115
	Vietnam	111	2.35	1.015	.096
Q5	Thailand	140	2.14	1.310	.111
	Vietnam	111	2.57	.931	.088
Q6	Thailand	140	2.42	1.073	.091
	Vietnam	111	2.32	1.072	.102
Q7	Thailand	140	2.55	1.102	.093
	Vietnam	111	2.71	.824	.078
Q8	Thailand	140	2.42	1.270	.107
	Vietnam	111	2.90	1.160	.110
Q9	Thailand	140	2.44	1.331	.113
	Vietnam	111	2.79	.992	.094
Q10	Thailand	140	2.56	1.348	.114
	Vietnam	111	2.45	1.059	.101
Q11	Thailand	140	2.25	1.164	.098
	Vietnam	111	2.65	1.006	.095
Q12	Thailand	140	2.31	1.060	.090
	Vietnam	111	2.69	.902	.086
Q13	Thailand	140	2.41	1.131	.096
	Vietnam	111	2.83	.761	.072
Q14	Thailand	140	2.38	1.128	.095
	Vietnam	111	2.76	1.055	.100
Q15	Thailand	140	2.72	.669	.057
	Vietnam	111	2.87	.648	.062
Q16	Thailand	140	1.93	.774	.065
	Vietnam	111	2.18	.591	.056
Q17	Thailand	140	2.94	.779	.066
	Vietnam	111	2.72	.677	.064
Q18	Thailand	140	2.58	.769	.065
	Vietnam	111	2.61	.833	.079
Q19	Thailand	140	1.72	.840	.071
	Vietnam	111	1.86	.903	.086
Q20	Thailand	140	2.55	.884	.075
	Vietnam	111	3.24	.965	.092
Q21	Thailand	140	3.23	1.146	.097
	Vietnam	111	2.62	.925	.088
Q22	Thailand	140	1.76	.926	.078
	Vietnam	111	2.23	.950	.090
Q23	Thailand	140	2.77	.876	.074
	Vietnam	111	2.98	.842	.080
Q24	Thailand	140	2.99	.971	.082
	Vietnam	111	2.71	.957	.091

**Table 2 Independent Samples Test**

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Q01	.110	.740
<b>Q02*</b>	<b>12.337</b>	<b>.001</b>
Q03	1.691	.195
<b>Q04*</b>	<b>13.595</b>	<b>.000</b>
<b>Q05*</b>	<b>14.745</b>	<b>.000</b>
Q06	.007	.935
<b>Q07*</b>	<b>10.882</b>	<b>.001</b>
Q08	2.651	.105
<b>Q09*</b>	<b>12.130</b>	<b>.001</b>
<b>Q10*</b>	<b>8.791</b>	<b>.003</b>
Q11	2.603	.108
Q12	2.986	.085
<b>Q13*</b>	<b>20.963</b>	<b>.000</b>
Q14	.871	.352
<b>Q15*</b>	<b>5.085</b>	<b>.025</b>
<b>Q16*</b>	<b>7.971</b>	<b>.005</b>
Q17	.442	.507
Q18	.773	.380
Q19	.001	.978
Q20	.032	.858
<b>Q21*</b>	<b>6.916</b>	<b>.009</b>
Q22	.030	.862
Q23	1.226	.269
Q24	2.727	.100

## Results and Discussion

As can be seen from an analysis of the VSM-13 data presented in **Table 2 Independent Samples Test** above, a significance (2-tailed) level below 0.05 can be seen regarding VSM-13 questions **02, 04, 05, 07, 09, 10, 13, 15, 16, and 21** represented with an “\*” next to the question number and the data highlighted. An analysis of the actual VSM-13 content pertaining to those questions of significance is:

**VSM-13 Instruction:** *Please think of an ideal job, disregarding your present job, if you have one. In choosing an ideal job, how important would it be to you to:*

- 1 = of utmost importance*
- 2 = very important*
- 3 = of moderate importance*
- 4 = of little importance*
- 5 = of very little or no importance*

**Q02:** have a boss (direct superior) you can respect

**Q04:** have security of employment

**Q05:** have pleasant people to work with

**Q07:** to be consulted by your boss in decisions involving your work

**Q09:** have a job respected by your family and friends

**Q10:** have chances for promotion

**VSM-13 Instruction:** *In your private life, how important is each of the following to you:*

- 1 = of utmost importance*
- 2 = very important*
- 3 = of moderate importance*
- 4 = of little importance*
- 5 = of very little or no importance*

**Q13:** doing a service to a friend

**Q15:** How often do you feel nervous or tense?

**Q16:** Are you a happy person?

**VSM-13 Instruction:** *In your private life, how important is each of the following to you:*

- 1 = strongly agree*
- 2 = agree*
- 3 = undecided*
- 4 = disagree*
- 5 = strongly disagree*

**Q21:** One can be a good manager without having a precise answer to every question that a subordinate may raise about his or her work

## CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the degree of significant variance in social and regional values by comparing culturally influenced values and sentiments of matched respondents completing the VSM-13 survey from Vietnam and Thailand. The study tested the hypothesis that the group variances were equal. The study rejected the null hypothesis at the ( $p < 0.05$ ) significance level since the value of the Levene test statistic is less than the critical value, therefore the study concludes that there is insufficient evidence to claim that the variances are not equal in the following VSM-13 questions:

1. **Power Distance** (large vs. small): focuses on the degree of equality or inequality between people in the country's society (*VSM-13 Questions 02* ( $p = .001$ ), *07* ( $p = .001$ ))
2. **Individualism vs. Collectivism**: focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships (*VSM-13 Questions 04* ( $p = .000$ ), *09* ( $p = .001$ ))
3. **Masculinity vs. Femininity**: focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power (*VSM-13 Questions 05* ( $p = .000$ ), *10* ( $p = .003$ ))
4. **Uncertainty Avoidance** (strong vs. weak): focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society (*VSM-13 Questions 15* ( $p = .025$ ), *21* ( $p = .009$ ))
5. **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation**: focuses on the degree the society embraces long term devotion to traditional, forward-thinking values (*VSM-13 Question 13* ( $p = .000$ ))
6. **Indulgence vs. Restraint**: focuses on the degree of gratification of desires and feelings, leisure activities and consumption values (*VSM-13 Question 16* ( $p = .005$ ))

Due to the single market and base of production envisioned to be implemented by the initial ten (10) countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) by the end of 2015, understanding the social and cultural similarities and differences between and among ASEAN countries in this union may allow them to integrate more easily and firmly into the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The study suggests further social and cultural research in Southeast Asia and among ASEAN Member States which may help to enhance stability, economic development and regional cooperation in the area.

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