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Pentecostalism and marginalised ethnicity in Indonesia: Chinese identity assimilation

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This article critically examines the complex relationship between Indonesian Pentecostalism and the marginalised Chinese ethnic identity, arguing that Pentecostal churches can serve as transformative spaces for negotiating and integrating identity. Grounded in the historical and cultural challenges faced by the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia, particularly during the New Order regime, the study employs a literature-based approach that incorporates historical, social and theological analyses supplemented by demographic data and narrative accounts. It contends that the Pentecostal movement offers a unique potential to reconcile fragmented identities by fostering spiritual experiences that transcend ethnic and cultural barriers. However, the article highlights that Pentecostal churches often struggle to fully adapt their doctrines to local cultural realities, which can limit their capacity to address the needs of diverse communities. Despite these challenges, Pentecostalism can make a significant contribution to shaping both the Chinese ethnic identity and the broader national discourse on multiculturalism. By promoting an inclusive vision of the Kingdom of God, Pentecostalism can facilitate healing, unity and dialogue within Indonesia's multi-ethnic society, addressing historical wounds and supporting a shared sense of belonging.

Contribution: This study contributes an interdisciplinary perspective by bridging insights from theology, sociology and cultural studies. It aims to provide a holistic understanding of how Pentecostalism intersects with broader sociopolitical and cultural processes in Indonesia.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; Chinese ethnicity; cultural identity; acculturation; ethnic discrimination; multiculturalism; identity reconciliation.

Introduction

Cultural identity has two main approaches. Firstly, cultural identity is understood as 'collective authenticity', which refers to a shared heritage derived from a common history and origin (Hall 1990). This approach emphasises the importance of historical experiences and cultural codes that bind ethnic groups together, creating a sense of stability, continuity and national unity amid the dynamics of social change. Secondly, in the context of the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia, this identity is not merely symbolic but also represents a space of cultural struggle that asserts their existence as an integral part of the Indonesian nation.

The long history of the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia has shaped a complex identity through the process of acculturation (Zuraida, Rahmawati & Faqih 2023). The 'Peranakan' generation exemplifies this cultural encounter, resulting in a hybrid identity that encompasses both local and Chinese traditions. Traditions such as *Cap Go Meh* and *Qingming* are not merely cultural celebrations; they also represent acts of resistance against the marginalisation that once forced the Chinese diaspora to relinquish their identity in the public sphere. This phenomenon demonstrates that Chinese Indonesian identity is dynamic and productive in creating new forms of cultural expression. Nevertheless, the journey of the Chinese diaspora has not always been smooth. Forced assimilation policies during the New Order era and the tragedy of May 1998 left deep wounds in the nation's collective memory (Vatikiotis 1998). This historical trauma not only triggered identity fragmentation but also generated hesitation in expressing cultural identity in public spaces. Artistic works, literature and historical narratives function as forms of imaginative reconciliation, creating a space to reexamine the complexity of the diaspora and the ongoing process of reconstructing identity.

The historical wounds of the May 1998 tragedy continue to leave a profound impact to this day, both personally and collectively, influencing the dynamics of Chinese Indonesian identity. Recent studies reveal that trauma and anxiety within the Chinese Indonesian community regarding this

event have not yet been resolved. Randy Mulyanto's report highlights that the Chinese Indonesian community still demands official acknowledgement of the mass violence, including the mass rapes of ethnic Chinese women, and emphasises the importance of 'resisting oblivion' as part of the process of healing and justice (Mulyanto 2019). In the realm of literature, recent research (October 2024) has examined the role of fictional works, such as *Sekuntum Nozomi 3* and *Putri Cina*, in transmitting the collective memory of the post-1998 period to generations who did not directly experience it. These works highlight how traumatic memories are embedded within cultural expressions and contribute to the formation of a symbolic narrative of reconciliation (Widodo & Andalas 2024). Furthermore, a related study from June 2024 in *Inside Indonesia* indicates that even the post-1998 generation continues to experience stigma and negative stereotypes towards Chinese Indonesians, demonstrating the ongoing nature of intergenerational trauma (Kusumabrata 2024).

In Indonesia's multicultural context, religion serves as a strategic means of integrating cultural identities. However, the contribution of Pentecostalism to overcoming ethnic and cultural identity fragmentation remains limited. Rather than functioning as a bridge, Pentecostal churches often become entangled in Western theological legacies that are insufficiently sensitive to local cultural realities, thereby failing to internalise the rich cultural heritage of Chinese identity as an integral part of the body of Christ. However, if managed properly, the Church can become a space of reconciliation that affirms that Christian faith can coexist with cultural identity without negating the uniqueness of each.

Pentecostalism entered Indonesia in the early 20th century through American missionary activity. It grew rapidly through the Bethel Church of Indonesia (Idn: Gereja Bethel Indonesia [GBI]), which later became one of the largest denominations with a significant number of Chinese Indonesian congregants. However, the history of Pentecostal churches in Indonesia has been marked by divisions from the very beginning, as evidenced by the split within the Pinkster Gemeente, which led to the formation of Gereja Utusan Pantekosta (GUP). Further schisms occurred within GBI later, particularly in the early 2000s, resulting in the emergence of churches such as Tiberias Indonesia Church and Bethany Successful Family (Tambunan 2025:103). This fragmentation not only reflects internal theological dynamics but also highlights the Church's failure to build an inclusive and multicultural narrative of unity. As a result, the Church's potential as a space for integrating ethnic identities is often hindered by sectarian interests.

To provide a fuller context for this analysis, it is important to briefly outline the historical development and current demographics of Pentecostalism in Indonesia. Pentecostalism was introduced to Indonesia in the early 20th century, primarily through the influence of the Azusa Street revival and subsequent missionary efforts from the United States (US) and the Netherlands. One of the earliest and most influential missions was led by Rev. Cornelius van Gessel, whose arrival in 1921 marked the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in the Dutch East Indies. In 1924, the Pentecostal Church in Indonesia (Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia [GPDI]) was officially established, becoming the first recognised Pentecostal denomination in the country. Over time, other major Pentecostal organisations emerged, including the Bethel Church of Indonesia (GBI), which today is among the largest, alongside churches such as Gereja Pantekosta Serikat di Indonesiaand (GPSDI) and GBI Bethany.

Pentecostalism experienced rapid growth in post-authoritarian Indonesia, particularly after the political reforms of 1998, which allowed greater religious expression and expansion. According to national statistics, Christians comprise about 10.58% of Indonesia's population, and Pentecostals constitute a significant proportion within that figure. For example, GBI alone reports more than 3 million adherents and thousands of local congregations nationwide (Wiyono 2019). The movement is especially vibrant in urban centres and eastern Indonesian regions such as North Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua.

Today, Pentecostal churches play a vital role in theological education, youth ministries and digital media outreach, and are increasingly recognised as key actors in shaping Indonesia's modern religious landscape. Understanding this historical and demographic backdrop is crucial to fully grasp the sociocultural impact of Pentecostalism, particularly on Chinese Indonesian identity and multicultural integration.

It must be acknowledged that one of the distinctive features of Pentecostalism is its pneumatic ecclesiology, which emphasises the experience of the Holy Spirit as a unifying force among God's people across cultures (Vondey 2018). However, in practice, this ecclesiology is often rooted in a Western universal paradigm that insufficiently accommodates the local cultural expressions of Chinese identity in church liturgy, leadership and theology. Efforts to incorporate bilingual liturgies and cultural symbols remain sporadic and have yet to be integrated theologically or structurally into church life. This situation highlights a significant disparity between the potential for cultural integration and the practical reality.

I argue that Indonesian Pentecostalism has the potential to transform the reconciliation of Chinese Indonesian identity through a contextual and inclusive assimilative ecclesiology strategy. Pentecostal churches can become spaces for affirming dual identities if they can develop liturgy, theology, and leadership that accommodate the unique cultural heritage of the Chinese diaspora. However, if churches continue to adhere to Western paradigms that disregard local cultural sensitivities, this potential will not be realised. Therefore, this study will analyse the extent to which Pentecostal churches in Indonesia can implement effective cultural integration strategies to build unity in diversity.

The research method employed in this study is a literature-based, qualitative approach that utilises content analysis. It examines historical, social and theological sources related to the development of Pentecostalism in Indonesia, particularly in its interaction with Chinese identity. The study relies on secondary literature, including books, journal articles and research reports, as well as demographic data and ethnographic narratives that document the experiences of the Chinese diaspora during the post-New Order period. This analysis is further supported by a critical examination of church discourses and ecclesiological practices relevant to identifying the potential and limitations of Pentecostal churches in fulfilling their role as agents of reconciling Chinese Indonesian identity.

Results and discussion

Philosophical search for the religiosity of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia

According to the 2010 Census, Indonesia's population reached 237m, with the Javanese ethnic group forming the majority at 40.22% and the Chinese as the 18th minority group. However, international estimates suggest that the number of ethnic Chinese may be as high as 11m. Their ancestors originated from Chinese regions, including Guangdong, Hokkien and Hainan, and their long history has led to the creation of subgroups based on dialect, residence and clan, all shaped by local cultural assimilation. The cultural identity of the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia, as theorised by Stuart Hall, is dynamic and evolving, influenced by history, culture and power (Hall 1990). Wang Gungwu noted that modern Chinese identity is increasingly shaped by Western culture, leading to significant generational differences. Their social relationships reflect adaptation to local diversity and government policies, including the assimilation pressures of the New Order era. Incidental conflicts, such as the tragedy of 1998, highlight psychological barriers between ethnic Chinese and indigenous people, although instances of multi-ethnic cooperation are also common (Gungwu 2010).

The strategy of 'installing' identity among ethnic Chinese, such as in Bima, involves appreciating local culture and utilising regional languages, thereby effectively creating multicultural harmony. However, pragmatic motives, such as economic interests, are often the primary drivers of this adaptation. This process is successful if supported by an egalitarian attitude and local wisdom, offering a model of ethnic harmony in plural Indonesia. Judith noted the existence of stereotypical attitudes that triggered conflict between ethnic Chinese and Makasarese society (Lubis & Buana 2020). Prejudice and stereotypes are the main obstacles to effective communication (Nshom 2024). They have become a potential barrier to intercultural communication. Conflict between ethnic Chinese and indigenous people is not a frequent occurrence. Racial conflicts involving ethnic Chinese and local people are usually incidental, arising as a reaction to discriminatory attitudes and behaviours carried out by specific individuals from ethnic Chinese towards local people. Such adverse incidents are not comparable to the many acts of collaboration and cooperation between ethnic Chinese and local people in various regions. For example, ethnic Chinese in Bima is one of the few areas recorded as having minimal conflict between ethnic groups (in this case, Chinese and residents of Bima).

The cultural identity of the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia cannot be reduced to a single shared experience. Still, it must also consider the historical differences that shape who they are. In plural Indonesian-ness, cultural identity is influenced by conflict and division, which are also embraced as dimensions of nationality that create unique cultural identities. This identity is not static but continues to 'become' the result of past, present and future interactions. Indonesian-ness is a complex combination of more than 1331 ethnic identities that interact with each other Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS 2024:37). Cultural identity continues to evolve throughout history, rather than being fixated on the past. National identity is not only about 'restoring' the past but also involves a process of dialogue with the future so that it is always dynamic and not permanent. This has not only an impact on the Chinese ethnic group but also on other ethnic groups. In the history of the development of Indonesian national identity, there have also been bloody conflicts between ethnic groups (Dayak-Madura, etc.) (Anderson 2006).

Emphasising only one internal or external aspect can weaken national identity. This results in individuals losing their cultural anchor and direction in life, as seen in the extremes of countries such as North Korea, which is too closed, and Western countries, which tend to focus on openness. For example, China has begun to respond to global pressures by combining the search for internal and external identity. According to Søren Kierkegaard, identity arises from conscious choices and personal commitments to life values rather than a fixed essence outside of history and culture. Cultural identity is constructed through memories, narratives and myths that are constantly changing. This creates unstable points of identification in historical and cultural contexts (Kierkegaard 1994:34). Cultural identity is a historical and symbolic construction rather than an absolute or transcendental concept. The relationship with the past is always dynamic, forming a national identity that continues to develop in a dialogue between the internal and the external. A healthy identity requires a balance between the two.

Søren Kierkegaard introduced the concept of the 'three stages of life' or 'stadia of life' as a path to authentic identity. The first is the Aesthetic Stage, the second is the Ethical Stage, where the individual follows social rules and norms, and the third is the Religious Stage. This is the stage that Kierkegaard considers the pinnacle of authentic identity development, as it involves recognising human dependence on something greater than oneself and a commitment to profound spiritual beliefs (Kierkegaard 1849). Søren Kierkegaard's concept in his book *Fear and Trembling* also introduces the idea of a 'leap of faith' as part of forming a religious identity. In his view, true identity requires the courage to transcend logic and

rational evidence, making existential decisions that involve a complete commitment to faith and values. Søren Kierkegaard views identity as the culmination of a continuous personal process that necessitates self-reflection, deliberate choices and a struggle to discover the true meaning of life. In Kierkegaard's view, identity is never wholly stable or finished; identity is a dynamic journey that requires growth and transformation over time. Indeed, this idea is rooted in the background of Søren Kierkegaard, who lived in an era when rationalism and Hegelianism dominated European philosophical thought. Philosophers at that time tried to understand the world through a coherent, rational system, often emphasising that everything can be explained or understood through logic and reason. However, Kierkegaard criticised this approach for ignoring essential aspects of human experience, such as emotion, suffering and faith. According to Søren Kierkegaard, human life is characterised by uncertainties and paradoxes that cannot be fully understood or resolved through rational thought (Kierkegaard 1994).

He argued that there are limits to what can be known or achieved through reason, especially in matters relating to faith and God (in this case, Kierkegaard uses the image of Abraham being ordered to sacrifice his son). Abraham faced a situation that seemed absurd and contrary to morality and reason. However, Abraham obeyed out of faith – he believed that even though it was unreasonable, God would still be faithful to his promise. Abraham's action is an example of a 'leap of faith', a commitment that goes beyond ordinary logic and morality. This is where the 'leap of faith' becomes relevant to the struggle of the Chinese ethnic group through the ecclesiology of Pentecostalism, where Kierkegaard argues that achieving an authentic religious identity or a deep relationship with God requires more than knowledge or good morality; it requires a leap of faith, that is, the act of believing in something that cannot be rationally proven. This is characteristic of the Pentecostal movement.

Pentecostal movement, business, and individual empowerment

Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity attracted Chinese Indonesian entrepreneurs, particularly during challenging times such as the 1997–1998 economic crisis. The crisis shook their security, business and identity. In this situation, a personal religious experience became a solution that transformed their lives spiritually, morally and socially. Many Chinese entrepreneurs approached Christianity when facing extreme hardship. A supernatural encounter with Christ was often the turning point in their lives. The narratives of their experiences highlight how Pentecostal-Charismatic worship revived their spirits, freed them from fear and gave them hope amid political and social discrimination (New Order regime). One entrepreneur's experience illustrates this transformation. He faced business failure because of the monetary crisis, but through the support of his family and Pentecostal church community, he found peace in surrendering to God. Although his business was shaken, he finally overcame the challenges with complete confidence and the awareness that God was always with him.

The momentary experience of the political and spiritual juxtaposition during the fall of the New Order regime not only resolved personal problems but also renewed their identity and self-esteem. Belief in God brought peace, courage and the ability to face life's challenges. In the business world, Chinese entrepreneurs began to rely on their faith, replacing their dependence on ethnic connections, which were often hampered by political discrimination.

In the context of Chinese ethnic culture in the business world, Pentecostal-Charismatics are explicitly perceived as supporting the achievement of wealth and capital accumulation, as Meyer argues that born-again Christians are entitled to experience prosperity as a gift of God's grace (Meyer 2007). While Chinese Indonesians generally align with Christian teachings on the value of family, mainstream churches sometimes diverge in their stance towards the entrepreneurial mindset typical of the Chinese business culture (Hoon 2016). This is where the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement stands out in the Indonesian church scene. Many Chinese Indonesians find answers to their life struggles in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches alongside the options offered by Buddhism and Catholicism. Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity does not view wealth as a sin, but rather as a tool that can be managed wisely by biblical values. This is relevant to the Chinese ethnic culture, which values hard work and profit. Spiritual support from the church community helps them strengthen their business strategies and gain trustworthy partners.

Pentecostal-Charismatic churches offer more than just a place of worship. Organisations such as Christian business clubs (e.g. Full-Gospel) create spaces for entrepreneurs to meet, share experiences and find moral support. These communities provide a sense of belonging, recognition as equal citizens of Indonesia and a means to overcome discrimination. In discussing the organisational structure of Pentecostal churches, Anders Nygren explains that the post-denominational pattern means the Church is no longer just a group or merely a collection of individuals who are its members. He said (Nygren 1957):

> The Church is Christ as he is present among and meets us upon earth after his resurrection. Christ is present in His Church through His Word and sacrament. The Church is, in its essence, nothing other than this presence of Christ. (p.96)

However, Simon Chan inserts a critique into his idea of the Church as 'mother', namely that the Pentecostal-Charismatic approach to religious life has limitations. The Church is often viewed as a service provider for individuals, while its deeper community aspect is underemphasised. The focus on personal experiences of the power of the Holy Spirit sometimes overrides the view of the Church as a holistic body of Christ. The concept of *koinonia* [fellowship] is often

understood as the result of human effort rather than the work of the Holy Spirit (Chan 2019:60–65). Despite the complex struggles in the Indonesian context, for Chinese Indonesian entrepreneurs, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has become a means of escape from the crisis, offering them new hope and empowering them spiritually and socially. By combining the values of faith and business culture, this movement plays a significant role in shaping their identity, courage and ability to face challenges in Indonesia.

Pentecost-Charismatic church as a leap of faith for the cultural identity of Chinese ethnicity

In Rodemeier's analysis, as quoted by Vondey (2013), he explains why Javanese people choose to become members of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and the impact of this membership on their family life. His research focuses on Javanese-Muslim families where only one family member is part of a Pentecostal or Charismatic church. During the study, it became apparent that the growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches within the church environment and the family was dynamic. This growth can potentially provide a new face for ethnic pluralism in Indonesia (Rodemeier 2017). The emergence of new Pentecostal-Charismatic churches since the late 1980s, mainly from the Indonesian Chinese community, could trigger a mass movement that transcends existing ethnic differences. This situation could reduce the antipathy between the Javanese and Chinese communities, as seen in Indonesian history over the past few centuries.

In the dynamics of Pentecostal church life, the relationship between the Church and culture is critical because it concerns the core of the Christian community, namely, the authenticity of its doctrine and practice. The primary challenge in the relationship between the Church and culture is the struggle to determine the appropriateness of formulating and communicating faith in a way that meets the demands and needs of a particular cultural context. The limitations of the Christian ecclesiological framework suggest that the road ahead requires a reconsideration of ecclesiology in the global arena. Theology has discussed the challenges of this church's responsibility since the 1970s, namely under the themes of 'contextualisation' and 'inculturation'. The Pentecostal struggle focuses on the formation of doctrine and the proclamation of faith, or in other words, the relationship between Christianity, culture and theology. However, what is surprising is that the characteristics of the Church are rarely discussed. Instead, Church and culture are viewed as two distinct realms; the deadlock in associating and integrating Church and culture is presented as the primary problem. Pentecostals make ecclesiology the subject rather than the object of consideration. Culture, in turn, is often viewed as ambiguous. Therefore, something needs purification by Pentecostals (Vondey 2017:206–211). Culture is not part of the Church but rather part of the Church's mission, an object of the Church's mission. As a result, the encounter between the Church and culture is viewed as a cultural phenomenon rather than an intrinsic aspect of the Church itself. Perhaps that also causes us to find only a few Pentecostal church models full of movements contextualising classical Indonesian culture.

While this article previously emphasised that culture is positioned as the object of the Church's mission (Vondey 2017:208), it is important to expand this reading by considering the dynamics of power within contemporary Pentecostal ecclesiology in Indonesia. Various developments indicate that the success of Pentecostal churches in accommodating Chinese identity is not solely the result of openness to cultural expressions in liturgy or ecclesial practices, but also stems from a transformation in leadership structures that allows ethnic Chinese to assume significant roles within church institutions. Figures such as Rev. Niko Njotorahardjo and Rev. Johan Handojo not only lead megachurches but also symbolise the ascent of ethnic Chinese into ecclesiastical authority spaces that were previously dominated by non-Chinese leaders.

This raises a critical question: Is this cultural integration the result of genuine theological inclusivity, or should it be more accurately understood as a representational strategy mediated through leadership? If the latter is true, then the relationship between church and culture in this context resembles a project of cultural representation rather than a participatory ecclesiological dialectic. Consequently, Pentecostalism has given voice to ethnic Chinese not merely because of its trans-cultural spirituality, but because it has structurally empowered Chinese actors to shape and lead church culture.

This situation leads us to the argument that, sociologically speaking, Pentecostal churches function as symbolic political spaces where previously marginalised minorities gain new bargaining power through the church. In this light, the Church becomes a medium for the reconstruction of political and cultural identity, not merely spiritual. This aligns with Koning's observation that the Chinese embraced global religion 'as a deliberate strategy to move away from the nation-state towards a broader global frame of reference' (Koning 2009). Thus, Pentecostalism can be interpreted as a vehicle for the political reconfiguration of Chinese identity, bridging ethnicity, spirituality and sociopolitical relevance.

The involvement of ethnic Chinese in Pentecostal ecclesiology in Indonesia is rooted in sociopolitical dynamics. Since its birth until its current development, evangelicals and Pentecostals in Indonesia have generally been reluctant to engage in the political and social world, viewing it as worldly affairs with no eternal value (Konaniah 1995:177–179). Therefore, they typically eschew politics and are pragmatically driven to engage in diakonia among the poor and oppressed, doing so within the framework of being a means of evangelism (conversion) and saving souls from perdition. The lack of involvement of evangelicals and Pentecostals in politics attracts many ethnic Chinese to Pentecostalism, given that politics has historically been an

area that is difficult for Chinese Indonesians to access. Koning argues that the Chinese embraced this global religion as a 'deliberate strategy to move away from the nation-state to adopt a broader global frame of reference' because the Church provided them with a safe space to participate in the 'politicization of the Kingdom of God' instead (Koning 2009). However, attitudes towards politics and social action among Pentecostals have begun to shift in recent years, influenced by the strong presence of the global trans-denominational urban Christian movement.

The Roman Catholic document 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World' (*Gaudium et spes*) is one of the crucial proposals of the 20th century for the development of contextual theology, primarily through the approach of Aggiornamento (1962–1965), namely the renewal of theological resources for critiquing modern culture. However, Tracey Rowland criticises this document for not providing a clear theological definition of culture, which results in the underdevelopment of the pneumatological dimension. As a result, the Church tends to accommodate modern culture rather than provide a critical response. Birher suggests the need for a profound understanding of the role of culture in shaping the soul. He emphasises the importance of a sharp global spirituality (Birher 2025). In the Pentecostal context, the relationship between Church and culture is more focused on proper psychological positioning than on doctrine and practice, with attention to social, political and financial relevance. This view highlights the Church's capacity to adapt and engage in broad dialogue with various aspects of society.

The preceding strongly supports the movement of the Chinese ethnic group to align with its own political, cultural and religious identity. For example, the spectacle of ethnic Chinese in the Pentecostal movement in Indonesia is visible in the performances of religious concerts, which Nanlai Cao sees as the impact of political exclusion in Indonesia on ethnic Chinese, where Christianity is stigmatised as a religion of escape from the conversion of ethnic Chinese-communists who are threatened with arrest because Indonesia is actively eradicating communist-based parties (Cao 2012). The holding of these revival concerts is part of the manifestation of nationalism and claims to citizenship because Chinese Christians are considered less Indonesian than Chinese Muslims. At the same time, the revival concerts aim to bridge the differences between Christian denominations through themes that promote a national identity for a unified Indonesian state. This phenomenon is similar to the 'spiritual nationalism' described by Cao, where urban Chinese Christians who were once marginalised and victimised in China adapt Pentecostalism imported from the West to the mode of Chinese popular religiosity, positioning themselves as modern religious subjects in line with the project of state building, and contributing to the rise of nationalism from below.

Within global Pentecostalism, the concept of *Aggiornamento* finds concrete application and definition in various forms. One of the consistent elements in the development of Pentecostal ecclesial throughout the world is the emphasis on orthopathy (understood as the carrier of the imagination forming a bridge between the conceptual and the practical), interpreted in pneumatological, ecclesiological and anthropological terms, and thus opening the Church to the joy of Christ's love that also has a critical, counter-cultural function in the liturgy. This orthopaedic function, understood metaphorically as the Church's corrective and supportive role that aligns culture with orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right practice), serves as a space where culture engages in dialogue with both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, making the liturgy a means of contextualisation within the Church.

In the context of the diasporic Chinese Indonesian ethnic group, it will express its ethnic nature in various ways, one of which is through the world of religiosity. In this case, it can be observed that over the last decade, approximately four churches have been categorised as 'Mega Churches' or 'Grand Churches', meaning that every Sunday, more than 5000 people attend services. This development is shocking, especially considering that 90% of the population around these churches is Muslim. In addition, obtaining government permission to build a church in Java is extremely challenging (Crouch 2007:106). Interestingly, this 'Mega Church' type is not found in areas with a larger Christian population. However, Charismatic groups have experienced significant growth. In various regions in Indonesia, the emergence of new churches is often the result of divisions within Pentecostal churches. 'Mega Church' in Java also represents independent churches within the Pentecostal-Charismatic environment. Only the Indonesian Evangelical Reformed Church in Jakarta is an exception, as it claims to have roots in the Calvinist Reformation tradition. What these megachurches have in common is that they were all founded in the 1980s by Indonesian individuals of Chinese descent. However, in contemporary Charismatic church communities, not only are people with the same ethnic background as the church founders active, but also members of other ethnicities. The number of Javanese members in Charismatic churches is at least equal to, if not greater than, the number of members of ethnic Chinese descent.

Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is frequently linked with ethnic minority communities who have been marginalised and regarded as inferior. In this context, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement serves to reaffirm and restore their moral position. For Chinese Indonesians, conversion to Charismatic Christianity represents a form of self-empowerment, with religion functioning as a symbol of identity. The state's policies of assimilation and ethnic manipulation have left lasting scars on Chinese identity. However, the fall of the New Order regime in the late 1990s created space for Chinese Indonesians to express their voices as an ethnic minority.

Despite the political changes, by 2004, many Chinese Indonesians remained ambivalent, as the trauma and unease that had built up over the previous three decades had not completely subsided. The economic collapse, along with the

riots and targeted violence against Chinese Indonesians in the late 1990s, reinforced the sense of vulnerability they had long endured. For some, religious faith became a source of solace. As a dynamic global movement, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity offered a sense of protection that transcended national boundaries: 'Christian churches have links to a strong international constituency that enthusiastically defends the rights of Christian minorities around the world' (Brazier 2006). Moreover, the Charismatic movement adeptly harnessed its global networks to integrate the message of salvation with the realities of local experience. For example, the Indonesian Bethel Church in Solo intensively built cooperation with churches in Korea under the leadership of Pastor Yonggi Cho. From the network that was established, GBI in Solo gained insight into the phenomenon of cell groups, and within 5 months, the number of cell groups in the Solo area doubled as a result.

Pentecostal and the Bethel Church in Indonesia: The meeting of modernity and Indonesian culture

The ethnic identity of Chinese Indonesians holds a distinctive character because of their complex and often precarious position within the Indonesian nation-state. During the mid-1960s, under the New Order regime led by President Suharto (1966–1998), policies of forced assimilation were implemented, resulting in the closure of Chinese-language schools and the prohibition of Chinese religious and cultural practices in public spheres. As a result, being Chinese became a contested and vulnerable identity, despite the deep-rooted sense of belonging many Chinese Indonesians felt towards the nation. Alongside challenges of ethnicity and spirituality, their perceived economic dominance fuelled further tension, encapsulated in the stereotype that all Chinese Indonesians were affluent. While it is estimated that Chinese Indonesians control around 80% of corporate wealth in Indonesia, the vast majority – among the estimated 3 to 7m – work as small-scale traders or shopkeepers. This prominence in business is closely tied to historical restrictions during the New Order regime, which barred them from entering political, civil service or military careers (Ling 2016). Their multifaceted and often marginalised status has rendered them frequent scapegoats during times of national crisis, most notably in the violent anti-Chinese riots of May 1998. As Indonesia experienced severe environmental, economic and political upheaval in the late 1990s, many Chinese Indonesians not only suffered financial losses but also feared for their safety. This situation raises a critical question: Did the deep insecurity of this era contribute to the conversion of some Chinese Indonesian entrepreneurs to Charismatic Christianity? Within this context, the GBI has emerged as a significant Pentecostal denomination that embraces this trend, with more than 20% of its pastors or local church leaders being of Chinese descent.

Similar to other Pentecostal movements across Indonesia, GBI has undergone significant expansion in recent years, playing a notable role in reshaping the country's religious dynamics. Although Indonesia is predominantly Muslim – the largest in the world – many adherents, particularly in urban areas, practise their faith nominally and peacefully. Nonetheless, the rise of Christianity is increasingly influencing the religious landscape. Over the past two decades, the Christian population has experienced substantial growth. In 1988, Christians made up just 10% of the national population; by 2008, that number had increased to 12%, with Christian representation in Jakarta estimated to be between 30% and 40%. The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement has undoubtedly contributed to this growth. Several factors have facilitated the spread of Pentecostalism in the Indonesian context, including the government's relative openness towards Christianity, its resonance with cultural values, and the strong appeal of Pentecostalism's spiritual intensity and promises of tangible, transformative change in everyday life.

Studebaker echoes the conclusion of others that Pentecostals are moderate partners, especially in urban areas, as evidenced by their proficiency with 'media, technology, marketing strategies, business management and transportation, to spread the message' (Studebaker 2016:38) According to Harissa, many of its pastors come from non-religious professional backgrounds and bring their previous expertise into ministry with remarkable enthusiasm – described as being like 'crazy people' ignited by the Holy Spirit. What stands out most is how Pentecostalism in Indonesia has evolved into a movement that integrates both modern developments and traditional cultural elements to carry out its Christian mission in a deeply contextual manner – arguably more profoundly than merely through advanced technology. From a sociological perspective, Pentecostalism represents a globally resonant movement, not only supported by its North American ties but also empowered by a fusion of historical and contemporary features that enable swift and widespread identification. Regarding 'the modern elements of Pentecostalism', Kees de Jong (2016) concludes that:

> [*W*]hat Pentecostalism offers is a portable faith and identity that carries millions of people in moral and economic security to modern megacities and other contexts across the politically developing world. (p.200)

Daily life becomes a fragmented world where each area is like an essential but incomplete piece of a puzzle, and individuals must put them together so that life 'makes sense'. In this case, GBI has pioneered institutionally and successfully empowered individual Christians to play a role and colour various areas of life that are no longer binary and cross-line. It is no coincidence that ethnic Chinese people, with their managerial and trading instincts, can be accommodated within the GBI institutional structure to support the space for local churches to play a large or small role in the lives of Indonesian society, even though their involvement is motivated by various factors. For example, Pastor Ir. Niko Njotorahardjo is a pastor of Chinese descent who is very influential in the Synod of the Indonesian Bethel Church and in ecumenical dynamics. With more than 2000 branch churches under his care, Ir. Niko Notodoharjo established worship centres under the auspices of the GBI synod and the

cross-denominational movement, one of the most prominent in the region. One of Niko's prominent spiritual successors is Pastor Johan Handojo, a well-known and seasoned church planter who has founded numerous Pentecostal congregations throughout Asia, Australia and the USA. He is the founder of Transform World Connection Indonesia and serves on the Asia Cabinet of the Empowered21 Global Council. Pastor Johan also leads two prominent Pentecostal megachurches – one in Jakarta that primarily caters to upper-middle-class Chinese Indonesians, and another in Singapore, where the congregation is primarily composed of members from the Indonesian diaspora. He chose Singapore as the central base for his ministry, recognising its strategic regional position and expressing growing concern over the rising influence of Islam in Indonesia.

Beyond the confines of church life, the decade following media deregulation and the political reforms of 1998 witnessed a notable rise in Christian media content in Indonesia. Sermons, healing services and live Sunday worship broadcasts began appearing on private television networks. Pentecostal churches have actively allocated financial resources to secure media access, even venturing into the production of soap operas. This development is both an effort to manifest the Christian faith's influence within the spheres of the arts, media and entertainment, and a strategic response to the growing presence of Islam in public and media spaces. This trend has significantly shaped the religious practices of Indonesia's expanding Muslim middle class. The rise of Christian media has been further facilitated by the backing of Harry Tanoesoedibjo, a prominent Chinese Indonesian Christian media magnate and owner of the Media Nusantara Citra (MNC) Group, one of the country's largest media conglomerates, making it increasingly feasible to produce and air Christian programming nationwide.

Conclusion

Pentecostalism in Indonesia has evolved into an inclusive spiritual movement with a global and eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God that transcends ethnic, cultural and national boundaries. In the Indonesian context, characterised by the ideology of Pancasila, Pentecostalism emphasises that while national identity is important, it is not the primary focus of God's redemptive narrative. The Holy Spirit is poured out on all nations without granting special privileges to any one nation (Ac 2:17). Consequently, the Church is called to be critical of excessive nationalism and instead focus on the vision of the pan-ethnic people of God.

For Chinese Indonesians, the spiritual experience offered by Pentecostalism becomes a means to unify identities that historical and social challenges have fragmented. Through this experience, they can embrace their cultural heritage without losing their spiritual identity, thereby fostering an integration between ethnicity, culture and faith. As a result, Pentecostalism becomes a vehicle of reconciliation that strengthens awareness of the universal calling of the Kingdom of God, which rejects exclusivist religious identities tied to a single church or nation and instead enlivens all aspects of human life to reflect the image of God.

As a movement responsive to modernity and Indonesian culture, Pentecostalism has demonstrated its capacity to embrace technology, business strategies, media and modern communication as tools in the Christian mission. By combining ancient and modern elements, this movement has become an international force that guides its followers through the transition to the modern world. For Chinese Indonesians, the Pentecostal spiritual experience offers an opportunity to heal identity wounds and find unity in diversity. Thus, Pentecostalism functions not only as a religious movement but also as a platform that supports the reconciliation of multicultural identities within Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that the success of Pentecostal churches in integrating Chinese culture has not always emerged from the grassroots level, but has often been facilitated by the presence of ethnic Chinese leaders within church structures. This process reveals a hybrid formation between theology and representational power, in which cultural identity is restored through top-down ecclesiological engineering. In this context, Pentecostalism is not merely a space for spiritual refuge but also functions as a political and symbolic arena for Chinese Indonesians who were marginalised during the New Order era. Thus, the contribution of Pentecostal churches to Indonesian pluralism extends not only to the level of faith but also through the reinforcement of social and cultural capital among previously excluded minority groups.

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