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# Religious aspirations among urban Christians in contemporary Indonesia

HOON Chang-Yau

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## Abstract

Recognizing that the Christians in Indonesia are not a homogeneous group, this article examines the various contested spiritual, social, and political aspirations of urban Christians in the contexts of the historical trajectory of Indonesian modernity, forces of globalization and urbanization, the role of capital, and the development of Islam – the indispensable religious ‘Other’ to this minority religion in contemporary Indonesia. It sheds light on the ways in which this minority exercises agency in using political participation and social activism as a counterbalance to the growing Islamization of Indonesia, and how they strategically utilize their extensive economic, social, and political capital to navigate the treacherous waters of rising religious intolerance in the country where the world’s largest Muslim population resides.

**Keywords:** Aspirations, Christianity, Indonesia, modernity, religion

Tens of thousands of youths gathered at Indonesia’s largest sports arena, in the 100,000-seat Gelora Bung Karno Stadium, to attend a mega-concert on 19 November 2014. Ferried in on chartered buses, these youths and students, many of whom were still wearing school uniforms, filled one-fifth of the mammoth stadium. Nationalistic sentiments ran high: some performers wore red-and-white outfits – the conspicuous colors of the Indonesian flag – and sang patriotic songs at the opening of the concert. In one particular rendition, scores of youths who wore regional cultural costumes carried a giant Indonesian flag and paraded on the center of the soccer field. While such nationalistic fervor could be mistaken as a political youth rally, it was actually a Christian youth concert organized by the trans-denominational National Prayer Network (or Jaringan Doa Nasional) and the youth and children’s ministry of Bethel Church of Indonesia, under the auspices of the International Rise Up Movement from South Korea. The objective of the concert was reflected in its theme, ‘Rise for One: Heart for the Nation,’ as it brought together Christian youths from Greater Jakarta to pray for the nation, in particular for the new Joko Widodo administration, which took office in October 2014, a month before the concert. Various church leaders took turns to proclaim emotional prayers for Indonesia and its leaders, praying for blessings, prosperity, conversion of non-Christians, and repentance of the nation.

The main highlights of the concert were the performances and presentations by famous Indonesian celebrities. There was also a line-up of prominent charismatic speakers. For instance, the keynote speaker was David Yonggi Cho, the senior pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea, reckoned to be the largest church in the world with approximately 1 million members. After attempting to correlate the Korean experience of economic development to Christian revivalism, the speaker hailed it as a model for Indonesia. He further related the Korean experience to Indonesia by drawing parallels with South Korea's dark past marked by colonization, war, and a dictatorial military regime (field notes, 19 November 2014).

A few days after the mega-concert, a four-day conference entitled 'International Consultation of Church and Homophobia' was held by the Jakarta Theological Seminary (JTS) as part of its annual 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Week' to celebrate sexual diversity. Established in 1934, the JTS is the oldest seminary in Indonesia, and is famed for being ecumenical and 'liberal' in its outlook. The conference was co-organized by the National Council of Churches in India, and supported by local and international ecumenical organizations such as the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, World Council of Churches, and Christian Conference of Asia. Since 2011, the seminary has held 'LGBTQ Week' to affirm sexual differences, raise awareness of issues related to gender and sexuality, and promote the acceptance of homosexuals in the church.

As part of the conference, the seminary installed rainbow flags around the campus with the conference title conspicuously printed on a banner flying at its entrance that faces a busy road. Besides students at the seminary, the conference was attended by over 60 Christian theologians, Christian and Muslim LGBT activists, and pastors from mainline churches in Indonesia and elsewhere. The conference had not only provided a rare platform for theologians and religious practitioners to deliberate on queer theology, but also provided a space for dialogue among Christians, Muslims, and gay activists. Other programs included a photo exhibition on the stories of transgender people and a dance performance by members of a transgender NGO. The outcome of the conference was the 'Jakarta Statement on Church and Homophobia,' which among others, affirmed the equality of LGBTQ people as God's divine creations and denounced any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The two accounts above offer a glimpse into the contrasting aspirations among urban Christians in contemporary Indonesia. They highlight the salient fact that the Christian agenda is not unified or homogeneous: the main concern of the mega-concert was the spiritual and economic salvation of the nation, but the conference focused on social justice and minority rights. To understand the disparity of foci in the two events and in Christian aspirations in general, detailed analyses on the different networks and modes of religious organization within Indonesian Christianity, including different theological interpretations and practices, and different types of social commitment and discourses, are needed. Bourdeaux and Jammes (2013) argue that such a nuanced understanding of Christianity in Southeast Asia is generally lacking in the literature.

This article intends to fill this lacuna by providing insights into the complex and contested organization of Indonesian Christianity manifest through diverse urban aspirations. Echoing Van der Veer's call to use

‘religion as a lens to understand the urban’ (2015: 10), this article attempts to offer the urban as an optic to understand religious aspirations and contestations. This focus is consistent with the fact that Christianity is a religion that is currently experiencing unprecedented growth among the emerging urban middle class in Indonesia (Chao, 2014). The article begins with an examination of the role of religion in Indonesia’s modernity, highlighting the changing position of Christians in the nation’s recent history and the ways in which they claim citizenship rights. To understand the diverse spiritual, social, economic, and political aspirations of the Christians, the article dissects the community into various theological streams – notably ecumenism and Pentecostalism – to explain their different outlooks. It traces the evolution of such streams in conjunction with the global influences of other Christian international movements, particularly those from the United States and South Korea, which have contributed to the further divergent Christian aspirations in Indonesia.

It is impossible for any discussions on Christian aspirations to occur without juxtaposing them against the aspirations of the Muslim majority who make up more than 87% of Indonesia’s population, because they constitute the most immediate ‘Other’ to the Christians. It is thus unsurprising that some Christian aspirations emerged as reactionary measures to counter what they perceive to be the rising threat of Islamization as Indonesia experiences a ‘conservative turn’ (Fealy, 2006). On the other hand, Muslims have also been feeling threatened by the proliferating Christian numbers in the past few decades: 7.4% in 1971, 9% in 2000, and 10% in 2010. The fear between Muslims and Christians is mutual, and is often encapsulated in the all-encompassing terms ‘Christianization’ and ‘Islamization,’ which they use to accuse each other (see Chao, 2014; Mujiburrahman, 2006). With the rise of an emerging religious middle class that is ‘consumption hungry, education-obsessed, religiously conservative and preoccupied with individualistic aspirations’ (Simone and Fauzan, 2013: 287) following Indonesia’s modernization and urbanization, the competition between the two religions continues to heighten, and is often expressed through their contested aspirations.

This article is a part of an ongoing project on urban Christianity in Indonesia in which intermittent fieldwork has been conducted in Medan, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya in the past few years. The data used for the present study are drawn from interviews with key ecumenical, evangelical, and Pentecostal Christian leaders, and participant observation in major Christian events such as concerts, conferences, worship services, and theological seminars, conducted over an intermittent period in 2014. Having been engaged in ethnographic research in Indonesia for more than a decade, the author has established rapport with the field and is able to draw from his various networks. Although he now identifies more closely with ecumenical Christianity, his own evangelical background has given him the cultural resources and linguistic familiarity to access the evangelical and Pentecostal scene. This study encompasses a brief historical review, ethnographic fieldwork, as well as discourse analysis of textual materials including web pages, flyers, church magazines, and sermons. Through triangulation, the article provides insights into the ways in which plural Christians in urban Indonesia exercise citizenship and agency in drawing from their extensive social capital and transnational network as they attempt to realize their aspirations amid local and global forces.

## **Religion in Indonesia’s modernity**

Religion was an important consideration when the founding leaders of Indonesia deliberated on the form of philosophical foundation for the new nation-state. A few months before independence in August 1945, Muslim and secular nationalists contended fiercely on whether Indonesia was to be an Islamic or a secular state. To break the deadlock, Sukarno, who became the first President of the Republic of Indonesia, devised the five basic principles, known as Pancasila, to become the foundation of the state. The five principles include: nationalism, democracy, deliberative consensus, social justice, and Lordship. Sukarno's proposition was met with Muslim nationalists' demand for the inclusion of a 'gentleman's agreement' known as the Jakarta Charter. Additionally, they proposed a clause for Muslims to be obliged to carry out the Islamic Syaria Law. The Jakarta Charter was subsequently abrogated due to an unyielding disapproval from the Christians, who made up the majority population in the eastern part of the archipelago, and who threatened not to join the republic if the clause remained. A compromise among the Muslims, Christians, and secular nationalists was reached only when the fifth principle of Pancasila concerning 'Lordship' (or religiosity) was promoted to become the first principle and was revised as 'belief in one supreme God.' This principle essentially positioned Indonesia as neither a secular nor an Islamic state, but a religious or Godly state, 'in which religion was revered and in which mutual tolerance and freedom of believe would be prized' (Elson, 2009: 112; see also Darmaputera, 1982; Hoon, 2013b).

As this nation-state was built on the premise of religious adherence, modernity and religion have been working in tandem in postcolonial Indonesia. Since independence, the state had made affiliation to a 'modern religion' (agama) a quintessential part of Indonesian citizenship. Under the national ideology, only five world religions were officially sanctioned: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, though this list has been expanded to include Confucianism and Baha'ism in recent years. 'Traditional' religious systems, including Javanese mysticism, tribal animism, and local syncretic practices, were classified under the lesser category of 'kepercayaan' or 'beliefs' (Abalahin, 2005). Affiliation with one of the official religions is officially stated in documents of legal status such as birth and marriage certificates and the national identity card (KTP). Through such state-imposed disciplinary technologies, the state was able to naturalize 'sanctionized religions' as an integral part of Indonesian citizenship.

It must be noted, however, that the pragmatic and developmentalist state during Suharto's New Order period (1966–1998) promoted religion as a political tool to counter Communism rather than as an expression of the state's piety and commitment to any particular religion. For instance, the Suharto regime was particularly hostile towards an assertive and politicized Islam. Elson argues that the regime 'saw Islam as the most important surviving exemplar of politically dangerous and potentially socially disruptive "ideological" streams in politics ... [and] as the very antithesis of its pragmatic, modernizing and developmentalist paradigm (2010: 331). Consequently, Islam was marginalized during the first half of the New Order, and only regained the favor of the state in the latter half of the regime when Suharto needed the Muslim votes. Even then, the regime continued to eschew political Islam and only promoted civil or cultural Islam, which simultaneously encouraged Muslim piety as well as religious tolerance and pluralism (Elson, 2010).

While Islam was considered the antithesis to Suharto's modernizing and developmentalist ideology, Christianity was regarded differently. Christianity was commonly associated with modernity in postcolonial Indonesia due to its legacy of being a 'Dutch' religion, which represented ties with the

modern, global world (Aragon, 2000; Keane, 2007; Van Klinken, 2003). The religion was not only deemed compatible with the official discourse on 'religion,' but also with the ideology of national development. As such, the Suharto administration utilized Christian missions to implement basic economic development programs such as creating nuclear family households, introducing biomedicine, and expanding school attendance among outer-island minorities (Aragon, 2000: 24).

Furthermore, Robinson (2008: 7) argues that Christianity in Indonesia, in particular Pentecostalism, is intimately intertwined with the nation's modernity as manifested in the use of modern technology, Western music, marketing strategies, and business management styles. Observers claim that the erosion of traditional cultural and social foundations of Indonesian society through rapid modernization, industrialization, and economic development in urban centers has opened up new opportunities for Christian groups such as the neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements to expand the 'kingdom of God' among the urban middle class and to fill the ideological vacuum created by the modernization processes (Koning, 2009: 121; Robinson, 2005: 338).

However, the fervent evangelical activities of the past few decades have raised anxiety among some Muslims about the 'Christianization' of Indonesia (Chao, 2014). In response to their demands, the state issued various legislations to curb Christian activities, including religious propagation, receiving foreign aid, inter-religious marriage, and building places of worship (see Crouch, 2010; Mujiburrahman, 2006). Moreover, the ideological tensions inherited from the pre-independence period of the nation did not abate with the failure of the Jakarta Charter. The continuing ambition to promote an Islamic ideology and to implement the Syariah Law intensified in the post-Suharto period, as the process of decentralization and the opening of the public sphere have allowed the previously repressed political Islam to return in full force.

The post-Suharto Indonesia is a much more democratic country that has witnessed free and fair national elections and freedom of expression; paradoxically, the country is simultaneously becoming more socially conservative and less inclusive in its public policy. Religious pluralism has been increasingly circumscribed by restrictive governmental regulations and rising intolerance. The institutionalization of intolerance through the implementation of various regional bylaws based on the Islamic Syariah is an example of the 'radicalization of public space' in post-Suharto Indonesia (Hartiningsih, 2011). Furthermore, in 2005, the Indonesian Council of Ulama prohibited Muslims from praying with non-Muslims; and issued a series of fatwa (Islamic rulings) that forbade Muslims from marrying non-Muslims, outlawed the Islamic minority sect, Ahmadiyah, and banned pluralism, secularism, and liberalism in general (Gillespie, 2007). In 2006 came the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister for Internal Affairs to further circumscribe the building of places of religious worship, which proved to be detrimental to religious minorities as it gives the authorities and radical groups such as the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI) and the Holy Warriors Council of Indonesia (MMI) the pretext to shut down non-Islamic places of worship that have existed without proper permits (Crouch, 2010). Ironically, the same standards are rarely applied to unlicensed mosques.

While Islamization has produced a more Islamic public space in Indonesia since the 1980s, (Fealy and White, 2008), the phenomenon has accelerated in the past decade. This can be seen in a sharp increase in Islamic content in the media, especially in popular TV series, and in public displays of piety, such as veiling practices and Islamic greetings and prayers at public events (see Heryanto, 2011). There has also been a rise in political Islam – both in Islamic political parties as well as the use of Islam in secular nationalist parties – and the state-condoned Islamist vigilantes and radical groups that take upon themselves the role of the moral police in attacking religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities (Elson, 2010).

The reasons behind such a ‘conservative turn’ are multiple and complex. The more obvious ones are the opening of the public sphere in the process of post-Suharto democratization, the rising influence of the puritanical forms of Islam from the Middle East, and other international factors such as the ‘war on the terror,’ the Iraq War and globalization (Fealy, 2006). However, Fealy (2006) further argues that the rising conservatism could be a backlash towards the aggressive and confrontational approach of the liberal movement within Islam in their attempt to reform Islam. This approach has alienated mainstream Muslims and allowed the conservative forces to enhance their agenda. The rising Islamic conservatism is unwittingly working in tandem with a concomitant reactionary conservative force within Christianity, which will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Different aspirations among the plural Christians**

Protestant Christianity in Indonesia has been conventionally divided into three streams: the ecumenical (sometimes known as ‘liberal’ Christianity), which encompasses mainline churches with the heritage of a particular version of Calvinism dominant in the Netherlands called Dutch Reformed theology; the evangelical, which is made up of mainly conservative churches that are closely associated with the fundamentalist movement that emerged in the United States in the early 20th century; and the Pentecostal, a brand of church that emphasizes the gift of the Holy Spirit, miracles, and certain spiritual experiences, which is also currently experiencing phenomenal growth in Indonesia and around the world (see Hoon, 2013a).

One of the main differences between the ecumenical and its other two counterparts is that the former is keen to build ‘inclusive Christian communities out of multi-religious peoples’ (Goh, 2010: 65), while the latter perceive that the Christian community must be exclusive to believers and actively seek the conversion of unbelievers. The ecumenicals relate to other religions in the spirit of religious pluralism, which is based on a hermeneutic that acknowledges God’s presence in all religions, and that non-Christian faiths may also possess the truth and the way to salvation. With such pluralist outlook, the ecumenicals are more concerned with upholding social justice than with proselytization. They have been historically active in the sociopolitical sphere in Indonesia, paying special attention to the working class, the impoverished, and the marginalized (Konaniah, 1995).

Conversely, evangelical and Pentecostal Christians generally espouse an exclusive interpretation of salvation. They are primarily concerned with carrying out ‘the Great Commission’ of Jesus to ‘make disciples of all nations’ (Matthew 28:19, NIV), which they construe as a call to evangelize. Compared to the ecumenicals, the evangelicals and the Pentecostals share more similarities in doctrines and mission.

During Suharto's New Order, the developmental ideology provided these enterprising Christians the impetus to leverage on the ethos of success and prosperity to reach out to the emerging middle class.<sup>1</sup>

As with many other places around the world, traditional mainline churches in Indonesia are either experiencing stagnation or are losing members – particularly the young ones – to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that deliver lively worship through contemporary music and media technologies, and dynamic preachers who convey bite-sized Christian messages that aim to address the practical daily needs of the audience.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Pentecostal work ethic and faith practices are decidedly compatible with the norms and behaviors of post-industrial capitalism, in particular with the demands of neoliberal economies. Barker (2007) argues that the prosperity gospel that is at the crux of many Pentecostal churches filters all economic experiences and material well-being through the spiritual lens of faith and miracles. Under this brand of Christianity, the accumulation of capital is seen as a sign of blessings from God that ought to be celebrated. Like their counterparts in Singapore, Pentecostal and Charismatic megachurches in urban Indonesia are correspondingly a 'faith of an emergent middle class' because their practices are able to tap into the aspirations of the new middle class (Chong, 2015a: 218).

The ecumenicals have been involved in politics since independence, as evident in their establishment of the Christian political party, Partai Kristen Indonesia (or Parkindo) in 1950 to represent the Christian voice. Nevertheless, a deficit of votes forced the party to eventually merge into a mainstream party in 1973. The demise of the party did not mark the end in political participation among the ecumenicals. During the New Order, the regime appointed the chairman of the Indonesian Council of Churches, the largest organization of the ecumenical churches, to a seat in the parliament as the representative of all Christians.<sup>3</sup> In 2001, mainline Christians, specifically the ethnic Batak, emerged again on the political scene by establishing the Prosperous Peace Party (Partai Damai Sejahtera) to contest the legislative elections. Again, due to insufficient votes, it suffered the same fate as its predecessor (Parkindo) and was merged into the People's Conscience Party (Hanura) in 2013. While participation in party politics has proved unviable for the ecumenical Christians, they continue to collaborate with various governmental and nongovernmental organizations, activist groups, and Islamic organizations (e.g., Nadlathul Ulama and Muhammadiyah) on social issues and interfaith dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, the evangelicals and Pentecostals usually eschew political and social activism, which they perceive as 'this-worldly' and lacking eternal value (Konaniah, 1995). Hence, they generally avoid politics and are not instinctively inclined towards diakonia – the call to serve the poor and oppressed – except as a means to evangelism (conversion) and saving souls from damnation. In fact, it is precisely such a lack of investment in national politics that has attracted many ethnic Chinese to Pentecostalism since politics has historically been an area that is inaccessible to Chinese Indonesians. Koning argues that the Chinese converted to this global religion as 'a purposeful strategy to turn away from the nation state in order to embrace a larger global frame of reference,' as the church provides them a safe space to participate in the 'politics of the Lord' instead (Koning, 2009: 126). However, attitudes towards politics and social action among the Pentecostals have started to change in recent years with the strong influence of a global trans-denominational urban Christian movement, which will be discussed in the next section.



## **Trans-denominational networks: Global movements and local contexts**

A new phenomenon has taken place in the last two decades that has witnessed the establishment of various interconnected Christian networks that endeavor to unite all churches in transcending the denominational boundaries. This resembles what Donald Miller (1998) describes as ‘postdenominational Christianity,’ which refers to new-paradigm churches that appropriate stylistic and organizational elements from the postmodern culture to provide a model that endeavors to free themselves from the institutional constraints of denominational Christianity. The trans-denominational Christian networks in Indonesia have departed from vertical structures, including formal membership structures, traditional liturgy, and appointed council leaders. They adopt a fluid and horizontal organizational configuration coalescing around ‘networkers’ and ‘contact persons’ instead of formal office bearers such as chairperson, presbytery, and council members. The nonhierarchical structure of the network leaves little incentive for institutional politics and power struggles among its activists.

The National Prayer Network (or JDN, Jaringan Doa Nasional) is one such network. The JDN has co-organized monumental events such as the World Prayer Assembly that was held on 12 May 2012, where 3.5 million people prayed simultaneously in 378 cities and towns across Indonesia. The JDN was founded by Iman Santoso, a Chinese Indonesian businessman who embodies a trans-denominational unity because of his background in an ecumenical church, evangelical commitment, and charismatic spirituality.<sup>5</sup> As a resourceful and respected figure, Santoso is able to tap into his social network to mobilize various Christian bodies across theological boundaries, which otherwise rarely come together, to collaborate and hold large-scale prayer assemblies focusing on sociopolitical issues. The focus on prayer as a bridge across denominational differences is strategic, as Budijanto argues, ‘The emphasis on prayer, fasting, and spiritual warfare and great expectations from God’s intervention attracted evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic churches; the substance of the prayer – sociopolitical and spiritual transformation – attracted mainline churches’ (2009: 165).

The JDN is instrumental in the establishment of Indonesian chapters of global trans-denominational movements such as the Transform World Connection (TWC) and Empowered21. The TWC held a global summit in Indonesia on 5 May 2005, hosting 500 pastors and Christian leaders from 56 countries, which was seen as a major momentum booster for Christianity in Indonesia (see [www.transformindonesia.org](http://www.transformindonesia.org)). The Empowered21 Movement grew out of the centennial commemoration of the Azusa Street revival in the United States in 2006, with the aim of evangelizing every person in the world by the year 2033 – the 2000th anniversary of Pentecost ([www.empowered21.com](http://www.empowered21.com)).<sup>6</sup> Two charismatic senior pastors, Niko Njotorahardjo and his deputy, Djohan Handojo, from the Bethel Church of Indonesia – the largest Pentecostal church in Indonesia claiming 2.6 million members – have played an important leadership role in these trans-denominational networks discussed above. Accordingly, they have hosted global meetings for TWC and Empowered21 in the colossal church-owned Sentul International Convention Center in a satellite city located in the outskirts of Jakarta.

Unlike traditional churches, these trans-denominational networks do not compete with each other for members. JDN and TWC, for instance, regularly co-organize large-scale assemblies, drawing on their own networks and members, which often overlap. The core aim is to unite disparate groups of Christians to achieve a vision based on Seven Mountains Theology. The theology encompasses the following areas

of influence: arts and entertainment, business, education, family, government, media, and religion. As an extension of 'Dominion Theology,' which proposes that God has planned for humans to have dominion over the Earth and its animals, the Seven Mountains Theology maintains that Christians are biblically mandated to control all earthly institutions until the second coming of Christ. This theology was envisioned by two prominent American evangelical leaders: Bill Bright (1921–2003) and Loren Cunningham (1935–), founders of Campus Crusade and Youth with a Mission, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Closely associated with the New Apostolic Reformation and the Christian Right Movement in the USA, they promote the reclaiming of the seven mountains of culture.

Popularly referred to as the 'Seven Spheres Movement' in Indonesia and ardently advocated by JDN and TWC, the seven mountains of culture are adapted and abbreviated in alphabetical order from A to G: Arts, media, and entertainment; Business and marketplace; Church; Development of the poor; Education; Family; and Governance. These seven spheres foreground a new type of Christian movement in Indonesia that attempts to transcend denominational divides and penetrate Christian values into all sectors of society. This movement is ambitious, combative, well organized, and resourceful. Its urban focus endeavors to capture the aspirations and imaginations of the nation's emerging urban middle class. It also claims to offer a counterbalance to the social, familial, and moral degradations and polarizations experienced in a city amid forces of rising intolerance and Islamic conservatism in Indonesia. My interview with Pastor Djohan Handojo,<sup>8</sup> a pivotal leader of the Seven Spheres Movement in Indonesia, in February 2014 has informed the following discussions on the movement. The discussion will also reveal the Pentecostal character of the movement, raising the question of whether being 'trans-denominational' is an aspiration rather than a reality.

In the decade following the post-1998 media deregulation and political liberalization, there was an increase in Christian media content such as sermons, healing programs, and live broadcasts of Sunday services on private television channels (Budijanto, 2009: 165). Pentecostal churches have invested economic resources to acquire access to the media in order to 'produce sinetron (Indonesian drama series) (interview, 2 February 2014). While this could be seen as a promotion of the first of the seven spheres, on arts, media and entertainment, it may also be a 'counter-measure' towards the rising Islamic expression in the public sphere, including the media, which has been instrumental in constructing a new sense of piety among emerging middle-class Muslims in recent years. Heryanto (2011) argues that this phenomenon not only reflects the rise of Islamic politics and morality, but is also a reaction towards the global consumerist culture among the rising middle class. With the support of Chinese Christian media moguls such as Hary Tanoesoedibjo, who owns one of the largest media conglomerates in Indonesia, the MNC Group, it is now much easier to produce and broadcast Christian programs on Indonesian television.

The second sphere calls for a concerted effort for Christians to penetrate the marketplace. The blurred boundary between Christianity and capitalism has been well documented in Weber's seminal book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and other works that followed (see Weber, 2001; Ekelund et al., 2008). The 'Prosperity Gospel' espoused by Pentecostal and charismatic movements aims to take God to the marketplace and emphasizes self-development, prosperity, and material growth (Pahl, 2008). For instance, the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, which is 'unashamedly capitalistic in ethos' (Anderson, 2004: 145), has been extremely successful in Indonesia as a site where the 'Prosperity Gospel' is actualized through practical business networking and spiritual sharing of charismatic

experiences. In many cities, churches have been acquiring a space in a shopping mall to conduct their worship. In Indonesia, the concept of a church-mall is more than just an embrace of the market logic (Chong, 2015a). The practical dimensions of conducting church services in shopping malls include the excellent security provided by the mall against vandalism and mob attack, the convenience of a one-stop location where church members can worship, shop, and dine, and the circumvention of the need for a church permit, which has been increasingly difficult to obtain (Gudorf, 2012). The market-oriented practice of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement further explains why in Indonesia this movement is primarily an urban phenomenon that appeals largely to the upwardly mobile middle-class city dwellers (Chong, 2015b).

Education and family, according to Pastor Handojo, are two institutions that are susceptible to the assault of contemporary secular values (interview, 2 February 2014). He argues that the antidote to such threat is to instill strong 'Christian values' in schools. In addition, he also interpreted the 2003 Education Law that requires schools to provide religious teaching for students in accordance with their own faith, taught by a teacher who belongs to the same faith, as a step towards the Islamization of education. Under this legislation, Christian schools are required to provide Islamic religion classes taught by a Muslim teacher to its students who profess Islam.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the call to instill 'Christian values' in education also concerns the preservation of family values and the institution of marriage, which reflects much of the political debate in the United States. The anti-gay and pro-family discourse from the Christian Right in America has been globalized to several Asian nations where evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity have established considerable social and political influence (see Cho, 2014; Chong, 2011; Wong, 2013). While the same notion of a 'Christian Right' is still virtually unheard of in Indonesia, the attitudes of Pentecostal and evangelical churches towards issues of family and sexuality resemble similar moral conservatism, usually expressed by way of moral panic, such as 'our family values and God's design for the institution of marriage have been under attack!' (interview, 2 February 2014).<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the sphere of governance in the Seven Spheres Movement marks a shift in attitudes of the Pentecostals towards political participation. As discussed earlier, the Pentecostals are not generally known to be active in 'worldly' issues such as politics and the struggle for liberation and justice' (Anderson, 2004: 261), as they regard 'politics as dirty' (Budijanto, 2009: 166). However, this is no longer valid as Miller and Yamamori observe: 'Pentecostals no longer see the world as a place from which to escape – the sectarian view – but instead as a place they want to make better' (2007: 30). For instance, Goh's analysis on the Pentecostal movement in Singapore provides a nuanced insight into how local Pentecostals creatively exercised agency in engaging with the state and society through practical ideologies and contextual theologies (Goh, 2010). In other words, they are selective in their political involvement so that it will lead to certain practical objectives. One such objective, according to Pastor Handojo, is to 'create a clean government' (interview, 2 February 2014). More generally, the Indonesian Pentecostals now recognize that politics is an important platform to gain a voice in the parliament, to effect change, and to realize their seven spheres agenda. As such, the Bethel Church of Indonesia has been fielding its members to compete in local and national elections in recent years (interview, Deputy Chairman of the Youth and Children Ministry at Bethel Church of Indonesia, 28 November 2014).

### **Recasting the two events: Converging or diverging aspirations?**

The above discussion has demonstrated how the global Seven Spheres Movement has been adapted to the local context of Indonesia. For an enormous project like this to succeed, the ability to mobilize financial capital and the collective effort of all Christians are required. Thus, a trans-denominational network like JDN has tried to appeal to the ecumenical and evangelical camps by providing convergent platforms for all three Christian streams to collaborate. One such platform is the ‘Rise for One’ mega-concert, described at the beginning of the article. The concert is symbolically significant in showcasing the unity, power, and financial capital of the Christians, notwithstanding the fact that only less than one-fifth of the stadium seats were filled. A committee member of the organizing team told me, ‘Indonesians like to be impressed by something grand’, hence the organizer chose this colossal venue (interview, 28 November 2014). The event has featured the chairpersons of all three national communions of ecumenical, evangelical, and Pentecostal churches as the concert speakers, showing a rare display of unity.

The overt spectacle of nationalism in the opening of the concert is precisely a result of the politics of exclusion in Indonesia where Christians feel increasingly marginalized in the process of what they perceive as rapid Islamization. The nationalistic performance was in fact an enactment of national belonging and a claim to cultural citizenship, and at the same time, an attempt to de-emphasize interdenominational differences through presenting an imagined unified national identity. This phenomenon is similar to the ‘spiritual nationalism’ described by Cao (2012), where the once-marginalized and victimized urban Chinese Christians in China adapt Western-imported Pentecostalism to the folk Chinese mode of religiosity, fashion themselves as modern religious subjects compatible with the nation-building project, and contribute to the rise of nationalism from below. Nonetheless, while the concert presented itself to be an ecumenical gathering, in reality, the majority of the participants were from Pentecostal churches. This is not surprising because this kind of mega-worship concert is characteristic of a Pentecostal event that evinces ‘collective effervescence and the heightening of spiritual experiences’ (Goh, 2010: 66) and because of the leading role taken by the Pentecostals in the event organizing team.

Since the Dutch colonial period, the Christian minority has always maintained a patron–client relationship with power holders to seek protection and favor. This has continued to the present day and was evident in the patronage organizers of ‘Rise for One’ sought from Major General (Ret.) Darpito Pudyastunggoro, a former Christian general retired from the military command area of Jakarta (Kodam Jaya). Patronage is the only way to access security in the absence of state protection. Without such backing, the organizers could not ensure safety of the congregation, especially given that the concert was held in a symbolic public venue. The security for the event was very tight, as the conspicuous presence of military forces around the venue evinced. The concert went ahead ostensibly without a hitch, free from harassment from radical Islamist vigilantes who have frequently carried out attacks in various public gatherings of a similar nature. The ability to deploy military forces points to the connections that the organizers command, but also, more importantly, to the financial support of a handful of rich Chinese Christian capitalists who generously funded the event (interview, Deputy Chairman of the Youth and Children Ministry at Bethel Church of Indonesia, 28 November 2014).

The presence of Korean speakers at the events is also revealing. Christian mission organizations in Korea such as the Korea Wave Jesus Movement (KWJM) have been riding on the rise of K-pop in the region to reach out to nonbelievers. Under the auspices of the KWJM, Korean Christian bands frequently perform in major Indonesian cities at concerts that attract Christian youths in their thousands. Moreover, many Indonesian Pentecostal leaders look to the ‘Korean model’ for inspiration in church growth and economic development. Indeed, Protestant Christianity has played an indispensable role in developing South Korea’s economy and civil society (Cho, 2014; Kim, 2014). To many Koreans, Christianity is considered to be synonymous with modernity so that ‘conversion to Protestantism represented an effective method of becoming a modern individual’ (Cho, 2014: 316).<sup>11</sup> During the period of industrialization and urbanization, Pentecostal churches such as the Yoido Full Gospel Church provided a potent resource and direction for rural migrants, impoverished populations who were at the margins of development, and those who found themselves lost amid such rapid socioeconomic transformations (Cho, 2014). Behind the success of the Yoido Full Gospel Church is Yonggi Cho’s ‘Prosperity Gospel,’ which insists that poverty is not a virtue but a curse – a powerful rhetoric that reverberated with the nation’s developmental agenda (Kim, 2014). The extension of the Korean model beyond church growth to national development against the backdrop of a conspicuous display of nationalism at the ‘Rise for One’ concert evoked a Christian imagination of national belonging and an alternative modernity that is both Asian and Christian.

The case of the National Prayer Network demonstrates the ways in which a contemporary urban Christian movement strategically moves beyond denominational boundaries to realize the ambitious objective of penetrating the seven spheres of culture. Capitalism is central to its success, as financial resources and the structure of consumerist capitalism are key components of the movement. Budijanto reminds us that, in Indonesia, ‘economic strength entails connectedness to government officials and to power’ (2009: 165). Hence, while mainline ecumenical churches historically have had access to politics, they are rapidly losing ground compared to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that have strong financiers. The Jakarta Theological Seminary foregrounds a different kind of Christian aspiration that represents the rapidly diminishing voice of a liberal and inclusive religiosity in an uncertain world where fundamentalism claims to provide security and answers. As the bastion of ecumenical and, some claim, ‘liberal’ theology, the JTS has foregrounded a progressive Christian movement in Indonesia by pushing various normative boundaries, including gender and sexuality. In 2014, the seminary also volunteered to be one the 12 venues to host the Queer Film Festival (QFF) in Jakarta, despite the potential backlash from radical Islamic vigilantes who, in previous years, have threatened to burn down a venue where the QFF was held (The Guardian, 29 September 2010). The seminary took a major risk in making such a bold statement in promoting the rights of LGBTQ people in a country where intolerance towards minorities has been rising (The Straits Times, 30 October 2015) and where such an endeavor could be seen as highly controversial, if not provocative.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of posing Islam as a threat and citing the changing family structure as a moral panic like its Pentecostal counterparts, the seminary has focused on social justice, inclusivity, and dialogue. While this seminary is not representative of all ecumenical institutions or churches in Indonesia, where silence has been the most common response to homosexuality, for most of them still perceive the topic to be a taboo, organizing a conference like this and making an inclusive stance towards LGBTQ could mean funding withdrawal from donor churches which take a conservative stance on this issue. In spite of such risk, the seminary proceeded with its conviction to forge solidarity with sexual minorities, making it a leading

progressive Christian voice in Indonesia that provides an alternative to the conservative anti-gay discourse promoted by the increasingly assertive Christian Right Movement in Asia.

While the aspirations conveyed in the Seven Spheres Movement and the LGBTQ conference are vastly different, a point of convergence between the two has been the identical influence of global cultural and religious politics on the urban middle-class Christians in both camps. Occupying opposite ends of the spectrum, both the conservative right-wing Christian values espoused by the seven mountains of culture movement and the liberal left-wing acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identity reflect a version of American politics that has been imported and adapted to the Indonesian context. The confluences among the global, local, and urban thus reinforce the fact that Christian aspirations in Indonesia must be examined in the contexts of the historical trajectory of Indonesian modernity, forces of globalization and transnational influence, the role of financial capital, and the development of Islam – the indispensable religious ‘Other’ to this minority religion.

## **Conclusion**

The city is a dynamic site for the intersection of modernity, capitalism, and globalization, as well as a locus for the competition of ideologies, resources, and space. The urban space of Jakarta provides a fertile ground for both symbolic and material productions of religious aspirations and social imaginations among middle-class urbanites who are not embedded in structures and traditions, and who have a high level of mobility and adaptability to change. The ‘Rise for One’ mega-concert and the LGBTQ conference demonstrate precisely the ways in which two different Christian political ideologies were articulated, performed, and celebrated in an urban space amid forces of nationalism, capitalism, and globalization, which worked in tandem in giving material shape to both events. It is not feasible that events like these could be held outside the city for practical and ideological reasons such as the resources and space required for a mega-concert, the availability of a participatory young middle-class audience, and a critical mass that are presumably familiar and are willing to engage with controversial issues on sexuality.

As the Christians are heterogeneous, their agenda and aspirations are also expectedly omnifarious. This article has offered a glimpse into contrasting Christian aspirations that can be grossly generalized to represent two theologically incommensurable camps between the Pentecostals and the ecumenicals. Due to the different ways that the Christian mission is construed, the former focuses on winning souls for Christ and offers salvation for the afterlife, while the latter engages in social justice and minority rights in the here and now. A more nuanced analysis of the current Christian movements reveals that this dichotomy may not sufficiently capture some of the changes within, and border crossings among, these movements. For instance, as a malleable and adaptive religion, the Pentecostals have been increasingly active in social and political engagements as demonstrated in the emphasis on ‘governance’ in the Seven Sphere Movement, and are characterized by what Miller and Yamamori (2007) referred to as ‘progressive’ or ‘socially engaged’ Pentecostalism. Furthermore, the emergence of various trans-denominational Christian networks has presented a new deterritorialized and reterritorialized form of Christian expression through an unprecedented attempt to cross theological boundaries and unite disparate Christian groups to work on towards a larger objective.

These new developments notwithstanding, the question of motives is the key to understanding whether such a phenomenon is merely a case of old wine in a new bottle. While the ‘Rise for One’ concert shows an exceptional Christian ecumenism, in the literal sense of the word, beneath the ephemeral display of unity, however, it is questionable how much theological convergence there is among these groups. Such skepticism is corroborated by Robeck (1999), who argued that because Pentecostals do not understand the value of ecumenical theology, they do not trust or practice what the ecumenicals stand for. It is also quite evident that the new found enthusiasm in social and political participation among Indonesian Pentecostals stems primarily from the motivation to realize the larger agenda of dominating the seven spheres of culture. Moreover, the socially conservative interpretation of family and the inimical attitude towards homosexuality ostensibly rendered the abyss between the Pentecostals and their counterparts at the Jakarta Theological Seminary unbridgeable.

The resurgence of conservative Islam in Southeast Asia in recent decades has witnessed opportunistic religious and political leaders using a reductionist discourse about ‘Christianization’ to create a common enemy and a sense of moral panic in order to unify the diverse Muslim population to achieve certain political ends. In this process, the Christians are homogenized, vilified, and reified. On the other hand, the rise of Pentecostalism in the Southeast Asia has allowed the conservative Christian Right Movement from the United States to ride the wave and denominated the Christian discourse in the region. An example apposite to this is the Seven Mountains of Culture Movement that has offered a carefully crafted grand aspiration in an attempt to unify the Christians towards dominating the economic, cultural, and political spheres of influence. Amid such a climate of religious competition, an appreciation of religious pluralism is urgently needed so that religions do not see the Other as a threat.

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## Notes

1. Similar processes were taking place in neighboring countries like Singapore (see Chong, 2015a; Goh, 2010).
2. For example, referring to the context of Singapore, Goh argues that ‘Pentecostalism has been immensely popular because it replaced liberal Christianity in providing a practical contextual framework to make sense of the spiritual telos of the post-colonial nation and engage the developmental ethos of the Singapore state’ (2010: 57; emphasis in original).
3. The chairpersons of the Indonesian Council of Churches had always been male until the current term (2014–2019) when Dr Henriette Tabita Lebang, a female leader from the Toraja Church, was elected as chairperson.
4. Some of the activities of the ecumenicals can be seen on the website of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (formerly known as National Council of Churches) at [www.pgi.or.id](http://www.pgi.or.id).
5. I interviewed the founder on 20 November 2014.

6. Both TWC and Empowered21 are a continuation of the AD2000 Movement. The AD2000 Movement is a global movement for evangelism that sought to spread the Gospel to every person by the year 2000, with a focus on the ‘Christianization of the South’ (Bourdeaux and Jammes, 2013). The movement’s leader, Luis Bush, identified the ‘10/40 Window’ – a rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude – an area where 95% of the world’s least-evangelized poor are believed to be found (see [www.ad2000.org](http://www.ad2000.org)). The movement mobilized over 30 million intercessors to pray for the ‘10/40 Window’ for years before the millennium.

7. See [www.7culturalmountains.org/](http://www.7culturalmountains.org/)

8. Pastor Handojo is an accomplished church planter who has established dozens of Pentecostal churches around Asia, Australia, and America. He is the founder of Transform World Connection Indonesia and is a member of the Asia Cabinet in the Empowered21 Global Council. He is a senior pastor in two Pentecostal megachurches: one in Jakarta that caters mainly to upper-middle-class Chinese Indonesians and the other in Singapore serving a congregation composed primarily of the Indonesian diaspora. He made Singapore the headquarters of his ministry because of Singapore’s strategic location and because of his apprehension towards the rising Islamic forces in Indonesia (interview, 2 February 2014).

9. This requirement has raised controversy and angst among Christian schools in Indonesia who fear losing their Christian character. Many Christian schools circumvent such a demand by having parents sign a consent form to allow their child to fully participate in Christian education, including the religion class, daily morning devotion, weekly chapel service, and an annual retreat (Hoon, 2014).

10. Anderson (2004: 264) argues, ‘Pentecostals sometimes cloud the differences between “moral” issues like abortion and political ones, so that right-wing politicians are seen as having “Christian values.” Included in this debate is the sensitive issue of “gay rights,” where Pentecostals generally agree with the conservative Christian opposition to homosexual practice.’

11. The Korean experience was held as an example for Indonesia by Luis Bush, the founder of the AD2000 and TWC movements, who delivered a paper entitled ‘Transformation from poor to blessed: A Korean case study’ in Surabaya. See [www.disciplinations.org/article/pdf-transformation-poor-blessed-korean-case-study/](http://www.disciplinations.org/article/pdf-transformation-poor-blessed-korean-case-study/) (accessed 25 July 2015).

12. The general religious sentiments towards the LGBTQ minority in Indonesia can be described as hostile. This can be seen in the negative reactions of religious groups in Indonesia towards the recognition of gay marriage by the Supreme Court in the United States in 2015, which prompted the Religious Affairs Minister to state that gay marriage was unacceptable in Indonesia because of religious norms (The Jakarta Post, 2 July 2015). More recently, citing the role of universities as the moral safeguard of the nation, Muhammad Nasir, the Minister for Technology, Research and Higher Education, called for members of the LGBT community to be barred from university campuses (The Jakarta Post, 25 January 2016).

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