

# *A Kaleidoscopic Religion in the Local Context: A Study of Trajectories of Pentecostalism and Pentecostal Socio-Political Engagements in Hong Kong*

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## **Abstract**

This article aims at investigating local developmental trajectories of Pentecostalism, a rapidly growing Christian movement with an emphasis on the ecstatic religious experiences of the Holy Spirit and practices of spiritual gifts, since the late twentieth century and phenomena of its recent socio-political engagements in Hong Kong. However, it has received insufficient academic attention. The research question of this article is: how have different Pentecostal churches and Christians interacted with the socio-political sphere in today's Hong Kong? This article argues that in today's Hong Kong, Pentecostal communities have been phenomenally and theologically kaleidoscopic in their socio-political engagements, in which no single Pentecostal theory can fully depict and interpret their complex realities. An analysis of Pentecostalism and its socio-political dynamics in context needs to take the local context into consideration.

This article proceeds through literature review, historical overview, analysis, and conclusion. Its theoretical framework is grounded on Amos Yong's two typologies in his phenomenology of the Pentecostal body politic to explore the local case. Particularly in the analysis of local Pentecostal social engagements, it pays special attention to Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori's dominant theory of Progressive Pentecostalism in the global landscape. It uses various data for research, including the author's four-year ethnographic fieldwork in over 20 local Pentecostal churches, interviews and conversations with relevant individuals, including pastoral leaders and ordinary congregants, primary documents, such as church publications and newspapers, academic literature, and popular Pentecostal works. This article envisages contributing to both Global Pentecostal Studies and Hong Kong Christian Studies.

## **Introduction**

This article aims to investigate local developmental trajectories of Pentecostalism, a rapidly growing Christian spiritual movement, since

the late twentieth century and the phenomena of its recent socio-political engagements in Hong Kong. Reportedly, Pentecostalism reached 320,000 adherents in Hong Kong in the early 2020s (Johnson and Zurlo). However, it has received insufficient academic attention. The research question of this article is: how have different Pentecostal churches and Christians interacted with the socio-political sphere in today's Hong Kong?

This article argues that in today's Hong Kong, Pentecostal communities have been phenomenally and theologically kaleidoscopic in their socio-political engagements, in which no single Pentecostal theory can fully depict and interpret their complex realities. The use of the term 'kaleidoscopic' in its thesis is inspired by Mayfield's description of the early classical Pentecostal movement in Hong Kong, which "was a kaleidoscopic mix of people with competing ideas and practices" (Kaleidoscopic City 4). Its theoretical framework grounds on Pentecostal scholar Amos Yong's phenomenology of the 'Pentecostal body politic' to explore the local case. Still, an analysis of Hong Kong Pentecostalism and its socio-political dynamics in context needs to take the local context into consideration.

This article proceeds through literature review, historical overview of current Pentecostalism in Hong Kong, analysis, and conclusion. In analysis, the author first explores a variety of local Pentecostal social engagements. The author pays special attention to Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori's dominant theory of Progressive Pentecostalism in the global landscape. Second, the author focuses on the local Pentecostal political engagements in the case of the 2019 social movement.

This article uses a variety of data for research, including the author's four-year ethnographic fieldwork in over twenty local Pentecostal churches, interviews and conversations with relevant individuals, including pastoral leaders and ordinary congregants, primary documents, such as church publications and newspapers, academic literature, and popular Pentecostal works. This article envisages contributing to both Global Pentecostal Studies and Hong Kong Christian Studies.

A widely accepted inclusive definition of 'Pentecostalism' comes from Anderson, who suggests that it "includes all those movements and churches where the emphasis is on an ecstatic experience of the Spirit and a tangible practice of spiritual gifts" (Ends 8). Since its emergence in the early twentieth century, Pentecostalism has been one of the fastest-growing Christian movements worldwide (Robbins 117–18). In their worldview, Pentecostals believe that they can practice various 'charismata' or gifts of the Holy Spirit described in the Holy Bible, including "prophecy, healing, exorcism, speaking in tongues, and revelations through dreams and visions" (Anderson Ends 8).

## Literature Review

This section focuses on relevant literature on Pentecostalism's socio-political engagements in Hong Kong. Despite certain overlapping focuses, one can identify two research pathways in general. The first group is concerned with the societal and/or theological dimensions of Hong Kong Pentecostalism and focuses more on Pentecostalism in relation to the society as well as various Pentecostal phenomena.

Chan offers a local case study of the Shepherd Community Church (SCC) from a sociological lens to analyze its social process from a sect to a religious movement (48–69). A. Liu researches the contextualization of what she termed the Holy Spirit Movements in Hong Kong and focuses on the relationship between the Pentecostal movements and traditional Chinese religious culture (65–95). Kung offers a theological reflection on the outpouring of the Spirit as the identity of the Pentecostal community with particular reference to the context of Hong Kong (“Outpouring” 3–19). Kung’s later research also focuses on Hong Kong and offers a critical discussion on globalization, ecumenism, and Pentecostalism (“Globalization” 97–122).

Kay’s study tests a set of hypotheses of the growth of Pentecostalism in cases of Hong Kong and Singapore, seeing that, among other elements, charismatic empowerment is a critical factor pointing to Pentecostal growth (“Wind Blows” 128–48). Kay similarly tests certain hypotheses to examine the growth of Pentecostal-style churches in Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong in another research (“Pentecostal-style” 14–25). His later study also conducts a comparative analysis of Pentecostal ministers in Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong (“Comparison” 184–203).

Fang’s ethnographic study of praise-and-worship music in Hong Kong in the case of the Revival Christian Church stresses certain functions of the music and constructs a theoretical dialogue with both ethnomusicology and theology (255–83). Brandner’s research is concerned with the historical focus, socio-political engagements, and public theology of Pentecostalism in Hong Kong (“Pentecostals” 117–37). In her case study, Au argues that the Catholic Charismatic renewal as a global religious movement through migration can empower the Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong (“Migrant Spirit” 119–40).

The second group is closely linked to the historical and/or denominational–congregational dimensions of Pentecostalism in Hong Kong. These authors demonstrate significant research interests in early Pentecostalism in Hong Kong, particularly from a historical lens and as a case analysis. Au traces the early trajectories of Pentecostalism and the Pentecostal Mission in Hong Kong and points out early Pentecostal social ministries in her historical research (“Elitism” 63–88; “Collaborations” 85–106). In his study, Iap traces the trajectories of the Pentecostal Mission, Hong Kong and Kowloon, and the Kowloon

Pentecostal Church (61–100). Tai investigates the cross-cultural relation of the Hong Kong Pentecostal Mission and the history of the Kwloon Pentecostal Church in his recent articles (“Pentecostal Mission” 71–103; “Ecclesial Autonomy” 81–106).

Ng focuses on the historical and current developments of the Assemblies of God in Hong Kong (73–95). Mayfield analyzes the early Pentecostal print culture and the mapping of the early Pentecostal network in Hong Kong (“Arrows” 67–81). Mayfield’s recent monograph focuses on the early developmental trajectories of Pentecostalism and its theological and social missions in Hong Kong from 1907 to 1942 (Kaleidoscopic City).

In short, while many relevant studies focus rather on the historical, theological, and congregational perspectives, little research on current Pentecostal socio-political engagements have been done. How have Pentecostal communities developed in Hong Kong since the late twentieth century? Is there a typology to capture their social modalities in Hong Kong? If there is, is it sufficient for interpretation? Also, is there another one to depict their political modalities there, and if there is, is it sufficient or not?

### **A Brief History of Pentecostalism in Hong Kong, 1980s–Present**

Anderson argues for a theory of multiple origins of global Pentecostalism, in which the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, the USA, in 1906, is one significant origin among others (“Origins” 175–85). Numerous participants in this event claimed to have ecstatic experiences of the Holy Spirit, and they believed they were gifted the missionary tongues, a supernatural gift of a foreign language without any pre-learning, and soon went for evangelism and mission across the globe.

The direct historical root of Pentecostalism in Hong Kong is the Azusa Street Revival (Anderson Ends 64–65; Au “Collaborations” 85; Iap 66). The first local Pentecostal church, the Hong Kong Pentecostal Mission, was founded by an Azusa missionary Alfred Garr and two Chinese Christians named Mok Lai Chi and Sung Teng Man in 1907 (Iap 67–68, 72). Soon, more missionaries arrived to establish churches and ministries, including the Pentecostal Holiness Church by Anna M. Deane in 1909, the Assemblies of God (AG) by Mattie S. Ledbetter in about 1928, and the Foursquare Gospel Church (FGC) by Edwin and Beulah Lee in 1936 (Au “Hong Kong” 307–08; Ng 74).

In the post-war context, more classical Pentecostal churches locally emerged and focused on local ministries due to an increased demand for social and educational services among local people. Running schools has been a conventional institutional practice in their responses to local

needs. From the mid-twentieth century to the 1980s, more secondary schools with classical Pentecostal backgrounds were founded. Today, at least six Pentecostal secondary schools are in active operation, including two by the AG, one by the FGC, one by the Hong Kong Pentecostal Holiness Church (HKPHC), and two by the KPC. Observably, over a dozen Pentecostal kindergartens are being run in today's Hong Kong, including eleven by the AG and one by the FGC. In their early progress, the establishment of kindergartens was a common strategy to educate, socialize, and ultimately evangelize especially people in need in the New Territories simultaneously. Meanwhile, at least five primary schools still operate today, including three by the AG and two by the KPC. Almost all identifiable Pentecostal schools today have classical Pentecostal backgrounds, showing that Pentecostal churches have long engaged in local educational ministries for over half a century.

Denominationally speaking, due to political instability, many AG missionaries departed from China and settled in Hong Kong. They cooperated with local adherents to plant churches, preach the classical Pentecostal theology of glossolalia as the initial evidence of Spirit baptism and 'full gospel' message (a four-fold Pentecostal proclamation of Jesus Christ as savior, Spirit baptizer, healer, and soon-coming king), and conduct social and educational ministries, especially through establishments of kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools from the 1980s to the 2000s, simultaneously (Dayton 173; Lam 104–07). In 2000, there were about forty-five AG congregations in Hong Kong, and nearly 8,000 people attended their Sunday services (H. Liu 88). Reportedly, the AG consists of 10,000–60,000 members today (HKCC and DSCCC, CUHK 11).

In 1973, the HKPHC founded the PHC Wing Kwong College and Pentecostal Holiness Church Ling Kwong Bradbury Centre for the Blind, followed by the establishments of Pok Hong Study Centre and Gilead Social Service Centre in the 1990s (Tunstall 87). The HKPHC has been divided in three conferences, including the Hong Kong Conference with nine congregations, the Chinese Conference with three congregations, and the Wing Kwong Conference, with two congregations, including the Wing Kwong Pentecostal Holiness Church, a megachurch with over 4,000 congregants (Chau 21–34; Tunstall 92–94). Similarly, this denomination has reached 20,000–60,000 adherents (HKCC and DSCCC, CUHK 11). Alongside the AG, the number shows that the HKPHC is one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in Hong Kong.

Since the 1980s, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel Hong Kong District (Foursquare Gospel Church) has allocated more resources to its social services. Due to the ageing population in Hong Kong, in 1984 and 1989, the Lung Hang Church Elderly Centre and the Kin Sang Church Elderly Centre were respectively founded, currently serving over 1,900 elderly people (Yuen 5). Today, this denomination

consists of seven congregations, the mentioned elderly centers, Sempole Memorial Secondary School, and Sempole Kindergarten in Hong Kong.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, the Kowloon Pentecostal Church (KPC), derived from the Pentecostal Mission and founded in 1963, also started to penetrate the local educational sphere. It founded Pentecostal Lam Hon Kwong School, a secondary school, in 1983, Pentecostal Gin Mao Sheng Primary School, a primary school, in 1986, and Pentecostal Yu Leung Fat Primary School, a primary school, in 1999 (Iap 79).

While these classical Pentecostal churches gradually developed and expanded their local ministries in Hong Kong since 1907, more neo-Pentecostal communities have emerged and rapidly grown there since the 1980s. The early progress of local neo-Pentecostalism is traceable to two international neo-Pentecostal leaders, John Wimber and John White, who brought spiritual revivals to Hong Kong in 1990 (Atherstone 216; Balcombe 73–74; Yeung 45–64).

Its development was further catalyzed by numerous local neo-Pentecostals, especially Wimber's followers, in which more churches emerged, such as the SCC and The Praise Assembly (TPA) in 1987, Grace Community Church (GCC) and The Vine Church (Vine) in 1997, 611 Bread of Life Christian Church (611 Church) in 2001, and so on. Meanwhile, more neo-Pentecostal parachurches, "usually more flexible in their organizational structure than official church bodies," have also been established (Chan "Christian" 448). They include the Elijah Mission by John Lau in about 1995, Ladder Mission by Wong Shui Kwan and Jubilee Ministries by Agnes Liu in about 1997, Kingdom Ministries by Andrew Ho in 2004, and Incubator Ministries by Eddie Ma in 2008.

These communities no longer focus on classical Pentecostal theologies or even abandon them. Neo-Pentecostal theological thoughts vary extremely, including the 24/7 or house of prayer movement, apostolic–prophetic leadership, dominionism, five-fold ministry, harp and bowl worship and prayer, healing and deliverance, kingdom culture, Pentecostal Zionism, prophetic actions, signs and wonders, and spiritual warfare (McClymond "Charismatic Renewal" 40–43; "Neo-Pentecostalism" 449–52; Lewis 316–43). Their societal engagements, which will be discussed later, vary and do not necessarily focus on educational ministry.

## **Local Pentecostal Social Engagements**

Miller and Yamamori outline a Pentecostal stereotype in numerous people's eyes, in which "Pentecostals are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good" (21). Their 'heavenly'-mindedness leads Pentecostal Christians to pay merely attention to "such activities which they consider as spiritual," such as saving souls, and they "neglect

activities that are considered as secular” (Dermawan 205). However, such a Pentecostal stereotype of separating the religious and the secular is not an accurate description of Pentecostalism in Hong Kong (Ng 86–87).

In Hong Kong, Protestant Christianity can be divided into three forms, namely the mainline church, the Evangelical church, and the Pentecostal-Charismatic church (Chan “Zongjiao” 387–90). In Hong Kong Christian Studies, many existing literatures focus mainly on social and educational ministries among non-Pentecostal communities (see, for example, Lee Social Service; Kwok “Early Eighties” 13–52; “Seventies” 145–90; “Identity” 95–120). However, alongside Evangelical parties, Pentecostal churches have also served various social groups, especially the disadvantaged and the marginalized (Brandner Christians 120–21).

### **Varieties of Local Pentecostal Ministries**

Social and educational ministries are common forms of Pentecostal social engagements. Comparatively, Pentecostal social ministries are much more practically kaleidoscopic. Moreover, it is easier to mobilize lay believers to engage in social ministries as these activities require fewer professional qualifications. Some cases can exemplify that.

During the author’s participant observation, many visited Pentecostal churches had various ‘down-to-earth’ strategies to connect society. For instance, TPA in Tsuen Wan often mobilized its lay congregants to join voluntarily regular street evangelism weekly or monthly. These congregants, often in the form of small cell groups, usually targeted people in the nearby areas of Tsuen Wan Station and Yi Pei Square, where they found many new immigrants from China living there. They typically distributed various materials as attractive incentives, ranging from face masks to disinfectant wipes, to people on the streets while talking to those people about their Christian faith simultaneously.

Likewise, in the GCC, some young congregants often engaged in society through material distribution to ‘bless others.’ Elena (pseudonym), a church’s lay leader, opined that her ministries were directly linked to evangelization:

We [...] go to bless [our] community. For example, if possible, which we have tried before, [...] we may need to buy some supplies to bless some people, such as cleaners, or perhaps [food] from McDonald’s for [the homeless]. We use these modes to [actualize] our faith in a real way.

I think [these practices] can allow more different people to get to know Jesus through the church or through the lives of

Christians. Because when we usually come back to the church, maybe 90% of us are already believers in Jesus, but [these practices are] about how we go into this community to let some non-believers or some people who wouldn't go to church [...] also get to know God.

Similarly, the New Man Alive, a small neo-Pentecostal church in Kowloon, has started its ministry of distributing lunch boxes regularly to people in need, such as the homeless and the poor, since early 2024. To the church, such a ministry is an effective manner for evangelization, in which every time it could convert many individuals. Similar strategic manners, ranging from home visit to caring for the elderly, are adopted by both classical Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches today, including some visited AG and TPA congregations to supplement their evangelism.

As mentioned, historically, Pentecostal churches actively responded to local educational needs through the establishment of schools. Although most of these schools today posit themselves nowadays as secular (or non-religious) and public educational institutions to provide schooling services rather than as missional institutions for evangelism and spread of the Pentecostal message of the full gospel and more independent from Pentecostal churches in terms of organizational operation, some of them still indirectly link to Pentecostal mission of evangelism. Some Pentecostal churches, like some congregations of the KPC, have settled in the halls or other places at their established schools for regular religious activities, such as corporate worship services and prayer meetings. In religious gatherings, the congregants, usually including converted students and their parents, go to these schools to attend Pentecostal rituals, such as worship, prayer, sermon, and altar call, and those secular schooling spaces began to transform into sacred or religious spaces through these rituals.

In short, many Pentecostal churches have long engaged in society, alongside Evangelical and mainline churches. The cases above not only wipe out the stereotype of Pentecostal otherworldliness but also exemplify the diversity and continuity of their social engagements.

## **Revisiting the Thesis of Progressive Pentecostalism**

Using cases worldwide, including a few cases from Hong Kong, Miller and Yamamori identify an emerging phenomenon within global Pentecostalism as a theological counterforce against Pentecostal otherworldliness (7, 9, 61, 99–105). In particular, Miller points out that:

Historically, it is true that Pentecostals were very other-worldly, with many of their members evangelising their neighbours as



they waited expectantly for the imminent return of Christ. This other-worldly characteristic of Pentecostalism, however, is changing. There is an emergent group of Pentecostals who are pursuing the integral or holistic gospel in response to what they see as the example of Jesus who ministered both to people's physical needs as well as preached about the coming Kingdom of God. (278)

Miller and Yamamori term these adherents Progressive Pentecostals (1–5). These adherents are “inspired by the Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus, seek to address holistically the spiritual, physical, and social needs of people in their community,” and those Progressive Pentecostal churches are programmatic in their social ministries, which “are available to everyone in the community and, therefore, they are not simply incentives for people to convert to Christianity or join their church” (Miller 280). Their Progressive Pentecostal activities vary, but typically “are primarily humanitarian in nature (such as feeding and clothing people),” “are intended to serve people in moments of personal crisis (such as divorce, addiction, and depression), and [...] are attempting to promote community development and social transformation through education, economic development, and/or policy change” (Miller 281).

The two scholars observe a growing force of Progressive Pentecostalism in the so-called “developing world,” especially the “global south” or “Pentecostal churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America with a focus on their social ministries” (Miller 275–77; Miller and Yamamori 5–7). On the surface, many Pentecostal churches in Hong Kong seem to be Progressive, in which social ministry is at the heart of the Christian mission in light of the neighborly love of Jesus Christ as an example to be imitated in order to become good neighbors who help address people's social needs, seeing that social ministry does not stand in opposition to evangelism on earth (Miller 279–80).

Still, are local Pentecostal churches involved in educational and social ministries necessarily Progressive? Since local Pentecostal communities are phenomenally kaleidoscopic in nature, apparently, Progressive Pentecostalism is merely an option in Hong Kong. However, is there a typology to capture their realities?

### **Local Pentecostal Social Engagements as Phenomenally Kaleidoscopic**

Yong suggests that alternative forms exist to capture their realities in relation to the social dimension. Yong proposes the “phenomenology of the pentecostal body politic” to argue “that pentecostalism invites not one but many forms of political, economic, and social postures and

practices” (38). He typologizes Pentecostal social attitudes into three types, namely (1) pentecostal sectarianism, which some adherents emphasize a counter-cultural theological ethos, (2) pentecostal conservatism, which similarly, adherents particularly value moral and cultural conservatism, and (3) pentecostal progressivism, where adherents, especially those in the global south, favor socio-cultural activism to connect people in need and focus significantly on holistic salvation of the “whole person,” integration of mission and social ministry, and/or spiritual–social transformation (Yong 26–37). The third type points to Miller and Yamamori’s thesis.

The author’s response to whether there is a phenomenon of Progressive Pentecostalism in Hong Kong points to a suspicious attitude. First, the impact of social transformation by local Pentecostal communities, if any, is phenomenally ambiguous, insufficiently evident, and hardly measurable. Second, one needs to analyze the relationship between Pentecostalism and its local social context instead of imagining and representing the former without an association with the latter. Arguably, the so-called ‘Progressiveness’ is most likely a practical response to the local circumstances.

In Hong Kong, many Pentecostal communities are rather inclined to what the author calls ‘Pentecostal pragmatism.’ Their social campaigns “are pragmatic and results-oriented” as a strategic reaction to their social context (Brandner Christians 128). This form emphasizes flexible and practical contextual responses to identify and address local needs and problems effectively. Informed by fieldwork, the author finds that numerous Pentecostal churches, including AG churches, the GCC, the SCC, and TPA, typically link their social ministries to evangelism. In short, rather than perceiving social engagement as a practice purely out of love in light of God’s love, the author’s interpretation regards this as an effective means to supplement and strengthen evangelization.

While many other mainline and Evangelical churches in Hong Kong have long responded to the local context, Pentecostal churches are also pulled to make valid social responses (Ying “Xianggang” 1–3). Christianity has had a strong social presence in Hong Kong since its arrival (Lo 184–87). Before 1950, churches in Hong Kong encompassed a major social function, which they had sufficient resources to provide people with various social services, such as school, medical, and social welfare services, with governmental financial support (Lo 187). They have continued to do so and have also voiced out on different social issues and acted as religious pressure groups to confront the government (Lo 188). Ying opines those local Evangelical churches regard “social services as merely the means to realise the Great Commission of personal conversion” (“Hong Kong” 81–82).

Consistently, since their arrival, Pentecostal missionaries and churches have engaged in society through educational and social ministries (Au “Elitism” 71–73; Chong and Goh 406; Mayfield

Kaleidoscopic City 113–40). Yet, Pentecostal communities have merely been among others actively engaging in society, and arguably, the so-called Progressiveness is probably a common ethos in the local Christian circle and is not a distinctive Pentecostal characteristic. To put it simply, if one uses the term ‘Progressive’ to label Pentecostal churches with active social engagement, one can also use it to label other mainline and Evangelical churches, which have been even more active in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Pentecostal churches are kaleidoscopic in their social engagements. Some of them do not see that the work of the Spirit takes place in a socio-political arena (Kung “Outpouring” 8). They even avoid speaking of social issues because they are rather inclined to otherworldliness (Kung “Globalization” 117). Some others are rather inclined to conservatism and even stand behind Evangelical churches in debated issues such as gay-friendly legislation (Brandner “Pentecostals” 128, 134–35). The majority are rather socially pragmatic in identifying local needs and problems and coming up with effective tactics to address them to eventually supplement evangelization since their arrival or emergence, practically consistent with that of other mainline and Evangelical churches in Hong Kong.

### **Local Pentecostal Political Engagements**

In today’s Hong Kong, one can observe two phenomena in Christian political engagements. First, most Christian political voices have vanished from the public sphere. Second, there is no single way for churches and individual Christians to engage in politics. The social movements in the 2010s have gradually led to a division within the local Pentecostal circle. Particularly during the 2019 social movement, many congregants could not find a consistent political standpoint with their churches. Not surprisingly, they left their churches due to a disagreement over the churches’ official standpoint—whether the churches supported or opposed the government—or over the churches’ inaction towards the socio-political issues. Nevertheless, many Pentecostal churches and individual Christians have actively engaged in the local political sphere and always have kaleidoscopic political positions.

### **Local Pentecostal Political Postures in Polarization**

In 2019, the anti-extradition law amendment bill movement occurred in Hong Kong. After the Government proposed the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019, different Christian groups quickly responded to its

announcement, arguing either for (blue camp) or against (yellow camp) the bill. While the yellow camp expressed support for democracy and freedom and opposed the bill, the blue camp favored the social, political, and economic status quo and was pro-government. During the movement, those who were in the middle of the spectrum were regarded by the activists as the ‘silent majority’—a group of people indifferent to the movement and with a neutral socio-political attitude. Such a spectrum was applicable to local Pentecostal communities.

The Vine is famous for its strong emphasis on social justice. As mentioned above, the church has actively engaged in local and global social issues, ranging from poverty to human trafficking. Accordingly, on July 17, 2020, the church announced its official viewpoint on the passing of the National Security Law on Facebook, entitled ‘Statement on the National Security Law.’ In the statement, the church urged the government to set up an independent oversight committee (Mai 3).

Accordingly, numerous Christian communities across theological and denominational backgrounds expressed their concern, dissatisfaction, or even opposition to the bill through joint petitions, though most imitators were not authorized by or did not represent their churches. Many Pentecostal adherents were also part of them (see Table 1).

Initiator(s)	Number of Cosigners	Date
Assemblies of God Adherents	303	May 26, 2019
Pentecostal Holiness Church Adherents	943	May 27, 2019
Kowloon Pentecostal Church Adherents	335	May 28, 2019

*Table 1: Pentecostal Joint Petitions to Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill*  
Source: *Christian Times*, no. 1658 (June 9, 2019): i–iv.

However, others had different political views. Some Pentecostal churches loyally supported the government (Brandner “Pentecostals” 128). During the 2019 social movement, the author met Ted (pseudonym), a young college graduate from a Pentecostal megachurch. Months after the climax of the movement, the author had a casual meeting with Ted. Surprisingly, he said he left his church. Previously, he attended a Pentecostal church and joined a cell group with the youth in the church. The main reason for his departure was a political one. In his account, a pastor in his former church fiercely supported the government and frequently demonstrated a hostile attitude toward the movement in general and activists in particular. Once, the pastor advocated during a sermon that those activists were possessed by evil spirits. Left with disappointment, Ted is now an ‘unchurched’ Christian on a journey to search for a suitable church. In fact, Ted is not an

exceptional case as the author also encountered other similar cases in different Pentecostal churches.

The tone of that pastor is consistent with Pentecostal dualism of the Spirit and evil spirits. Some Pentecostal churches claim with supernatural reasoning either that the evil spirits possessed an individual or a group of people and controlled them to enact the wrongdoing in the 2019 social movement or that every human party was not morally wrong, but it was the force of the evil spirits behind the whole context. In short, they identified the evil spirits behind the whole socio-political context to launch this spiritual warfare against God and his people. Still, can the political posture of polarization represent the kaleidoscopic characteristic of Hong Kong Pentecostalism? Can it go beyond the dichotomy of pro-government and anti-government attitudes?

Yong identifies three basic Pentecostal political attitudes, namely (1) apolitical pentecostalism, in which some pentecostal groups focus on the soon-coming kingdom of Christ, salvation of an individual's soul, and spirituality rather than political agendas, (2) political pentecostalism, in which some other pentecostal groups show a greater interest in political engagement, ranging from mobilization of voting to elections, treating active social engagement as a spiritual field for warfare against the evil forces to ultimately win the worldly sector for God, and (3) pentecostalism as an alternative civitas and polis (3–14). Apparently, many local Pentecostal communities are more inclined to socio-political activeness than inactiveness, but some choose an alternative political attitude.

### **Local Pentecostal Churches as Alternative Communities**

In Hong Kong, many non-Pentecostal Protestant churches have long voiced out in different socio-political issues. For instance, since the late twentieth century, local ecumenical churches, which “interpret the gospel holistically and consider social involvement as an intrinsic part of the witness and realisation of the gospel,” “have been working with other non-governmental groups in fighting for labour rights, pushing forward community development and even democratising the political system” (Ying “Hong Kong” 82). During the 2019 social movement, many local Christian communities across the denominations, including the Evangelicals, the Pentecostals, and the ecumenicals, showed either pro-2019-movement or anti-2019-movement attitudes (Ying “Guo an” 4–7). However, some Pentecostal communities went beyond such a dichotomy.

Based on Yong's typology, the author also identifies some local churches as ‘alternative cities’ or alternative communities. Discourses

and practices of Pentecostal alternative communities are seemingly apolitical but are “prophetic critique[s] of the existing political order” (Yong 11). Each local Pentecostal alternative community forms unique practices and imaginations of prophetic politics.

The author visited Spiritual Church (pseudonym), a neo-Pentecostal church, for one year. Being discursively cautious, its senior pastor notes on the 2019 social movement that:

[...] we will not issue a statement that [represents] our church’s viewpoint, and the reason for not issuing a statement is because [...] our positions are very diverse. [...] so we will not issue a statement like that. [...] in fact, we will encourage our brothers and sisters to choose [...] a peaceful, rational and non-violent attitude, that [...] we do not encourage our brothers and sisters to be violent [...] we will [...] care about those events, and when we cannot do anything, we will try to help those in need [...] on the pulpit we will [...] talk about this direction, but [...] will not say that we must have any position. Purely standing in the lens of justice or caring [is] how [we] respond.

In praxis, however, Spiritual Church held prayer meetings to cry out for the stability of the city and peace for the activists who engaged or were involved in the social movement. Though implicitly, some adherents further expressed their political views in their prayer rites as indirect political rhetoric. Spiritual Church also advocated a 21-day prayer activity during the movement. With a belief of spiritual warfare that the evil spirits were behind the movement and disturbed peace and harmony in the city, it encouraged and mobilized the congregants to pray and declare God’s victory over the evil spirits by praying in tongues and seeking God to bring peace, harmony, social justice, and healing to the land.

Like Spiritual Church, some Pentecostal churches avoided to announce on political topics officially, but their sermons and/or prayer meetings were concerned with the current social and political topics. Specifically in their prayer meetings, numerous congregants would worship, sing praise songs, dance, bow down, cry out, lift hands, blow the shofars (Jewish horns), wave flags and banners, and pray in tongues collectively to seek God’s supernatural power to transform the circumstances.

For instance, the 611 Church also holds regular monthly prayer meetings to pray for social, economic, and political issues around the world. In a regular meeting, a pastor illustrates some current issues, and a few pastoral leaders lead the congregants to pray in tongues for the issues. The church pays much attention to issues in Hong Kong and China and urges its members to lift their hands and pray loudly. During the movement, the church organized prayers for the healing of the Hong Kong city through worship, speaking in tongues, and declaration

of the victory of God over the evil forces in spiritual warfare. This community believes that the evil spirits were behind this movement:

We were met with the social movement after the Occupy Central in 2014. In the meantime, the international relations are in greater turmoil. What is God doing amid all these? He makes us Warrior Brides who must go through troubles and overcome storms. (Cheung “Warrior Bride”)

We who are spiritual must hold the two-world view – we know that the natural world situation is caused by the battle happening between the darkness and the light in the spiritual realm. Hence we let our prayer work in the spiritual realm so that it will be highly effective. (Cheung “Victory”)

The earthly natural realm is being shaken continuously as strife and wars are going on among the nations. When we pray, we must be aware how real the spiritual realm is. He who follows God is working in the natural realm as well as moving in the spiritual realm. Holding the two-world view, he can be led by the Spirit of God in prayer. (Cheung “Victory”)

These local Pentecostal churches associate their everyday lives with the spiritual factor. In their worldview, evil spirits are hidden behind socio-political crises. They do not intend to engage directly with politics because they believe the spiritual manners, such as prayer in tongues, fasting and warfare prayer and worship, can result in the supernatural healing of Hong Kong city (see also Kirby 62–77). Hence, in their eyes, only through these spiritual practices, those evil spirits can be conquered.

### **Political Escapism as Local Pragmatic Practice**

In the eyes of many locals, churches and Christians are indifferent to local socio-political issues and problems and are merely interested in the religious. Many Pentecostal churches do not publicly speak of their political views for or against the 2019 social movement and the government. Some choose to discuss and/or express their political opinions privately. Observably, their attitude to avoid the discussion lies in their fear of political persecution. Furthermore, they also show fear towards their congregants leaving, criticizing them, or mobilizing other congregants to leave. The author shall regard this attitude as ‘political escapism,’ which is less associated with any Pentecostal theology and goes beyond Yong’s typology.

Pastor Donald (pseudonym) is an experienced pastoral leader in charge of a small Pentecostal church in Kowloon. This church is led by three pastoral couples. While it seems that they have cooperated to lead

their congregation well, they had diverse political views on the 2019 social movement. “We didn’t talk about it at the church; we prayed for it together,” asserted Pastor Donald. Like him, many adherents the author met in various churches did not publicly speak of their political views for or against the 2019 social movement and the government. Some chose to discuss it and/or express their political opinions privately in cell group meetings.

Ekklesia Church (pseudonym), another small Pentecostal church located in Kowloon, usually does not speak of local politics. Its preachers rarely mention politics during sermons, and although the church may pray for the government to have sufficient wisdom to govern the city during prayer rites in worship services and prayer meetings, it does not show any political attitude. Its congregants usually do not discuss local politics with each other during cell group meetings. Lucy (pseudonym), its senior pastor, opines that even when the government angered the public or caused public discontent, the church would not boycott the government and that her church has a principle of ‘not breaking the law’ to guide their political engagement. The same can be said for the case of Revivalist Church (pseudonym), a denominational Pentecostal congregation with about 60 congregants in the New Territories, which shows little interest in political engagements. Its senior pastor opines that her church is concerned with the individual’s spirituality, missional outreach, and spiritual relationship as family rather than politics.

In the field, those who were cautious towards the authors’ research motive were sometimes hesitant or unwilling to discuss the topic with the author, even years after the movement:

No comment.

I don’t know much about politics.

We should probably talk about other topics.

These were among other common responses received in the author’s field exploration. They know that if they show a pro-government attitude, congregants in the yellow camp may leave. If they show a supportive attitude towards the movement, they may face not only the congregant churn but also the potential political pressure or even persecution. Thus, they choose to hide their attitude and conceive of this posture as a proper manner to maintain religious communal harmony and integration. Political escapism is pragmatic in essence, as it identifies possible reactions and consequences and chooses an alternative that best suits their organizational developments. In short, whether Pentecostal or not, local churches with political escapism tend to escape political pressure or controversy and demonstrate a neutral or indifferent attitude.



## Conclusion

This article has briefly depicted some developmental trajectories of Pentecostalism in Hong Kong since the late twentieth century. It has also focused on how Pentecostal communities have engaged in the local socio-political spheres under Amos Yong's two typological frameworks, with special reference to Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori's thesis.

Pragmatism, as shown in some cases, is a useful lens to understand and interpret social and political engagements among some local Pentecostal communities, but meanwhile, it is one among various choices in the Pentecostal kaleidoscope. In contrast to the recent global phenomenon of Progressive Pentecostalism, many Pentecostal churches have long engaged in social and educational ministries, seeing that these pragmatic practices can effectively supplement their evangelism. In political engagements, some Pentecostal communities go beyond the dichotomy of anti-government and pro-government attitudes and seek to engage in politics through spiritually prophetic and pragmatic manners.

To sum up, the author argues that local Pentecostal communities are phenomenally and theologically kaleidoscopic in their socio-political engagements, in which no single Pentecostal theory can fully capture their complex realities. Their praxes even go beyond the listed types in Pentecostal typologies and are closely connected with the local context as contextually pragmatic practices, similar to that of many non-Pentecostal churches and Hong Kongers.

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