Journal Article

A comparison of Pentecostals in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Culture and Belief

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Abstract
Using empirical and quantitative methods Pentecostal ministers are compared in the three locations of Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. After providing an account of the historical backgrounds of Pentecostal churches in these locations, similarities and differences in the samples may be attributed to environmental or cultural effects. The paper concludes that there is evidence that cultural differences affect the views of respondents in a variety of measurable ways including in their opinion of ecumenical cooperation and in their attitudes to the poor or disadvantaged.

Keywords
Pentecostalism Culture Hong Kong Singapore Kuala Lumpur

Introduction

This paper makes a comparison between Pentecostal ministers, specifically Assemblies of God ministers, in the three locations of Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. By selecting ministers who belong to the same denominational group and who share Chinese ethnicity, the intention is to identify variations between them that might be attributed to culture.

Theories of Religion and Culture

Culture, like the word 'religion', is susceptible to numerous overlapping and inexact definitions (James, 1902/2002: 27). Nevertheless the impact of culture upon theology is foundational to the field of Contextual Theology which, for the most part, seeks to show how theology adapts to its cultural settings while retaining sufficient non-cultural elements to retain an identity (cf. Bevans, 2002; Green, 2009; Matheny, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, culture is seen as that set of values – usually sustained by key institutions – within a society which express themselves through symbols, normative behaviour and prevailing (often latently religious) ideals. While it is conventional to distinguish between 'high' culture in the form of the fine arts and classical music of the social elite and 'low' culture in the form of the recreational activities of manual workers (bingo and greyhound racing), this paper avoids what might be called a socially stratified view of culture. Instead it proceeds by dividing culture into three overlapping circles and this allows for similarities and differences between societies to be explored. Hofstede (2001: 27) is concerned to compare values, behaviours, institutions and organisations. In particular the analysis that follows should be seen as belonging to the realm of values and concomitant attitudes.

The first circle is concerned with traditional Chinese culture which, with its animist or latently Buddhist roots, presumes a world of local spirits and the salience of astrological signs. One only has to visit Singapore or Hong Kong at the time of Chinese New Year to hear the firecrackers set off to scare away evil spirits or to be given 'lucky' cards or red ribbons with particular numbers on them to understand the default expectation of spirits actively present in the home or in business or witness, at funerals, the burning of paper money as a sign of piety to make provision for respected ancestors in the afterlife. Pentecostalism, therefore, with its acceptance of an unseen world and the power of the Holy Spirit is more easily compatible with

this traditional Asian culture than it is with the post-Enlightenment rationalistic culture of Europe.

The second circle is concerned with the wider civic or commercial culture in which the church is situated. Here are one notes the disparity between rich and poor, the drive to succeed in business, the importance of herbal and other remedies for all kinds of healing as well as the westernised fringes of sport and entertainment. Chinese preoccupation with gambling has resulted in the building of huge casinos in Singapore, Malaysia and in Macau, a boat ride from Hong Kong. This is the culture of entrepreneurialism, risk-taking and venture capitalism. It is compatible with the faith-based projects of Pentecostal churches.

Additionally, one of the factors determining the choice of locations in this study concerns the extent of religious freedom. Hong Kong is the most completely free; Singapore is free within the legal requirement to maintain a traditional balance between the major religious groupings; and Kuala Lumpur is the least free since the Muslim majority's position is constitutionally safeguarded. Given that Pentecostal churches characteristically evangelise, the legal framework defining religious freedom is an important aspect of this paper's enquiry and dealt with more fully below.

The third circle is the ecumenical culture of relationships between churches. It is an inter-church culture that deals with connections between denominations or between established churches and the newer neo-apostolic networks. It is the predisposition to cooperate or compete with the wider church. Here we will argue that inter-church cooperation becomes especially important where religious freedom is legally restricted.

In 1951 Niebuhr famously identified a five logical positions regarding Christianity and culture. In one Christ is set 'against culture' and in another Christ is set 'within [of] culture'. In the first, Christians find themselves totally at variance with culture, especially in its politico-religious aspects – as when worship of the Emperor was compulsory at the zenith of the Roman Empire – but also in its ancillary religious customs in connection with marriage and burial. In the second, Christians adapt to culture and find affinities between it and their faith. Indeed their faith may prosper insofar as its utilises and builds upon predominant cultural features like respect for the family. The extent to which Pentecostal churches find themselves either against, or supported by, culture in the three chosen locations is a further important theme explored by the enquiry reported here.

Ecclesiastical polity of Assemblies of God

Assemblies of God is organised on a country by country basis such that each country has a similar ecclesiastical polity and no country has control over churches outside its national borders. Thus, for example, American Assemblies of God does not control the Assemblies of God churches in Hong Kong, Singapore or Malaysia even though American missionaries were important to the foundation of these churches. In each case, after the weakening of colonialism following the upheavals of the 1939-45 world war, missionaries withdrew or handed over to nationals. The basic organisational structure of Assemblies of God church groupings, however, remained unchanged even though Malaysia in 1957 and Singapore in 1965 gained political independence. Hong Kong's independence (or hand-back to China) followed in 1997.

The organisational structure is formed of two components: a statement of faith to which ministers subscribe and an annual national conference where decisions are taken by voting. After signing the statement of faith each minister is autonomous (i.e. is not deployed by a

bishop or superintendent) and each congregation is autonomous. Conference decisions are influential on policy and direction but do not impinge on congregational autonomy, which is fiercely guarded. The statement of faith held by Assemblies of God groups is very similar but not identical since national conferences may amend their beliefs if they wish. The distinctive mark of Assemblies of God churches is their acceptance of the role of the Holy Spirit in Christianity today and this acceptance is expressed by a belief in the reality and practice of charismatic gifts (speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing and other gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12). There is also usually a belief in the historical outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the 20th century and a shared eschatology which anticipates the pre-millennial return of Christ.

Because of their acceptance of the authority of a national conference made up of ministers who, if they are pastors, function as representatives of their congregations, there is an historic unwillingness to accept the role of apostles and prophets alongside the restored role of the Holy Spirit, though as the data below will show variations on this matter are detectable.

Historical overview of Assemblies of God in three locations

Each of the locations given here - Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur - is similar in the sense that its statements of faith are almost identical and the training of ministers is provided through national Bible colleges with a commitment to teach in line with the doctrines of the statements of faith. As the individual country histories related below indicate, however, there have been disagreements within national groupings, especially within Hong Kong, although these disagreements have themselves were completely eclipsed by the terrible events of the 1939-45 war which brought Japanese military invasion. Whatever differences occur in local culture will not affect the basic statements of faith that make these churches what they are. The influence of culture will be more subtle.

There is one further feature that needs to be raised at this point. Whereas all these locations were originally British possessions and accepted (in many cases gladly) the imposition of British law including, particularly, trial by jury and the presumed innocence of any arrested citizen, there have been changes in recent years. Trial by jury was abolished in Singapore in 1969 and, in Malaysia, the country's constitution at the point when hand-over from the British occurred was written to forbid the conversion of any Muslim to another religion or, at least, to make conversion extremely difficult. The effect of this has been to limit the churches to Chinese and Indian populations in Malaysia since these two ethnicities are traditionally animist/Buddhist or Hindu.[1]

The Chinese population constitutes about 25% of the total of Malaysia and about 75% of the Singaporean population. In Hong Kong Chinese amount to over 90%. The upshot of these figures is that many of the large Pentecostal churches build on selected aspects of Chinese culture and reject others, as the findings below will indicate. The total population of Singapore is 5.4m, of Hong Kong is 7.1m and of Kuala Lumpur is 1.6m and including, the whole Klang Valley, this rises to 7.2m.

Historical and cultural background

During the 19th century British Colonialism in south-east Asia began to shape the culture of Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia with the result that western science and medicine gained

1 'It is estimated that 75 per cent of all Chinese outside China, Hong Kong and Taiwan reside in Southeast Asia' (Koning and Dhales, 2009, referring to Ma 2003: 13). Both Malaysia and Singapore would be included in the geographical area where the Chinese diaspora has settled.

respect, the education of women was enhanced and courts and laws were more closely adapted to the British model. Religious freedom was part of this colonial package although in each location the identification between Anglicanism and the British establishment led to the building of Anglican cathedrals on prime sites, the appointment of bishops and a tolerated place for Nonconformity similar to that which obtained in Britain itself.

Singapore

An American Assemblies of God missionary couple arrived in Singapore in 1928 and started a Cantonese congregation and, in 1932, an English congregation. A village school was founded at about the same time (Abeysekera, 1992).[2] The combination between worship in a Chinese language and Western-style education was a potent attraction for impoverished Chinese. The command of English opened up a range of civil service or administrative jobs as well as, later, access to the Anglophone world including (relatively) nearby Australia.

While the hated Japanese occupation from 1942 until August 1945 demonstrated that the colonial powers were by no means invincible and, in this way, signalled the beginning of the end of the colonial era, there could hardly be a more dramatic contrast between British and Japanese rule. Even if British government of the time might now might appear to have been imbued with old-fashioned colonialist attitudes, it could not have been worse than the militaristic dictatorship perpetrated by Japan. Singapore was then and remained firmly orientated towards the West. Christianity was viewed as a progressive religion, one that swept aside traditional superstition and aligned itself with democratic values as well as trade and science. It is worth noting at this point that, if Christianity has been portrayed by recent British atheists as repressive, this is not how it has been seen in much of Asia.[3] Indeed, Chinese pragmatism and later Pentecostal claims for healing in answer to prayer turned out to be smoothly compatible.

During the next 40 years Assemblies of God continued to grow at a steady pace and then accelerated. In 1972 the Singaporean charismatic movement was ignited where it was least expected - in an Anglican school (Wong, 1996; Khong, 2012; Poon and Tan, 2012). This had an immediate impact on the Pentecostal churches as well as the mainline churches. It enabled them to work together, to share inter-denominational worship and to listen to the same preachers. By 2008 there were some 51 Assemblies of God congregations in Singapore (Ong, 2008).

Although the charismatic movement enlivened a range of churches and, because it was Anglican-led, retained a balance and respectability that might have been lacking if Pentecostals had been at the forefront of events, there is an alternative account for church growth. This centres on the 1990 Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act which according to Goh (2010) was a consequence of the failure of liberal Christianity within Singapore. Essentially liberal theology, especially Catholic liberal theology, which had pressed for an Asian understanding of Christianity that was communitarian rather than individualistic, rejected many aspects of capitalism and appeared to be ready to set a politically left-leaning agenda until it was confronted by the Singaporean government in 1987. As many as 16 arrests followed and the Roman Catholic Archbishop, after meeting with the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, dismantled

2 Wider evangelical efforts began to be noticeable through John Sung (1901-44) who visited the Singapore seven times between 1935 in 1936 and made a huge impact. He was a Chinese Methodist from mainland China whose ministry was fervent and evangelistic and included praying for healing.

3 Xenophobia and attacks on ‘western imperialism’ were incorporated into routine Maoist propaganda. Christianity was denounced as part of this but then so was Islam and to a lesser extent Buddhism.

the power base of his activists.

Although Goh's account is well argued, it is ultimately unpersuasive since it fails to take account of the growth of Pentecostalism in other parts of the world than Singapore or to note how Buddhism, along with Pentecostalism, also grew towards the end of the 20th-century (Kiong, 2008, table 2.2).

Malaysia

Ma (2007) reports on a revival in Sarawak, east Malaysia, in 1873 that was accompanied by crying, confession of sin and manifestations of charismatic gifts and that led to the formation of new congregations. The first classical Pentecostal missionaries were from American Assemblies of God and they reached Malaysia in 1934 and established a congregation in Kuala Lumpur, mainly by Sunday schools for children and the eventual conversion of parents.

After 1945 scattered believers re-congregated and missionaries returned. Assemblies of God was registered as a denomination in 1953 and, in the same year, a second congregation started and then, in 1957, building work began on a Bible Institute. The underlying thinking here was the same as in Singapore: missionaries would eventually need to return, colonialism was coming to an end and local leadership was required.[4] The success of the Bible Institute led to the starting of 44 new congregations between 1971 and 1980, and of these 11 were in Kuala Lumpur. Further congregations were started in other parts of Malaysia, particularly in the east which had a separate culture, so that by 1987 there were some 200 altogether and by 2012 this had risen to 325.[5]

The charismatic movement of the 1970s also lifted the Pentecostal churches. There do not appear to be any precise figures showing how these churches grew although it was from this time onwards that congregations began to climb to megachurch status. Some of the growth was by transfer from Roman Catholicism or mainline Protestant denominations and almost all of it was among the Chinese. In addition to the growth of classical Pentecostal churches, there was increase among independent neo-Pentecostal churches like that which broke away from, or was expelled by, the anti-charismatic Brethren congregation in Kuala Lumpur in 1981 to form the Full Gospel Tabernacle. Interdenominational charismatic meetings were held by the agency Abundant Life as well as by the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International.

So, as with Singapore, the growth of Pentecostal churches appears to have functioned through a preliminary foundational stage going back to the 1930s and then to have burgeoned once the charismatic movement began. Additionally, there were also large-scale meetings that will have contributed to the confidence of Pentecostals and charismatics.

The political and economic path of Malaysia was less smooth than that of Singapore because of the 'contested citizenship' of the Chinese community. Although the Chinese control 70-75% of private (non-state) businesses within Malaysia, they are not allowed to own land or take appointments in the civil service (Koning and Dahles, 2009). This discrimination contributes to an underlying psychological and cultural uncertainty that was made worse when thousands of Chinese marched through Malay areas in Kuala Lumpur in 1969 demonstrating after a bitterly fought general election. A recent interpretation of events argues that events were

4 After independence in 1957, it became more difficult for missionaries to gain visas to Malaysia.

5 See www.ag.org.my. Ma (2007) reports that in 1975 Malaysian AG had eight churches, 10 preaching points and 450 baptised members among the Tamils but that, by 1985, this had risen to 30 churches with 2,115 members. She attributes this growth to the training provided by the Bible School and its openness to Indian Malaysians.

provoked to trigger a *coup d'état* (Song, 2008). At least 160 were killed in the ensuing riots. This leads Koning and Dahles (2009) to postulate one reason for the growth of charismatic Christianity lies in its special appeal to politically excluded entrepreneurs who find its purposefulness, its endorsement of material prosperity, its emotional warmth, its support networks and its narrative of personal salvation through Jesus quite distinct from what is on offer among the rituals of traditional religion or the formalities of mainline churches.

Against the religious background of the increasing size of Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Malaysia two other events indicate powerful religious undercurrents. In 2004 the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches met in Kuala Lumpur and was addressed by the Malaysian Prime Minister who called for inter-religious dialogue.[6] In 2009 the High Court ruled that the prohibition by the government of the use of the word 'Allah' for God by Roman Catholics was unconstitutional.[7] In effect the High Court appears to have overturned government policy influenced by the separate Sharia courts. So, on the one hand, a senior member of the government gave a welcome impetus to dialogue between religions and, on the other, the religious courts claimed exclusive use of the word 'Allah' thus driving religious groups apart.

Hong Kong

The British army disembarked in Hong Kong harbour in 1842 and the first missionary, Revd Issachar Roberts, stepped ashore the same year (Lo, 1997). The Anglican Church of Hong Kong and the Baptists arrived at almost the same time. In 1882 the Methodists missionaries were followed by the Chinese Rhenish Church in the same decade.[8] There is evidence of at least one Pentecostal arriving in 1912 straight from the fire of Los Angeles' Azusa Street revival.[9] Evangelical Lutherans reached Hong Kong in 1948.

The population of the 200 or so islands that comprise Hong Kong was almost entirely Chinese and they lived in fishing villages. Once the British arrived the population grew rapidly. In less than 30 years new arrivals swelled the numbers to 120,000, and of these less than 10% were Europeans. After 1945, the rising trend resumed and by the early 1950s, there were 2m inhabitants and by the 1960s, over 3m (Kong, 2002). The Civil War (1945-49) in mainland China encouraged migratory waves and many of those who escaped the mainland came to Hong Kong. Among them were missionaries who were expelled by Mao and many of these preferred to settle in Hong Kong in the Chinese culture to which they had become attached. The arrival of a swathe of missionaries delayed the emergence of local leadership of some congregations and, in other spheres, encouraged the setting up of social services for poorer migrants and excellent schools and hospitals for others. It also formed a phalanx of mature Christians of various denominations who would resist the charismatic movement when it

[6] See also http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2010/02/11/malaysia-would-have-been-spared-the-religious-troubles-of-the-past-month-if-inter-religious-dialogues-had-been-institutionalized-as-an-important-aspect-of-nation-building-in-the-past-five-decades/ [accessed 1 April 2012].

[7] See, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168363.htm [accessed 18 Mar 2012] from which the following quotation is taken, 'On December 31, 2009, the High Court of Kuala Lumpur held that the government's prohibition on the Catholic Herald's use of the word "Allah" was unconstitutional, ruling in the Catholic Church's favor. The decision fueled opposition among the Malay majority, resulting in attacks on several places of worship. The government immediately filed an appeal and a stay of the court's decision, and on January 4 the trial court issued the requested stay pending a review of the decision by the Court of Appeals'.

8 Private communication from Dr Nathan Ng of the Baptist College in Hong Kong from whom the dates in this paragraph are taken.

[9] Author's interview with Benjamin Sun, pastor of the First Assemblies of God in Hong Kong (18 Oct 2010). There is however evidence that Alfred Garr visited Hong Kong from the Azusa Street revival in 1907.

eventually arrived.

During the period when China was ruled by doctrinaire communism, Hong Kong was a haven of capitalism and, as the hand-over to China in line with treaty obligations, loomed ever closer, British rule became genuinely concerned with the welfare of its people (Tsang, 2010: 206-208). Church-related schools had been set up in Hong Kong on a similar legal basis to their operation in the UK after 1944. Hospitals likewise were often founded by church money and, in addition to British contributions, North American Christian agencies also made an impact. American Assemblies of God was active very early after 1945 and purchased land for one or more churches and continued investment right through until the 1970s and then, when the charismatic movement in the rest of the world was occurring (it was delayed until the late 1980s in Hong Kong), Spirit-filled congregations might be founded among the international expatriate community using hired rooms in hotels or schools. In the poorer parts of the colony, among the drug addicts, Jackie Pullinger's specialist ministry had begun in the 1960s and led to the formation of a bilingual Vineyard (charismatic) congregation that runs extensive rehabilitation programs using land granted by the Hong Kong government, and an indication that the humanitarian work of charismatic churches was valued within Hong Kong's political culture..

There was a natural uncertainty about the handover to the Communist China although, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping who was far more pragmatic than Mao, a form of state capitalism was encouraged ('It doesn't matter whether a cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice'). Even so, property prices in Hong Kong fell in the 1990s, particularly as all leases were timed to expire when the British handed their colony over. Churches had to decide whether to sell and leave or build and wait for a transfer of authority from London to Beijing. During the 1990s many Chinese left Hong Kong while others exercising faith in a kind of eschatological political event, remained in the knowledge that their missional access to mainland China would improve once Hong Kong was incorporated into its motherland. They trusted the detailed negotiations which had resulted in a Basic Law and the concept of 'one country, two systems' that guaranteed the continuation of the Hong Kong way of life for 50 years, including its democratic freedoms of travel, association and worship (Tsang, 2010: 238-244; see also Campbell, 2009: 292-4).

Hong Kong had always been a place of raw capitalism and trade since its port facilitated an enormous flow of goods out into the world or into mainland China. A significant number of families, starting life as impoverished migrants to Hong Kong, had benefited from the education provided by church schools and, even if they were not committed Christians, had a respect for the church and a positive attitude towards Christianity.[10] Chinese business acumen allowed fortunes to be made in the 1970s and 1980s and many of the wealthy were Christian who applied their entrepreneurialism in a synergy between faith and culture, and huge congregations were built with imposing buildings.

One of the results of animism and traditional Chinese fatalism was to provoke a disproportionate belief in the power of chance which, at its worst, produced gambling addictions. Those who became Christians rejected fatalism and came instead to believe in a sovereign God rather than the caprices of Lady Luck. Similarly, although Chinese medicine has a long history, many Chinese were prepared to give credence to Western medicine because it was more reliable. Pentecostalism, with its teaching of divine healing, spoke to a central

[10] Interviews with author 2012.

feature of Chinese culture. Indeed if men and women were healed in answer to prayer, practical Chinese took this as a reason to believe in the Christian God.

Method

The analysis presented here is derived from quantitative data collected in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. All this is set out against the historical background sketched above.

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire distributed to ministers. The questionnaire contained items about the respondent's religious experience, responsibilities, role, charismatic activity and devotional life. There were also questions about the congregation to which the respondent belonged concerning its structure, size and pattern of meetings. Among these were questions about the percentage of congregational members who exercised spiritual gifts and about the percentage of congregational growth in the preceding 12 months. There were also 174 items written to be answered on a five point Likert scale ranging through strong agreement through a neutral mid-point to strong disagreement and it is these items that are shown in the tables below.

The ministerial questionnaire was distributed in three ways. In Singapore, it was sent out by the Assemblies of God National Office to 170 ministers with a request the booklet be completed and returned anonymously for a small cash reward. Six ministers from City Harvest also participated. In Hong Kong a day conference was held in an Assemblies of God college and the miscellaneous attendees were invited to complete the questionnaire at the end of the morning session. In Kuala Lumpur two further conferences were held, one for an independent charismatic group, the Full Gospel Tabernacle, and the other for Assemblies of God. Where data are collected through conferences, it is impossible to calculate an exact response rate. All data were collected anonymously since no names were written on the booklets. Altogether the ministerial questionnaire was completed by 310 ministers. Of these 125 were based in Singapore, 86 in Hong Kong and 99 in Malaysia. The average age was 48 years, with a range from 20 to 76 and a median of 50.

Nevertheless, in order to ensure the data set tapped into the views of decision-makers and figures of influence, the analysis presented here has been limited to Assemblies of God men and women in leadership positions, some being sole pastors of congregation and others being in team leadership. Of these 72 were based in Singapore, 61 in Malaysia and 27 in Hong Kong. In Singapore 61% were men, in Malaysia 66% and in Hong Kong 63%.

ANOVA is used to compare countries and to generate the probability and F values in tables 1-8. The procedure adopted for this analysis allows comparisons to be made between each combination of the three locations and to show whether one location differs significantly from the other two. Where this is so, the commentary picks this up.

Results and discussion

Insert table 1 about here

In turning to traditional Chinese culture, it is evident that this is the default position in these locations. There is endorsement in Hong Kong, for instance, of the view that the material and spiritual world are closely connected and, conversely, rejection of the proposition that the material world is 'quite independent of the spiritual realm'. When asked to assess common

beliefs, the means in table 1 point to the perception by respondents that their fellow citizens believe the 'spiritual realm is real' and there is usually a spiritual cause behind material events.

Nevertheless there are differences: Hong Kong is significantly more inclined to accept the interdependence of the material world and the spiritual realm while Singapore is significantly more westernised than Malaysia and is more inclined to reject the notion that spiritual causes lie behind material events. There is a significant difference in relation to belief about the material world's independence of the spiritual realm between Hong Kong and Malaysia and, on belief in a spiritual cause behind material events, between Singapore and Malaysia.

Insert table 2 about here

Despite slight differences in their view of the connection between the material world and the spiritual realm, table 2 shows respondents in each location agree that their church teaches about the spiritual realm, and in this sense is in tune with local culture. There is moderate support for the notion of spiritual warfare (which is a kind of strident and assertive prayer).

Insert table 3 about here

In each location respondents are equally adamant that Christians should *not* burn incense to idols and that their faith has freed them from ancestor worship (table 3). These are matters that mark a sharp distinction between Christian Chinese and non-Christian Chinese. Only in respect of the 'power of luck' are there locational differences and it is here that Hong Kong is slightly more in thrall to traditional culture than the other two locations.

Insert table 4 about here

All the locations accept the value of modern medicine and believe it to be 'a God-given blessing', and one should see support for this kind of medicine in the context of the prevalence of Chinese herbal medicine in each location. Support for this item does not indicate lack of support for Chinese herbal medicine but rather shows acculturation such that Chinese are likely to accept both modern medicine and aspects of the Chinese variant. There are differences concerning belief in the laying on of hands for healing where Hong Kong is somewhat less in favour than the other two locations. The most probable explanation for this slight reticence on the part of the Hong Kong Chinese lies with the anti-charismatic teaching prevalent in some Chinese churches.

Insert table 5 about here

In respect to giving practical help to different categories of needy people, the picture is remarkably consistent (table 5). All locations believe that help should be given to the poor and the elderly but Hong Kong is far less inclined to direct its resources to a spread of charitable engagement. We may argue that this is because other Hong Kong churches are involved in humanitarian mission and that Pentecostals are willing to leave this work to them or that Hong Kong has not experienced the stable economic prosperity of Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia which enables Pentecostal Christians to engage in serious and sometimes financially costly charitable enterprises. Alternatively we may see this as a function of an increasing number of migrants brought on by the quota-based open border policy with mainland China since 1997.

Insert table 6 about here

In all three locations the Pentecostal churches are orientated towards the world of work and Christian faith is understood as giving confidence in the workplace (table 6). There is, in this respect, a practical value to the Christian faith in the competitive environment of Southeast Asia. Although the church is not geared up to offer job training, it nevertheless helps people succeed in their jobs and this is part of the value of attendance.

Insert table 7 about here

In respect of the traditional restrictions of holiness teaching, Pentecostal churches show themselves to be mainstream (table 7). Rejection of gambling is uniform and indicates the decisive break with Chinese culture that Christian conversion entails. There is, however, an acceptance of social dancing, cinema attendance and sport, even on Sundays. There are differences between the locations in that Hong Kong is significantly more in favour of social dancing than Malaysia. Singapore and Malaysia are significantly different in respect of sporting activities on Sundays.

If one were to speculate on the reasons for these contrasts it would be to do with the overarching Muslim culture in which Pentecostal churches in Malaysia find themselves.

Insert table 8 about here

In each of the locations respondents believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in the ecumenical movement. This, coming from Pentecostals, is a strong endorsement since it implies that the ecumenical movement is divinely purposed. However in each of the locations there is support for denominational structures over and above interdenominational gatherings. The strongest support for Pentecostal and charismatic church cooperation with other Christians occurs in Malaysia and, again, one might suggest that this is related to the dominant Muslim culture in which the churches find themselves. Christians will feel the need to maintain a united front. However, there are considerable differences in respect of belief in apostolic leadership. This is given a positive endorsement in Malaysia and Singapore but not in Hong Kong and the difference between Hong Kong and the other two locations is statistically significant. A similar picture occurs in respect of belief in the authority of apostles today. Such a lack of support for apostles is likely to stem from the anti-charismatic stance adopted by a number of large and influential Hong Kong churches.

One of possible barriers to ecumenical work in countries with strong ethnicities is interracial disagreement. However, there is strong support for the notion of interracial churches which suggests that, although Chinese majorities are to be found in nearly all Pentecostal churches in Southeast Asia, Indian and other groups are welcome as, indeed, is found by observation. There are Indians and others serving on the staffs of big Pentecostal churches.

In summary, the most consistent and wider cultural differences occur in relation to sympathy for less advantaged groups. Hong Kong is significantly less willing to offer practical help than Singapore and Malaysia. One can only speculate for the reasons behind this but they may lie in the constant arrival of economic migrants from mainland China since 1997; the population rose by over 10% in the period 1996-2011.[11] Anecdotal evidence suggests that long-term Hong

[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Hong_Kong;

Kong residents dislike the pressure put on their schools and hospitals by the newcomers.

In respect of ecumenical culture Malaysia is consistently more favourable than the other two locations and significantly more inclined to believe that Pentecostal and charismatic churches should cooperate with other Christian denominations. Neo-Pentecostal belief in apostolic authority is also significantly higher in Singapore and Malaysia than in Hong Kong. Indeed belief in apostolic leadership is rejected in Hong Kong which suggests that ecumenical culture there is different from the other two locations.

Discussion and conclusion

The item clusters do support the impression given by historical and other discourse. By distinguishing between three different kinds of culture (Chinese, ecumenical and wider cultural dimensions) it is possible to see how respondents relate to typical markers of Chinese life and to the wider cultural features that now pervade the urban environment shared by all three locations.

The ecumenical culture is also distinctive. Singapore is most open to broad ecumenical approaches involving charismatic Anglican and Pentecostal streams. Hong Kong is the least open to a pan-Pentecostal ecumenical approach because there are strong anti-Pentecostal voices in the province and, on top of this, the Pentecostals themselves are not united. It is in Kuala Lumpur where Christians as a whole are in a minority that a different kind of ecumenical unity, perhaps the unity of necessity, may be detectable.

The data presented here and the historical frame within which the data are set demonstrate how an international comparison between essentially the same kinds of churches across three south-east Asian locations may be made. The findings drawn from the three samples in terms of differences and similarities are open to an interpretation that variations are due cultural factors. Further studies would be needed to establish the precise links between congregations and culture in each of the three locations but there appears to be sufficient empirical evidence to suggest that such studies would have value.

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Table 1 Traditional Chinese culture	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**			
		Means (sd)		**df**	**F**	**sig**
The material world and the spiritual realm are closely connected	3.75 (1.11)	3.84 (1.10)	4.08 (1.0)	2,154	.88	NS
Most people in Spore/KL/Hong Kong believe in the spiritual realm	3.76 (.93)	3.65 (.95)	3.81 (.75)	2,155	.38	NS
The material world is quite independent of the spiritual realm	2.20 (1.01)	2.58 (.98)	1.92 (.74)	2,154	5.03	.008
Most people in Spore/KL/Hong Kong believe the spiritual realm is real	3.92 (.79)	3.77 (.95)	3.85 (.83)	2,154	.49	NS
There is usually a spiritual cause behind material events	3.11 (.93)	3.59 (.92)	3.15 1.0)	2,155	4.62	.001

Table 2 Spiritual lifestyle	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**			
Item		**Means (sd)**		**Df**	**F**	**sig**
My Church teaches that the spiritual realm is real	4.44 (.54)	4.52 (.60)	4.20 (.58)	2,155	2.9	NS
Spiritual warfare is part of my life-style	3.79 (1.0)	3.75 (.86)	3.96 (.66)	2,154	.55	NS

Table 3 Effect of faith	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**			
Item		**Means (sd)**		**Df**	**F**	**sig**
The Gospel has freed me from ancestor worship	4.62 (.74)	4.75 (.60)	4.74 (.45)	2,156	.80	NS
Christians should not burn incense to idols	4.82 (.56)	4.89 (.49)	4.89 (.32)	2,157	.35	NS
My faith has rescued me from believing in the power of luck	4.54 (.79)	4.64 (.58)	4.04 (.71)	2,157	7.23	.001

Bonferroni tests show significant difference between Hong Kong and both the other two countries.

Table 4 Church in wider culture	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**			
Item		**Means (sd)**		**Df**	**F**	**sig**
I believe in the laying on of hands for healing	4.58 (.60)	4.64 (.58)	4.27 (.78)	2,156	3.36	.037
I believe modern medicine is a God-given blessing	4.43 (.58)	4.43 (.62)	4.27 (.53)	2,156	.80	NS
Christianity is always opposed to the dominant culture in society	3.0 (1.0)	3.02 (1.0)	3.23 (1.1)	2,156	.50	NS

Bonferroni tests show significant difference between Hong Kong and both the other two countries.

Table 5 Practical concern	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**			
My church ought to be fully involved in giving practical help		**Means (sd)**		**Df**	**F**	**sig**
…to the poor	4.24 (.52)	4.26 (.66)	3.23 (.95)	2, 158	26.07	.000
…to the elderly	4.22 (.51)	4.15 (.09)	3.12 (.99)	2, 158	27.78	.000
…to unmarried mothers	4.14 (.59)	4.13 (.79)	2.88 (.91)	2, 158	32.28	.000
…to drug addicts	4.04 (.66)	3.95 (.81)	2.92 (.89)	2, 158	22.03	.000
…to AIDS sufferers	3.60 (.80)	3.61 (.84)	2.69 (.79)	2, 158	13.56	.000
…to the unemployed	3.82 (.74)	3.57 (.78)	3.00 (.85)	2, 158	10.72	.000

Bonferroni tests show significant difference between Hong Kong and both the other two countries.

Table 6 World of work	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**				
Item		**Means (sd)**			**df**	**F**	**sig**
My faith gives me confidence in the workplace	4.57 (.58)	4.65 (.60)	4.33	(.56)	2,158	2.97	NS
My church teaches me how to succeed in the world of work	4.08 (.92)	4.23 (.79)	3.96	(.81)	2, 158	1.06	NS
My church helps me to succeed in my job	3.71 (.10)	3.87 (.74)	3.74	(.86)	2, 158	.57	NS

Table 7 Holiness teaching	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**			
Item		**Means (sd)**		**df**	**F**	**sig**
Christians should not take place in social dancing	2.14 (.95)	2.51 (1.14)	1.93 (.68)	2,157	3.98	.021
Christians should not attend the cinema	1.86 (.87)	1.75 (.68)	1.81 (.56)	2,156	0.32	NS
Christians should not engage in sporting activities on Sundays	2.00 (.95)	2.48 (1.12)	2.31 (.93)	2,156	7.71	.027
Christians should not gamble	4.39 (.78)	4.48 (.51)	4.50 (.87)	2,155	0.26	NS

Table 8 Ecumenical culture	**S'pore**	**Malaysia**	**HK**			
Item		**Means (sd)**		**df**	**F**	**sig**
Interdenominational gatherings of local Christian leaders are more important than denominational structures	2.76 (.98)	3.00 (1.08)	2.54 (.71)	2,155	2.22	NS
I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the ecumenical movement	4.00 (.78)	4.07 (.69)	3.96 (.92)	2,154	0.21	NS
Pentecostal and charismatic churches should cooperate more with other Christian denominations	3.97 (.90)	4.26 (.51)	3.92 (.69)	2,156	3.19	.044
Apostolic leadership is vital to the 21st-century church	3.69 (.55)	3.75 (.75)	2.81 (.94)	2,155	11.90	.000
I believe in the authority of apostles today	3.77 (.78)	3.70 (.86)	3.19 (1.02)	2,155	4.53	.012
Churches ought to be interracial communities	4.14 (.73)	4.20 (.65)	4.38 (.49)	2,155	0.89	NS