

## **Pentecostal-Charismatic Healing: A Bridge to Christ for Adherents of Chinese Religions in Singapore**

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### **Introduction**

#### Research Focus

Increasing chronic health concerns have driven people to seek healing beyond scientific medicine. One of those ‘beyonds’ has been the emergence of Pentecostal-Charismatic healing practices. While not in opposition to reason or rational observations or one’s experience, these practices are rooted in and flow from God’s self-revelation in the Word (i.e., the Bible and Jesus). Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality draws from and oscillates between theory and practice.<sup>1</sup>

There seems to be little published literature designed to deepen contextual understanding of both the worldview and the practices of divine healing of Chinese religions, which, in Singapore at least, embraces the co-mingling of local Buddhism and Daoism. Thus, the aim of this research is to present a deeper understanding of this worldview, which would offer fresh insights into how Pentecostal-Charismatic healing theories and praxis can be relevant to and attract Chinese religious adherents.

#### Thesis Statement

This paper seeks to provide Christians in Singapore with an understanding of the key beliefs, values, and practices of healing in Chinese religions so that they can explain and demonstrate the relevance

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<sup>1</sup>Nimi Wariboko and L. William Oliverio Jr., “Pentecostal Spirituality as Theory and Praxis of Theology,” *Pneuma* 44, no. 1 (2022): 1.

of Pentecostal-Charismatic healing to non-believers so such could serve as a bridge to Christ.

### Research Scope and Limitations

This research focused on the Chinese community in Singapore (comprising 75.6 percent of the city-state's population<sup>2</sup>) which normally seeks healing and wellness through Chinese religions. The study limited the healing practices of Chinese religious adherents to the common local Buddhist and Daoist practices. It examined and compared common Chinese religious practices with Pentecostal-Charismatic healing in order to (1) demonstrate the relevance of the latter for the Chinese community and (2) assist Christians as they seek to see prayer for healing serve as a bridge to Christ. (The term 'healer' used here refers to a person who prays for healing for the unwell.)

This study was a literature review and as such was limited by the absence of published fieldwork on the interactions and observations of experiences of the Chinese religious adherents in Singapore. The findings and subsequent recommendations from this review are restricted in their application to the Chinese community in Singapore despite its close geographical proximity to other Southeast Asian countries where certain similar Chinese religious practices on healing can be observed.

### Contextual Background

With accelerated industrialization, urbanization, and economic and cultural globalization, Chinese religions in Singapore have adapted to become complex participatory religions of ethnic 'rites of passage' that define the impermanence of an individual's life in the Chinese community.<sup>3</sup> These religions in their performative nature include a variety of modernized pragmatic practices based on the fusion of local Buddhist and Daoist beliefs and practices.

To Singaporeans, health is of great importance across different income levels.<sup>4</sup> Due to their utilitarian and pragmatic attitude, Chinese

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<sup>2</sup>Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language, and Religion" (Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, 2020), <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx>.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel P. S. Goh, "Chinese Religion and the Challenge of Modernity in Malaysia and Singapore: Syncretism, Hybridisation and Transfiguration," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37, no. 1 (2009): 108.

<sup>4</sup>Ah Keng Kau et al., *Understanding Singaporeans: Values, Lifestyles, Aspirations*

religious adherents go to places and to persons associated with miracles of healing and answered prayers.<sup>5</sup>

### Chinese Religious Adherents' Worldview on Healing

Adherents of Chinese religions perceive a world with suffering and consider that religious healing practices can provide meaningful and effective responses to suffering in the lives of individuals and in communities.<sup>6</sup> People are stuck in *Samsara*<sup>7</sup> and can only improve their wellness in life through cycles of rebirth.<sup>8</sup> Singapore's Chinese religious adherents have modernized and rationalized healing practices to expedite their achievement of Buddha's 'enlightenment,' which is also regarded as healing.<sup>9</sup> They interact with ideas of compassion and skillful means to seek liberation from their physical and their emotional pain, which includes frustration, fear, unhappiness, impermanence, sorrow, and disease.<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese religious adherents' perception of healing involves spirit-empowered transactions that are facilitated by mystical practices rooted in visual and verbalization aids.<sup>11</sup> Bodhisattvas, who are devotees to Buddha, have dedicated themselves to help others alleviate their suffering by any means,<sup>12</sup> including healing practices such as meditation, chants, and mantras. The adherents seek to use these practices to connect with spirits that release joy, peace, protection, liberation, and intervention

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and Consumption Behaviors (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2006), 47.

<sup>5</sup>John Clammer, "Religious Pluralism and Chinese Beliefs in Singapore," in *Studies on the Chinese Religion in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia: Chinese Beliefs and Practices in Southeast Asia*, ed. Cheu Hock Tong (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1993), 207.

<sup>6</sup>Sienna R. Craig, "Buddhist Healing Practices," in *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Practice*, eds. Kevin Trainor and Paula Arai (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022), 238.

<sup>7</sup>*Samsara* refers to the cycle of death and rebirth to which life in the material world is bound.

<sup>8</sup>Sarah Shaw, *Introduction to Buddhist Meditation*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2024), 33.

<sup>9</sup>Neena Mahadev, "Secularism and Religious Modernity in Sri Lanka and Singapore: Trans-regional Revivalism Considered," in *Secular in South, East and Southeast Asia* (Cham, Germany: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 289, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89369-3>.

<sup>10</sup>Charles E. Farhadian, *Introducing World Religions: A Christian Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 131.

<sup>11</sup>Farhadian, *Introducing World Religions*, 119.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 157.

in crisis.<sup>13</sup> The bodhisattvas claim these spirits can appear in person, in a vision, or a dream to eradicate illness and other sources of suffering.<sup>14</sup>

The bodhisattvas' motivation for extending healing and good health to others is personal. It helps them accrue notable 'karmic merits' and progress toward personal enlightenment and healing.<sup>15</sup> That motivation resonates with suffering in the Buddhist Four Noble Truths, wherein all of life involves suffering that emanates from unfulfilled desires. However, extending healing to others premised on the personal-karma (i.e., causality) motivation does not seem to align with the Buddhist Eight-Fold Path, which is supposed to be the antidote to suffering and for right actions.

Chinese religious adherents' perspectives on healing include seeing human beings as constituents of a cosmos (i.e., a harmonious universe in which everything is interconnected and interrelated with lives transcending into spiritual realities that extend beyond the present).<sup>16</sup> As a result, the adherents seek to maintain wellness by cultivating moral living and being in harmony with the environment using techniques like spirit possession, meditation, chanting, talismans, and amulets.<sup>17</sup> To achieve this, they engage with 'mediators' to unite with the spirits and spiritual reality. In Singapore, these mediators are known as *Dang-Kis* who serve in Daoist temples to 'connect' to the spirits those who need health and help.<sup>18</sup>

In summary, Chinese religious adherents perceive healing as the means to alleviate suffering in this material world. Such healing involves spirit-empowered transactions in order to achieve harmonious living within themselves and their environment.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Pierce C. Salguero, *A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 39.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>16</sup>Russell Kirkland, "Chinese Religion: Taoism," in *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare*, ed. Cobb, Mark, Puchalski, Christina M. and Rumbold, Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>17</sup>Terence Heng, *Of Gods, Gifts and Ghosts: Spiritual Places in Urban Spaces* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 3.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 83.

## Common Healing Practices in Chinese Religions

### Meditation

In seeking harmonious living, joy, and peace, the Chinese religious adherents adopt a concerted practice of meditation and mindfulness.<sup>19</sup> In meditating, the adherent deliberately and indefinitely focuses on objects. Initial attention is placed on the breathing process, then is extended to emotions, thoughts, and phenomena.<sup>20</sup> Practicing meditation involves mindfulness, which is a state of mental presence and “lucid awareness.”<sup>21</sup> The meditator relaxes and focuses on the subject or an object to quieten the mind until it becomes “one-pointed.”<sup>22</sup> Adherents feel this process helps the meditator achieve the awareness and wisdom to discern what is good and needful.<sup>23</sup> It is thought that through meditation and calming of one’s breathing, the mind is able to enter a state of peacefulness and contentment, which are regarded as wellness and health.<sup>24</sup>

For Christians, wellness and healing are found in Jesus, the immanent, transcendent God and healing source. Whereas for Chinese religious adherents, these desired attributes are derived from the human practice of meditation.<sup>25</sup> Bound by human weaknesses and limitations, can this practice truly release sustainable healing? Even Shaw acknowledges that humans have ingrained tendencies and habitual mental patterns that can negatively influence the meditator’s aspirations for wellness.<sup>26</sup>

Meditation is commonly practiced as a means of obtaining healing, of enabling one to overcome the complexity and challenges of life in the 21st century, and of releasing joy, energy, renewal, and purpose.<sup>27</sup> In urbanized Singapore, Chinese religious adherents seek healing (i.e., relief from daily stress and anxiety from uncertainties) via meditation on their religious teachings. This meditation is claimed to renew internal energy,

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<sup>19</sup>Mahadev, “Secularism and Religious Modernity,” 306.

<sup>20</sup>Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae, “Spiritual Care with Buddhist: Foundations, Essentials and Praxis,” in *Care, Healing, and, Human Well-Being with Interreligious Discourses*, ed. Helmut Weiss, Karl H. Federschimist, Daniel J. Louw, and Linda Sauer Bredvik (South Africa, Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2021), 212.

<sup>21</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi, “What Does Mindfulness Really Mean? A Canonical Perspective,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 12, no. 1 (2011): 19.

<sup>22</sup>Shaw, *Introduction*, 39.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>25</sup>Amos Yong, “Gladness and Sympathetic Joy: Gospel Witness and the Four Noble Truths in Dialogue,” *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 3 (2020): 246.

<sup>26</sup>Shaw, *Introduction*, 63.

<sup>27</sup>Yong, “Gladness and Sympathetic Joy,” 241.

restore mental tranquility, and eventually alleviate stress and anxiety.<sup>28</sup> By maintaining a present focus and being single-minded, adherents aim to attain peace and tranquility, detach themselves from stressors, and cleanse their bodies and minds. All these constitute a form of healing.<sup>29</sup> The adherents associate relief from illnesses and uncertainties in life with the emphasis on karma—good karma yielding positive outcomes and bad karma leading to negative results.<sup>30</sup>

### Chanting

Chanting is a pivotal devotional action in Chinese religions that (it is claimed) helps adherents remember the religious teachings<sup>31</sup> and prepares the mind for meditation.<sup>32</sup> As a primary meditation practice, it seeks to transform the mind and body through sound, meaning, and somatic engagement with these teachings.<sup>33</sup> Adherents feel that chanting can generate positive energy, joy, and calmness<sup>34</sup> and is practiced for blessing and protection.

Chanting involves rhythm and an active adjustment of sound production within the body, but not singing or speaking.<sup>35</sup> The syllables used are imbued with significance and meaning to impart the quality they embody to the chanter when each syllable is enunciated.<sup>36</sup> Chanting specific syllables or a group of them in a mantra allows the chanter to engage the divine.<sup>37</sup>

From a healing perspective, chants commonly invoke the names of Buddha or a bodhisattva in a repeated syllable to become an object of focus.<sup>38</sup> These names are claimed to have the capacity to eliminate distractions, clear impurities, quiet the mind, and give insight.<sup>39</sup> Reciting any part of the Buddha's speech is considered virtuous, as it

<sup>28</sup>Jianbin Xu, "The Lived Experience of Buddhist-Oriented Religious Coping in Late Life: Buddhism as a Cognitive Schema," *Journal of Health Psychology* 26, no. 10 (2021): 1554.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Xu, "The Lived Experience," 1552-1553.

<sup>31</sup>Yulianti, "The Social Role of Chanting Tradition in Indonesia Buddhist Society," in *Teaching Dhamma in New Lands* (Ayutthaya, Thailand: The International Association of Buddhist Universities, 2012), 21.

<sup>32</sup>Shaw, *Introduction*, 103.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Yulianti, "The Social Role," 21.

<sup>35</sup>Shaw, *Introduction*, 88.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

allows the chanter to accumulate karma and eventually achieve a state of enlightenment with the help of protector spirits and demigods.<sup>40</sup> Some adherents believe that chants can purify their intention, support their focus on an object, and help them abandon their human desires.<sup>41</sup> Some also believe that chants can dispel evil spirits, bring happiness and wellness to self, family, and social networks, and transfer merit to departed family members to help ensure better rebirth.<sup>42</sup>

Chanting rites are associated with healing spirits and rendering offerings to these spirits,<sup>43</sup> which suggests a transactional relationship between the chanter and the spirits he needs to appease. But if so claimed, how can chanting be a means to healing and wellness in the form of joy, positive energy, and calmness when the practitioner is constantly encumbered with his obligation to render offerings to the spirits? According to Endres and Lauser, this preoccupation instead instills in the practitioner a fear that the spirits will not heal but rather bring calamities to him and his family.<sup>44</sup>

In summary, short, powerful utterances or incantations are believed to be able to unleash the powers of religious teachings and associated spirits to heal and protect Chinese religious adherents from disease.<sup>45</sup> The effects of regular chanting are understood as coming about through the harnessing of enlightened wisdom to change their attitudes and actions and to improve their lives, constituting the holistic healing that underlines the adherents' worldview.<sup>46</sup>

### Talismans and Amulets

Sutras of the Chinese religions' teachings are regarded as having purifying or protective powers and thus are worshipped as material objects and used as protective talismans.<sup>47</sup> Their preparation is regarded as a closely related healing activity.<sup>48</sup> It is claimed that talismans,

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<sup>40</sup>Yulianti, "The Social Role," 21.

<sup>41</sup>Shaw, *Introduction*, 86.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>43</sup>Craig, "Buddhist Healing Practices," 239.

<sup>44</sup>Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser, "Multivocal Arenas of Modern Enchantment in Southeast Asia," in *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 19-20.

<sup>45</sup>Salguero, *A Global History*, 43.

<sup>46</sup>Jessica McCarthy, "Chanting Buddhas: Ritual and Language in a Lay Nichiren Buddhist Organization," in *Department of Theology and Religious Studies* (London: King's College, 2015), 48.

<sup>47</sup>Salguero, *A Global History*, 43.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

amulets, and associated rituals regulate the emotions and interpersonal relationships of those who seek healing. In Singapore, talismans may be worn on the body, displayed, or ingested to ‘harness’ their purifying influences and protective purposes.<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to the need for religious objects, the Bible points to Jesus as the authority for healing and miracles based on his direct command (Mark 1:25; Luke 8:29; Matt 17:18). He gave his disciples authority to cast out evil spirits and heal every kind of disease and illness, instructing them to take nothing for their mission (Luke 9:1-3). In the Book of Acts, the disciples performed healing in the name of Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 3:6-7; 9:34; 16:18), there being no need for any manmade religious objects. In the accounts of healing, the woman with the flow of blood who touched Jesus’ garment (Luke 8:43-48) and healing through handkerchiefs that had touched Paul’s skin (Acts 19:11-12), the garment and handkerchiefs were not religious objects but rather symbolic of Jesus’ and Paul’s close presence to God and were simply channels of his power to heal.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Dang-Ki* (a form of Shamanism)

Spirit-possession practices are considered to have therapeutic effects on one’s mental health and overall well-being, as they are used for healing and communicating with ancestors and spirits.<sup>51</sup> These practices are felt to connect the spirits with the Chinese religious adherents.<sup>52</sup> A common way for these spirits to manifest is through a person’s mediating body.<sup>53</sup> In Singapore, the *Dang-Kis* enter into ritual trances as they ‘perform’ in accordance with drum beats, sounds, and external spiritual powers that take possession of their bodies. The spirits are thought to be able to convey wisdom and knowledge.<sup>54</sup> Worship, offerings, and rites are rendered both to propitiate them and to avoid illnesses, disasters, and misfortune, reflecting the transactional relationship between adherents and spirits.<sup>55</sup>

During the trance, the *Dang-Kis* are believed to become the spirits, manifesting their behaviors and mannerisms. They seemingly ascend

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<sup>49</sup>Heng, *Of Gods*, 7.

<sup>50</sup>John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 177-178.

<sup>51</sup>Endres and Lauser, “Multivocal Arenas,” 19-20.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.



to the place of the spirits and descend into the underworld, as they are empowered supernaturally to bless and admonish.<sup>56</sup> The different ways that the adherents transact with the spirit world unveil the creative nature of the spirit practices. These practices can be adapted to evolving circumstances in order to offer healing, which appeals to the adherents' pragmatic attitude.<sup>57</sup>

For healing to take place, Chinese religious adherents believe that the *Dang-Kis* enact a shared mythic world and persuasively influence the adherents emotionally to be attached to the objects or instruments used in the trances.<sup>58</sup> A *Dang-Ki* is considered a god incarnate and can pierce his body with swords and rods to take on the spirit power that's driven into the flesh.<sup>59</sup> Self-mortification by the *Dang-Kis* is perceived as a demonstration of their invulnerability—a perception that incentivizes the adherents to worship them.<sup>60</sup>

In Singapore, concerns brought to the spirits through the *Dang-Kis* during spirit possession commonly pertain to health and illnesses.<sup>61</sup> The spirits 'address' these issues with moral advice, prescribe talismans, provide herbs and acupuncture, and perform rituals to ward off evil spirits.

To summarize this section—The practices and attendant ritual interventions are based on the need to both appease the spirits and gain access to their power. Use of meditation and chanting is to focus the adherents' minds on religious teachings that are supposed to release peace and tranquility. Healing can be 'stored' in consecrated objects like talismans and amulets for protection. Chinese religious healing rites involve a variety of material objects that can capture, preserve, and transport healing power. While these religious healing practices may bear some observable semblances with Pentecostal-Charismatic healing practices, the latter's foundational principles are critically different.

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<sup>56</sup>David Burnett, *World of the Spirits: A Christian Perspective on Traditional and Folk Religions* (Mill Hill, London: Monarch Books, 2000), 180.

<sup>57</sup>Endres and Lauser, "Multivocal Arenas," 15.

<sup>58</sup>B. O. Lee, L. J. Kirmayer, and D. Groleau, "Therapeutic Processes and Perceived Helpfulness of Dang-Ki (Chinese Shamanism) from the Symbolic Healing Perspective," *Culture, Medicine & Psychiatry* 34, no. 1 (2010): 77.

<sup>59</sup>Margaret Chan, "Tangki War Magic," in *War Magic: Religion, Sorcery, and Performance*, ed. D. S. Farrer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 38.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>61</sup>Boon-Ooi Lee and Laurence J. Kirmayer, "Dang-Ki Healing: An Embodied Relational Healing Practice in Singapore," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 57, no. 6 (2020): 788.

### Pentecostal-Charismatic Healing and Practices

Pentecostal-Charismatic healing, an outcome of a believer's transformation by the Holy Spirit, sends that believer forth into the world with soteriological praxis to improve practices to heal the sick.<sup>62</sup> These practices remain connected with ritualistic ones at the altar plus the redeeming presence of God.<sup>63</sup> Although Pentecostal-Charismatic healing is commonly perceived as an extension of biblical narratives regarding salvation, sanctification, and Spirit baptism, these healing practices are adapted to local cultural contexts without compromising the gospel message.<sup>64</sup> In this way, Chinese religious adherents can better understand the Pentecostal-Charismatic explanations of healing and sicknesses. These two worldviews have similarities of considering health and wellness as flowing from a right relationship with the natural and spiritual worlds.<sup>65</sup> Following are the key aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic healing.

#### Faith in and Authority of the Name of Jesus Christ

Pentecostal-Charismatic healing involves faith in prayer, testimony, and other forms of articulation amidst opposing circumstances.<sup>66</sup> This practice of faith requires active participation by the 'healer' invoking the name of Jesus as seen in Acts 3:6-7, where Peter took a crippled man's hand, lifted him, and authoritatively commanded him "in Jesus' name" to stand up and walk. That authority anchors the availability of Pentecostal-Charismatic healing in his abiding presence (notwithstanding that timing of the healing rests with God).<sup>67</sup> The phrase 'in the name of Jesus' directs his sovereign authority to the seeker.<sup>68</sup>

The healing accounts of Stephen, Philip, and Ananias in the Book of Acts further demonstrate the presence and authority of Jesus, who

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<sup>62</sup>Wolfgang Vondey, *Living the Full Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing PIC), 108.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Allan Anderson, "Contextualization in Pentecostalism: A Multicultural Perspective," *International Review of Mission Research* 41, no. 1 (2017): 34.

<sup>65</sup>Candy Gunther Brown, "Introduction: Pentecostalism and the Globalization of Illness and Healing," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

<sup>66</sup>Vondey, *Living the Full Gospel*, 110.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Keith Warrington, "James 5:14-18: Healing Then and Now," *International Review of Mission* 93, no. 370-371 (2004): 364.

imparted that ministry to his disciples.<sup>69</sup> His sovereignty in divine healing cannot be manipulated by anyone, including the disciples as his servants and healing instruments (Acts 2:18-19). When Simon the sorcerer offered money to procure the power in Peter's healing acts that were anointed by God's Spirit, the apostle rebuked him for his unrighteousness (Acts 8:18-21). God's divine healing process calls for believing, for fighting against fear and doubts, and for speaking words of faith as points of contact when faith is released.<sup>70</sup> Preaching the word of God is central because healing is based on faith in Jesus invoked by hearing God's Word (Rom 10:17).

### Healing Practices

Pentecostal-Charismatic healing involves praying for the sick with short commands, simple prayers of faith, speaking in tongues, testimonies, intercessions, tarrying in the presence of God, fasting prayer, and 'praying through' at the altar until it is manifested.<sup>71</sup> The practices adopted are varied and include the laying on of hands (Luke 4:40; Mark 6:5), anointing with oil (Jas 5:13-15), and other means (e.g., Peter's shadow [Acts 5:15], cloths from Paul's body [Acts 19:12], Jesus' use of saliva [Mark 7:33-34; 8:23-25]).

Physical touch to heal the sick is an extension of the prayer of faith.<sup>72</sup> The laying on of hands is a means of sanctification and empowerment for believers to bring healing to the unwell (Mark 16:18). Warrington explains that the healer's hand represents the Lord's hand, which is the source of power for all healing.<sup>73</sup> There is transmission of divine power from healer to seeker through the laid-on hands and an impartation of God's grace and presence in, with, under, and through the healing act.<sup>74</sup> This act anticipates God's healing where the Spirit engages the believer's body in the cleansing of sins and the healing of sicknesses.<sup>75</sup> Collectively, these actions point to Jesus' sovereignty and authenticate him as the ultimate source of healing.

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<sup>69</sup>Keith Warrington, "Acts and Healing Narratives: Why?" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 2 (2006): 215.

<sup>70</sup>Thomas K. Mathew, "Oral Roberts' Theology of Healing: A Journey from Pentecostal 'Divine Healing' to Charismatic 'Signs and Wonders' to Spirit-Empowered 'Whole Person Healing,'" *Spiritus* 3, no. 2 (2018): 310.

<sup>71</sup>Vondey, *Living the Full Gospel*, 110.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>73</sup>Warrington, "Acts and Healing Narratives," 205.

<sup>74</sup>Kimberly Ervin Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing: Models in Theology and Practice* (Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2006), 69.

<sup>75</sup>Vondey, *Living the Full Gospel*, 112.

### Salvific and Transformative Gift from God

Pentecostal-Charismatic healing theology reveals the contrast between God's will and the human condition that requires his remedy for sickness and suffering available in the atonement.<sup>76</sup> Healing is a gift of God that is transformative and salvific.<sup>77</sup> In Matt 8:16 and Luke 6:19 all who came to Jesus were healed, and in Acts 5:16 the power of healing continued in the Church's ministry. While Christ is the ultimate healer, Pentecostal-Charismatic healing is an act of the Holy Spirit manifested commonly in an intense, tangible, and electrifying experience.<sup>78</sup> The Spirit's continual extension of grace and power emphasizes a God-ward journey with healing that was accomplished at the atonement. This gives hope that all believers will be healed when God's kingdom is fully established.<sup>79</sup>

### Spiritual Warfare

While the Western dualistic worldview rationalizes the Chinese religions' involvement with the spirit world as 'superstition,' Pentecostalism explains healing as a form of spiritual warfare, with a confrontation between the kingdom of God and kingdom of Satan.<sup>80</sup> Healing and deliverance are empowered by Christ's authority and point to the in-breaking of his reign with supernatural powers,<sup>81</sup> which upholds God's sovereignty. Pentecostal-Charismatic healing confronts spirit powers with God's power to overcome evil forces through the atoning work of Christ.<sup>82</sup> That healing includes deliverance and exorcism in the physical world with a battle of powers and principalities in the spirit realm (Eph 6:12). Signs and wonders in Pentecostal-Charismatic healing eliminate the artificial dichotomy of the supernatural and the natural in God and his creation.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>77</sup>Alexander, "Pentecostal Healing," 69.

<sup>78</sup>Joseph W. Williams, *Spirit Cure: A History of Pentecostal Healing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 49.

<sup>79</sup>Kimberly Ervin Alexander, "Divine Healing: Sacramental Signs of Salvation," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vonkey (New York: Routledge, 2020,) 258-259.

<sup>80</sup>Peter Althouse, "The Historical Implications of Wimber's Theology of Healing and Deliverance," in *The Pentecostal World*, 1st Edition, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Jorg Haustein (New York: Routledge, 2023), 189.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Vonkey, *Living the Full Gospel*, 118.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 127.

### Healing as a Church Ministry

Pentecostal-Charismatic healing is practiced in the context of the church community (Jas 5:13-16). To equip its congregants, Pentecostals have defined steps and procedures in facilitating believers to pray for healing.<sup>84</sup> This is particularly the case for Third-Wave Pentecostals influenced by John Wimber. For this healing practice, Wimber defined procedures to discern how to pray for healing; those procedures included interviewing the sick, diagnostic decisions, prayer selection, prayer engagement, and post-prayer directions.<sup>85</sup>

Pentecostal-Charismatic healing empowers the Christian community by enhancing its service to one another and enabling its mission to outsiders.<sup>86</sup> This is where Pentecostal-Charismatic healing can provide a ‘bridge to Christ’ for those Chinese religious adherents who actively seek healing. The process calls for believing, fighting against fear and doubt, and speaking words of faith as a point of contact when faith is released. Preaching the Word of God is pivotal because healing is based on faith in Jesus (i.e., a true relationship) that is invoked by hearing God’s Word.<sup>87</sup> Faith is an essential trust in God and involves commitment of one’s allegiance to him revealed in Christ, to the church community, and to God’s kingdom. Pentecostal-Charismatic believers are called to enter everyone’s world and proclaim the gospel with God’s healing power.<sup>88</sup>

To summarize this section—for Pentecostal-Charismatic believers, healing is a gift of God that is transformative and salvific. It is not a transaction between the healer and the seeker of healing. Rather, it is a remedy for all, is anchored on Christ’s atonement, and is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit (not human initiatives). God’s holistic healing addresses mind, body, and spirit with performative healing practices. Healing and deliverance are empowered by the authentic source, which is the power of the Holy Spirit in the authority of Christ and points to the in-breaking of Christ’s reign over supernatural powers. In the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Singapore, healing practices are commonly performed in churches to bring wellness and wholeness to those in need.<sup>89</sup> Testimonies of God’s healing are shared among believers

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<sup>84</sup> Althouse, “The Historical Implications,” 189.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 193-194.

<sup>86</sup> Vondey, *Living the Full Gospel*, 121.

<sup>87</sup> Mathew, “Oral Roberts’ Theology,” 310.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>89</sup> Terence Chong and Daniel P. S. Goh, “Asian Pentecostalism: Revivals, Mega-Churches, and Social Engagement,” in *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*, ed. Bryan S. Turner and Oscar Salemink (New York: Routledge, 2015), 407.

and their social networks in order to glorify God and draw people to believe in him, as in Acts 5:12-16.

### **Pentecostal-Charismatic Healing—A Bridge to Christ for Chinese Religious Adherents**

Despite cutting-edge medical technology, health-related issues continue to invade the world. This has resulted in expansion of religious movements that include an emphasis on healing. Pentecostalism is growing fastest in the Majority World,<sup>90</sup> with its primary appeal being ‘a religion of healing’ that attends to the physically sick and the mentally and emotionally disadvantaged.<sup>91</sup>

Most people desire direct experiences with what is real, and Pentecostal-Charismatic prayers and touch-oriented healing practices can provide sensory experiences with the divine.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, efforts to introduce God to Chinese religious adherents call for a paradigm shift in the latter’s worldview—a shift that (unfortunately) is too often destroyed by conflicts and disagreements. But here is where Christians, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can bridge the gap without compromising God’s sovereignty and his principles in healing practices.<sup>93</sup>

This section examines the key similarities and differences between Pentecostal-Charismatic healing principles and Chinese religious healing practices. By recognizing and understanding these differences, Christians can tailor their explanations to demonstrate the relevance of Pentecostal-Charismatic healing principles and praxis to Chinese religious adherents and redirect their focus to Christ.

### **Power Encounter—God’s Spirit Vs. Other Spirits**

Power encounters are familiar experiences to Chinese religious adherents, who seek out mediums who draw power from spirits in order to bring relief from physical and mental suffering. Christians can leverage the power encounters in Pentecostal-Charismatic healing whenever they

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<sup>90</sup>Candy Gunther, Brown, “Pentecostal Power: The Politics of Divine Healing Practices,” *PentecoStudies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 39.

<sup>91</sup>Brown, “Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing,” 8.

<sup>92</sup>Candy Gunther Brown, “Feeling Is Believing: Pentecostal Prayer and Complementary and Alternative Medicine,” *Spiritus* 14, no. 1 (2014): 67.

<sup>93</sup>Dave Johnson, *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2013), 181.

communicate with these seeking adherents. The notable differentiating factor is the power of God's Spirit demonstrated in the many accounts of healing and deliverance that were performed by the Spirit-empowered disciples (Acts 3:1-10; 9:32-42; 19:11-19).

When Christians bear the power of God's Spirit as the source of all that is good (Luke 11:9-13), they progressively manifest the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Cultivating these attributes can bring forth physical and mental healing. This addresses the Chinese religious adherents' worldview of healing, which acknowledges the need for peaceful and harmonious living with the universe wherein all things are interconnected. Conversely, to engage spirits in order to transmit power and extend healing to adherents, the mediums in the Chinese religions self-mortify (i.e., inflict pain and suffering on themselves). How can these destructive practices contribute to the relief of suffering in the world that the adherents seek?

Healing by the power of the Holy Spirit does not require intervening objects like talismans or amulets to be carried in a person's body. In Exod 7-9, Moses demonstrated the absolute power of God without any such manmade objects. God's power surpassed that of the spirits and magicians, which may be analogous to the Chinese religions' *Dang-Kis* and their power. Similarly, Christian disciples in the Book of Acts did not wear or hold talismans and amulets in their healing mission; they simply invoked the name of Jesus and were empowered by the Spirit to heal. These episodes in the Bible demonstrate God's sovereignty over the spirits. This can be used to underscore the fact that talismans and amulets give a false sense of security and misplaced trust in these objects.

Testimonies of healing by the power of the Holy Spirit can serve as a means of visualizing the invisible God and making him real as he engages in the affairs of this world. Such is consistent with Chinese religious adherent's worldview of spirits being present in a social context and active in their daily lives.<sup>94</sup> Testimonies and demonstrations of God's healing power through the laying on of hands can further unveil the work of God and the Spirit in tangible ways to these adherents. This helps them refocus and see God's power and works instead of being lured into tangible sources like *Dang-Kis*, who are human intermediaries between adherents and other-world spirits and occultic objects.

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<sup>94</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, Daniel R. Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 45.

Signs and wonders are pivotal in drawing adherents to Jesus in the world of Chinese religions, but works of power *per se* are not always sufficient to create a definite commitment to Jesus.<sup>95</sup> Challenging the superiority of their gods is not easy. Beyond the demonstration of power, Christians need to teach God's Word in order to deal with worldview issues and correct the adherents' understanding of signs and wonders. The purpose of this teaching is to help those who have experienced God's power to trust in his healing and not revert to the Chinese religions.

Strategies should be defined and deployed to help new believers persevere in discipleship and share their testimonies of God's power and healing with family and friends. Also, it's important that new believers be baptized in the Holy Spirit, who will progressively mature and equip them with his fruit and gifts (Gal 5:22-23 and I Cor 12:7-11). In this spiritual journey, the new believers' old worldview will be replaced with the immanence and transcendence of God in their lives.

#### Sources of Healing—Authentic Vs. Occultic

The word of God declares his absolute authority over the devil and his forces—"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7 NASB 1995) and "Behold, I [Jesus] have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you" (Luke 10:19 NASB 1995). These texts affirm God's absolute power for healing, which is a relief from the suffering instigated by the devil.

Leveraging the Chinese religious adherents' familiarity with the discipline of meditation and chanting, Christians can diplomatically introduce the reading, reciting, and meditating of the Word of God as an alternative means to have faith in the true Healer. That faith comes by hearing God's Word (Rom 10:17), which enables the adherents to believe and fight against their fears and doubts. Tapping into this authentic source of power releases authentic healing that is transformative and salvific. Release of power and wisdom vested in meditating on and memorizing the Word also points to the importance of these spiritual disciplines for Christians, especially those young in faith or age. Meditating on and reciting it constantly assure success and wellness in life (Josh 1:8).

Interestingly, Christians can learn from Chinese religious adherents by involving and training their youth and children in the meditation and

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<sup>95</sup> Alan Johnson, "Signs and Wonders Necessary but Not Sufficient," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 2 (2021): 50.



recitation of God's Word (Deut 6:6-7), just as the religious institutions in Singapore engage their youth and children in meditation and chanting of teachings on Chinese religions and *Dang-Ki* practices.

Using the spiritual disciplines of meditating on and reciting God's Word to access him as the authentic source of healing opens an avenue for Christians to share with Chinese religious adherents. In Singapore, these adherents are familiar with meditation and recitation. By doing so, they think they are drawing on the power in their religion's teachings, objects, and spirits for healing—but these sources are not from God. Rather, the adherents are indulging in powers from demonic forces,<sup>96</sup> as illustrated in 1 Kings 18:19-26.

Chinese religious adherents need a shift in their worldview. They need the Word of God to correct and transform their views and practices (2 Tim 3:16-17). Toward this end, Christians can introduce to the adherents the meditation and recitation of God's Word, which is necessary to build faith in him—and for healing. Because the Word is truth and life, Christians, by seeking to understand and internalize it through meditation and recitation, can meaningfully and purposefully transform their thoughts, lives, and ways (Ps 119:9-16, 24). This differs from Chinese religious meditation, which focuses on an object to derive peace and wellness. That object may be the words of Buddha or bodhisattvas, who were/are human beings and not God; thus, the object cannot serve as a source of life, truth, and wellness.

Christian wellness is found in Jesus, the immanent and transcendent God and ultimate healing source. However, Chinese religious adherents' wellness and healing are derived from meditation, which is a human practice. Encumbered by human weaknesses and limitations, how can these adherents receive sustainable healing through meditative practices? Shaw informs that humans have entrenched tendencies and habitual mental patterns to address, since these tendencies and patterns commonly influence the meditator's aspirations.<sup>97</sup>

Christians need to highlight to the Chinese religious adherents the different sources of healing power and emphasize that their (the adherents') power sources are occultic and as such will lead to following Satanic forces and acquiring selfish goals through personal will and the control of one's life.<sup>98</sup> This is a deviation from acknowledging the sovereignty of God as defined in Deut 5:6-8 and illustrated in Acts 8:9-23, when Simon the sorcerer, seeing Philip's power from the Holy Spirit

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<sup>96</sup>Burnett, *World of the Spirits*, 163-164.

<sup>97</sup>Shaw, *Introduction*, 63.

<sup>98</sup>Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 379.

was greater than his sorcery, led him to offer money to buy this power gift.

Chinese religious adherents need to be aware that, by following *Dang-Ki* practices, they are relying on spirits that ‘respond’ to human worship and offerings to propitiate them instead of following God their Creator who knows them in every way even before they were born (Ps 139:14-17). When Chinese religious adherents seek out spirits and mediums for relief from the stress in daily life and anxiety over uncertainties, they seek self-control and are accessing power sources with selfish goals that are destructive (Col 2:23). These sources know the past but not necessarily the future.

People generally long for physical, emotional, and spiritual connectedness through meaningful touch and likely learn from these sensations.<sup>99</sup> Pentecostal-Charismatic touch-oriented healing practices can appeal to those who seek healing from God. These connectedness-related practices can allow for explanations of the causes and remedies of suffering and actively promote relief. Touch-oriented practices are also observed in the Chinese religious adherents’ desire to connect with spirits to receive healing via the *Dang-Kis*. However, the critical difference between that and the Pentecostal-Charismatic practices is that healing comes through the Holy Spirit to the recipients.<sup>100</sup>

Christians can take advantage of the Chinese religious adherents’ desire for touch-oriented healing practices by laying hands on the latter and praying for their healing. Importantly, after praying, Christians need to explain the difference in the authentic source of their healing—the all-powerful, living God. In addition, the adherents should be made aware that believers who are Spirit-baptized can go forth in the power of the Spirit to pray for the healing of those in need, plus there is no need for intervention by mediums, objects, or spirits because healing is a gift from God.

#### Healing-Healer Relationships—Love Vs. Transactional

The transactional relationship between the Chinese religious adherents and the spirits that offer healing requires worship and offerings to both the *Dang-Kis* and the spirits in order to appease them and avoid unfavorable outcomes from their engagements. Being entrenched in this worldview, it is difficult for the adherents to accept healing as a gift from God and not human work (Eph 2:8-9). This fact provides opportunity

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<sup>99</sup>Brown, “Feeling is Believing,” 62-63.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*

for Christians to introduce their father-son relationship with God, with Jesus being the only mediator (Heb 8:6-13). No one else or any object can replace Christ's position and authority.<sup>101</sup> God as the Father gives good gifts to his children (Matt 7:11) and requires nothing in return. As sovereign Creator of the universe, God initiated the sacrifice of his Son for our sins; that atoning work on the cross suffices not only for forgiveness, but also for healing.<sup>102</sup>

This truth needs to be differentiated from Chinese religious practices, which require rituals to be performed and teachings recited for the cleansing of body and mind via mediums, talismans, and amulets in order to transfer healing from the spirits to the adherents. When one acknowledges Christ as Lord, there is no need to look to spirits that operate based on human support and offerings. Thus, healing is no longer a transaction between adherents and spirits via mediums, rather it is a gift from God, who is the Father to all who believe in him.

### Conclusion

An appropriate understanding of the Chinese religious adherents' worldview is essential for Christians to know that these adherents perceive healing as the means to alleviate suffering in the world. This involves transactions with spirits in order to achieve harmonious living within themselves and their environment. Healing practices and ritual interventions operate by the adherents tapping into the power of those spirits, which can offer 'solutions.' However, these solutions come at a price—the need to appease the spirits. Use of meditation and chanting focuses the adherents on religious teachings that supposedly release the peace and tranquility of the mind. Such 'healing' can be stored in a range of material objects that can capture, preserve, and transport healing powers.

Pentecostal-Charismatic healing practices have multifaceted contextualized features that can resonate with the Chinese religions' worldview regarding health and wellness, which depends upon the right relationships with the natural and spiritual world. Drawing on the salient aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic healing, this study identifies the similarities and differences with the Chinese religious adherents' worldview through three areas—power encounters, sources of healing, and healing-healer relationships.

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<sup>101</sup>Johnson, "Theology in Context," 105.

<sup>102</sup>Vondey, *Living the Full Gospel*, 116-117.

Based on the comparative analyses of God's Spirit versus other spirits in power encounters, of authentic versus occultic healing sources, and of love-versus-transactional healing/healer relationships, this study concludes that, with a deepened understanding of the key beliefs, values, and practices of healing in Chinese religions, Christians can explain and demonstrate the relevance of Pentecostal-Charismatic healing to non-believers, providing them with a bridge to Christ.

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