INCLUSION OR EXODUS? THE FUTURE OF CHINESE-CHRISTIAN TALENT IN INDONESIA AFTER POLITICAL EXCLUSION

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study is to explore the existential experiences of double-minority talents in the context of post-2017’s Jakarta Governor election, aiming to understand the impact of political and social upheavals on their professional aspirations and life decisions.

Theoretical Framework: This study is anchored in the intersectionality of race, religion, and politics within the Indonesian context, drawing on theories of minority stress and resilience. The work of Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (BTP) and its reception provides a critical backdrop for examining the nuanced challenges faced by Chinese-Christian talents in Indonesia.

Method: Adopting a qualitative, phenomenological approach, the study engaged with participants through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to uncover the lived experiences of Chinese-Christian talents in Jakarta’s changing political landscape. The sample comprised individuals directly aspiring to contribute to Indonesia’s development, inspired by BTP’s leadership.

Results and Discussion: Findings reveal a complex interplay of motivation, disillusionment, and resilience among participants, impacting their aspirations, decisions to remain in or leave Indonesia, and perspectives on the future for Chinese-Christian talents. The study discusses how these experiences reflect broader socio-political dynamics in Indonesia and their implications for minority talents.

Research Implications: This research underscores the importance of inclusive policies and practices to harness the full potential of all talents in Indonesia. It highlights the need for further studies on the intersection of politics, religion, and minority status in shaping professional and personal trajectories.

Originality/Value: By focusing on the specific experiences of double-minority talents post-2017’s Governor election, this study adds a unique perspective to the literature on political influence on minority groups, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities for Chinese-Christian talents in Indonesia. Its findings are valuable for policymakers, educators, and organizations aiming to foster a more inclusive society.

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Keywords: dminority, talents, chinese-christian, indonesians, phenomenological study.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo é explorar as experiências existenciais de talentos de dupla minoria no contexto da eleição para governador de Juctartu pós-2017, com o objetivo de entender o impacto das mudanças políticas e sociais em suas aspirações profissionais e decisões de vida.

Estrutura Teórica: Este estudo está ancorado na interseccionalidade de raça, religião e política dentro do contexto indonésio, baseando-se em teorias de estresse minoritário e resilência. O trabalho do Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (BTP) e sua recepção fornecem um cenário crítico para examinar os desafios sutis enfrentados por talentos sino-cristãos na Indonésia.

Método: Adotando uma abordagem qualitativa e fenomenológica, o estudo envolveu os participantes através de entrevistas aprofundadas e análise temática para descobrir as experiências vividas de talentos sino-cristãos no cenário político em mudança de Juctartu. A amostra compreendia indivíduos que aspiravam diretamente contribuir para o desenvolvimento da Indonésia, inspirados pela liderança da BTP.

Resultados e Discussão: Os resultados revelam uma interação complexa de motivação, desilusão e resilência entre os participantes, impactando suas aspirações, decisões de permanecer ou deixar a Indonésia, e perspectivas sobre o futuro para os talentos sino-cristãos. O estudo discute como essas experiências refletem as dinâmicas sociopolíticas mais amplas na Indonésia e suas implicações para os talentos das minorias.

Implicações da pesquisa: Esta pesquisa ressalta a importância de políticas e práticas inclusivas para aproveitar todo o potencial de todos os talentos na Indonésia. Destaca a necessidade de estudos adicionais sobre a interseção da política, da religião e do estatuto de minoria na formação de trajetórias profissionais e pessoais.

Originalidade/valor: Ao se concentrar nas experiências específicas de talentos de dupla minoria após a eleição do governador de 2017, este estudo acrescenta uma perspectiva única à literatura sobre influência política em grupos minoritários, oferecendo insights sobre os desafios e oportunidades para talentos sino-cristãos na Indonésia. As suas conclusões são valiosas para os decisores políticos, educadores, e organizações que pretendem promover uma sociedade mais inclusiva.

Palavras-chave: minorias, talentos, chinês-cristão, indonésios, estudo fenomenológico.

¿INCLUSIÓN O ÉXODO? EL FUTURO DEL TALENTO CHINO-CRISTIANO EN INDONESIA TRAS LA EXCLUSIÓN POLÍTICA

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El objetivo de este estudio es explorar las experiencias existenciales de talentos de doble minoría en el contexto de la elección de gobernador de Yakarta posterior a 2017, con el objetivo de comprender el impacto de los trastornos políticos y sociales en sus aspiraciones profesionales y decisiones de vida.
Marco teórico: Este estudio está anclado en la interseccionalidad de la raza, la religión y la política dentro del contexto indonesio, basándose en teorías de estrés y resiliencia de las minorías. El trabajo de Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (BTP) y su recepción proporciona un telón de fondo crítico para examinar los desafíos matizados que enfrentan los talentos chino-cristianos en Indonesia.

Método: Adoptando un enfoque cualitativo y fenomenológico, el estudio se comprometió con los participantes a través de entrevistas en profundidad y análisis temático para descubrir las experiencias vividas de los talentos chino-cristianos en el cambiante panorama político de Yakarta. La muestra estaba compuesta por individuos que aspiraban directamente a contribuir al desarrollo de Indonesia, inspirados por el liderazgo de BTP.

Resultados y Discusión: Los resultados revelan una compleja interacción de motivación, desilusión y resiliencia entre los participantes, impactando sus aspiraciones, decisiones de permanecer o salir de Indonesia, y perspectivas sobre el futuro de los talentos chino-cristianos. El estudio analiza cómo estas experiencias reflejan una dinámica sociopolítica más amplia en Indonesia y sus implicaciones para los talentos de las minorías.

Implicaciones de la investigación: Esta investigación subraya la importancia de las políticas y prácticas inclusivas para aprovechar todo el potencial de todos los talentos en Indonesia. Destaca la necesidad de estudios adicionales sobre la intersección de la política, la religión y el estatus de minoría en la configuración de las trayectorias profesionales y personales.

Originalidad/Valor: Al centrarse en las experiencias específicas de los talentos de doble minoría después de la elección del gobernador de 2017, este estudio agrega una perspectiva única a la literatura sobre la influencia política en los grupos minoritarios, ofreciendo ideas sobre los desafíos y oportunidades para los talentos chino-cristianos en Indonesia. Sus hallazgos son valiosos para los responsables de las políticas, los educadores y las organizaciones que buscan fomentar una sociedad más inclusiva.

Palabras clave: dminoría, talentos, chino-cristiano, indonesios, estudio fenomenológico.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article explores the unique existential challenges faced by individuals who belong to two minority groups, focusing on Chinese Christians in Jakarta. It examines how they navigated two key events in 2017: the political defeat and subsequent blasphemy conviction of former governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (BTP), who shared their dual minority status.

In navigating the turbulent waters of politics in Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (BTP), a figure emblematic of both resilience and controversy, showcased exemplary leadership that transcended his minority Chinese-Christian background to address the tangible needs of society. Initiating vertical housing projects, BTP not only sought to alleviate Jakarta's chronic housing shortage but also demonstrated efficient leadership and a commitment to improving public services. This endeavor not only served as a testament to his governance skills but also as a beacon of hope and inspiration for other Chinese-
Christian talents in Indonesia, struggling with their own professional aspirations amidst a backdrop of political and social upheaval. BTP's approach to governance, characterized by direct engagement with societal needs and an overarching vision for inclusivity, offers a compelling case study within the broader narrative of minority talents navigating the complexities of identity, politics, and leadership in a diversifying Indonesia, which remains, concurrently, a deeply religious society at large (Saragih, 2020).

Through an existential phenomenological approach, the study investigates how these individuals interpret and respond to these events. It aims to understand their lived experiences of engagement and representation within the political sphere, particularly considering the broader socio-political context (Thorpe & Holt, 2011, p.152).

The concept of "double-minorities," while not formally recognized in academia, captures the specific social position of Chinese Christians in Indonesia. Existential phenomenology allows us to delve into their personal experiences, focusing on how they express their values, aspirations, and emotions in response to their social interactions (Suprajitno, 2020, p.8). This research prioritizes understanding these deeply personal experiences, emphasizing the existential impact on individuals rather than seeking a uniform experience across the entire group (Suryadinata, 2016, p.34).

Chinese-Indonesians who are Christian face a constant struggle with their identity in Indonesia (Brahma, 2018, p.272) (Chang, 2021). This struggle intensified after the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (BTP), the incumbent governor (also Chinese-Christian), lost the election. His opponents used his religion and ethnicity to turn voters against him (Walujono, 2014) (Djemat & Pratama, 2022). Even though BTP was a popular leader, accusations of blasphemy in court damaged his chances. He lost the election and was even jailed.

This outcome made Chinese-Christians question their place in Indonesian society and if they could participate in politics anymore (Shasha & Darmoko, 2022, p.263). This was especially true for highly educated individuals who supported BTP's vision for Jakarta. Many of them were graduates of top universities around the world and offered their skills to help him. Studies show that these overseas-educated professionals are important for Indonesia's development and politics. However, after the election, many of them questioned their identity as Indonesians and even considered leaving the country. The election results created a lot of existential and political uncertainty for them.
2 METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

Interviews were conducted with a select group of twelve individuals, of whom only six consented to the publication of their responses due to the sensitive nature of the inquiries. The demographic breakdown of the informants includes four individuals aged between 25 to 30 years, and two in their early thirties. The criteria for selection as "double-minority talent" encompassed individuals of Chinese-Christian heritage who have attained their education from prestigious universities globally. The designation of "talent" reflects a deliberate choice, highlighting the informants' high human capital value, derived from their academic achievements at leading institutions in Asia, Australia, the US, and the UK. Given the sensitivity of the topics discussed, only the general backgrounds of the participants are disclosed, with all direct quotations attributed to pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

The methodological approach for data analysis adopts a text condensation strategy, drawing inspiration from Giorgi's phenomenological method (Giorgi et al., 2017, p.182). This analytical process unfolds in four distinct stages: (i) acquiring an overarching view and setting aside pre-existing assumptions, (ii) delineating the meanings into distinct experiential units, (iii) distilling the essence of meaning within each experiential unit, and (iv) compiling a comprehensive summary that encapsulates the existential experiences as described by the participants. This analysis, informed by existential philosophy, eschews a rigid theoretical framework (Zahavi, 2021, p. 259). Instead, it organizes the findings around the collective, subjective experiences that emerge through the analytical process, offering a nuanced exploration of the informants' lived realities.ention what the purpose of this work is (De Castro, 2018, p.49).

3 FINDINGS

The participants felt like being Indonesian-Chinese Christian was a constant struggle. Their time abroad made them feel more Indonesian, but it also made them question their loyalty to Indonesia when they interacted with other cultures and even considered getting citizenship elsewhere. This struggle got worse after BTP became governor of Jakarta. They wanted to contribute to Indonesia's development and saw BTP as a great example of how Chinese-Christians could make a difference in politics and
society. They saw BTP's story as their own – his success and failures reflected the opportunities and challenges Chinese-Christians faced in Indonesian politics.

3.1 IDENTIFICATION: DEFINING CHINESE-CHRISTIAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Participants who know BTP deeply respect his honesty and leadership. They see him as the ideal example of a Chinese-Christian leader. In their eyes, he's fully devoted to helping society, not enriching himself. This sets him apart from the common view in the Chinese community, where people often see politics as a way to get rich. Instead, they praise BTP for his genuine dedication to the public good. This makes him a unique figure who goes beyond typical political motives and truly works to make society better. One of the participants describes the following.

BTP is a true inspiration. He's honest, dedicated, cares deeply about people, and works incredibly hard. He's willing to give up his own comfort and career options to make Jakarta a better place. He only cares about what's best for the city and Indonesia, not himself. He's brave enough to fight for what's right, even if it means going against the rules or upsetting people. He might seem strict sometimes, but it's because he truly wants to help his fellow Indonesians. (Participant-1)

A significant portion of the study's participants ascribed BTP's ethical principles and leadership style to his religious beliefs. His Chinese-Christian background emerged as a critical factor influencing their interpretation of his political methodology, particularly regarding his exercise of power.

Observing someone like BTP venture into politics truly ignites my enthusiasm. It's a rare occurrence for individuals of Indonesian Chinese descent, who are traditionally taught to adhere strictly to their societal roles, with politics often considered beyond our prescribed path. (Participant-2)

3.2 THE "OUTSIDER" POLITICIAN

Participants expressed the view that BTP's electoral defeat resulted from an unfair democratic process. This perception aligns with the notion that Indonesian society may be hesitant to accept a Chinese-Christian leader, despite his demonstrably high approval ratings (70%) for his governance. None of the participants anticipated the loss, suggesting
a potential disconnect between public sentiment and electoral outcomes. Furthermore, they observed that media-driven accusations of religious blasphemy significantly impacted the election results, potentially swaying public opinion. A participant, originally from Indonesia, currently employed as a researcher at a prestigious international university and who has since acquired Singaporean nationality, offered the following insights.

BTP's electoral defeat is attributed to the controversy surrounding the Al-Maidah incident. Regardless of this specific scandal, it was anticipated that BTP would be targeted by a campaign leveraging religious sentiments. Given that Jokowi, despite being a Muslim, faced attacks on religious grounds, it was inevitable that BTP, a non-Muslim, would encounter similar tactics. However, the scandal provided his adversaries with a semblance of justification for employing such strategies. (Participant-3)

Analysis of the judicial verdict on BTP revealed widespread concerns among respondents regarding its fairness and impartiality. Participants perceived BTP's conviction as a potential miscarriage of justice, possibly driven by external pressures. One participant explicitly stated their belief that the judiciary succumbed to public pressure and intimidation by BTP's detractors. Specifically concerning the case's subject matter, one participant observes,

While the verdict may have aimed to appease certain groups, the bigger concern lies with the religious blasphemy law itself. This law needs to be scrutinized, and a challenge before the Constitutional Court is warranted. (Participant-3)

3.3 INDONESIAN IDENTITY: AN EXISTENTIAL DILEMMA

BTP's political trajectory raises critical questions regarding the genuine societal acceptance of Chinese-Christians as full members of Indonesian society. Informants interpreted his electoral defeat as an implicit rejection of the Chinese-Christian community. While BTP's leadership qualities were acknowledged, his ethno-religious background appeared to hinder his complete acceptance. This perception suggests that other Chinese-Christian individuals venturing into politics may face similar challenges.

The case of BTP compels me to examine the relationship between demonstrably effective leadership and societal acceptance. His ostracization, despite his clear

contributions to Indonesia, raises a critical question for me: how do I incentivize public service in the face of potential negativity? BTP's experience highlights a tension within civic engagement for me – the potential for outstanding merit to be overshadowed by societal resistance. (Participant-4)

BTP's electoral defeat and subsequent legal judgment triggered a cascade of intense emotions among participants, reflecting a profound existential crisis. Disappointment, anger, despair, and helplessness were prevalent. One participant expressed their anguish by resigning to the situation's perceived immutability: "It is the way it is, we can't do anything." The judicial verdict further intensified this emotional response, with participants resorting to vehement language to describe their feelings – outrage, sadness, shock, and anger. However, their national identity remains a source of ambivalence. While some express pessimism about their ability to contribute meaningfully to Indonesia's future, others exhibit varying reactions, suggesting a nuanced interplay between disillusionment and hope in the aftermath of these events. A participant, who completed their education at a prestigious university in Singapore and subsequently returned to Indonesia to establish a business, comments:

Recent events have led me to reassess the potential for progressive change in Indonesia. It seems that these occurrences reveal a consistent power dynamic where self-interest prevails over the common welfare, which could impede the country's progress. (Participant-2)

BTP's political trajectory reignites the persistent narrative of Chinese-Christians as outsiders within the Indonesian political landscape. Historically, intergenerational advice has emphasized their supposed incompatibility with political leadership roles. While BTP's leadership initially offered a promising counterpoint, the outcome of his political journey reinforces the pre-existing notion that Chinese-Christians are better suited for the realm of entrepreneurship rather than the sphere of political engagement.

3.4 ADAPTING TO EXISTENCE: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES

The events triggered a multifaceted response among participants. For some, it served as a catalyst for introspection, prompting a critical reevaluation of their engagement within Indonesia's political landscape. This introspection led to a profound self-examination of their Indonesian identity. Consequently, rather than abandoning their
national identity, the events instilled a renewed sense of commitment to Indonesia. This translated into a stronger desire to contribute meaningfully to the nation and a heightened determination to actively participate in the political process.

The events really exposed some hypocrisy and tribalism within the Indonesian Chinese-Christian community, in my opinion. Traditionally, we haven't been very active politically – we've kind of known 'our place.' But then, with BTP, there was this sudden surge of enthusiasm. It made me think that maybe the Chinese-Christian community needs some reflection. If we just go back to how things were before BTP, then it would be hypocritical, wouldn't it? (Participant-2)

The events surrounding BTP's political journey have ignited a critical discourse on the perceived lack of full acceptance for Chinese-Christians as authentic Indonesians. This perception has led some individuals to contemplate alternative paths, including the possibility of acquiring citizenship elsewhere. These individuals engage in a complex cost-benefit analysis, weighing the value of their skills against the potential for greater acceptance in another nation. One participant expressed this sentiment by stating, "It is more advantageous to apply my skills in a locale that values my contributions." (Participant-2). Conversely, another segment of the study population exhibits a more optimistic outlook. They advocate for Chinese-Christians to learn from past experiences and to embrace a more active role in Indonesian politics. This engagement, they argue, should not be solely motivated by BTP's shared ethno-religious identity, but rather by a broader commitment to Indonesia's well-being, mirroring BTP's own dedication.

My observations indicate that the recent events have cast a shadow of negativity and disheartenment over many talented individuals who resonate with the dual identity of being Chinese-Christian and Indonesian. Feelings of discouragement and disillusionment seem widespread among us. Yet, importantly, there is a subset within our community that feels a renewed sense of purpose and determination to advance the pioneering work initiated by BTP. Grounding our political actions in our shared ethnic and religious background alone would only reflect the tribalism we have critiqued. Rather, we should aim for a broader engagement, propelled by a unified desire for a fairer and more just Indonesia. (Participant-5)

4 DISCUSSIONS

This qualitative study reveals the profound impact of a prominent Chinese-Christian leader, BTP, on the professional lives and sense of belonging of Chinese-
Christian professionals in Indonesia. Their career aspirations strongly resonate with BTP's political trajectory, which they view as emblematic of their own potential contributions to the nation's socio-political sphere. However, this analysis also highlights a collective introspection regarding the recognition and acceptance of Chinese-Christian contributions. Existing literature suggests that Chinese participation in Indonesian politics is often met with suspicion, perpetuating a sense of being outsiders. (Aguilar, 2001; Suprajitno, 2020)

Further exploration reveals a shared sentiment of discrimination among younger Chinese-Christian professionals. They grapple with the challenge of being perceived as less than fully Indonesian, despite their ethnicity and religion. This observation aligns with findings from other studies, emphasizing the need for societal recognition of their unequivocal Indonesian identity (Brahma, 2018). The study underscores the existence of persistent social barriers that segregate Chinese and non-Chinese communities. Dismantling these divisions is crucial for fostering not only acceptance but also the essential inclusion of Chinese-Christians in political discourse. Their talents and contributions must be recognized as integral to the nation's socio-political fabric (Shasha & Darmoko, 2022).

The dismissal of BTP from his political position transcends a mere rejection of leadership. This research posits that Chinese-Christian professionals interpret it as a broader repudiation of their collective identity and contributions. This perception is particularly significant in a globalized context where talent is increasingly valued internationally. The vicissitudes of BTP's career, therefore, have a bearing on the potential engagement of those who see their aspirations and identities mirrored in his experiences.

Despite this adversity, these professionals retain a flicker of hope for a potential revival of BTP's political endeavors, suggesting a continued or renewed influence on their sense of belonging and professional opportunities. The study further suggests that figures like BTP could act as magnets, attracting Chinese-Christian talent back to Indonesia from abroad. This potential reversal of human capital outflow, triggered by the events surrounding BTP's downfall, warrants further investigation (Lan, 2017). Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, such research could assess the broader ramifications on a global scale.

Ultimately, the potential for a resurgence in human capital investment within Indonesia hinges on the societal embodiment of justice, acceptance, and
fairness (Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2020). The extent to which these values are instilled will be crucial in determining the willingness and ability of Chinese-Christian professionals to fully contribute their talents to Indonesia's social, political, and economic landscape.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This research sheds light on the profound consequences of BTP's electoral defeat and legal conviction for Chinese-Christian professionals in Indonesia. The disheartening outcome triggered a reevaluation of their aspirations and a sense of existential crisis. They question their place and recognition as Indonesian citizens, highlighting a broader societal question: can Chinese-Christians hold leadership positions? The ramifications extend far beyond BTP himself, embodying a collective existential inquiry among this group.

The participants' interpretations reveal a complex mix of despair and determination. The events fractured initial optimism, raising doubts about the feasibility and desirability of political participation for Chinese-Christians. However, a segment of the community views these challenges as a call to action. They advocate for a shift in political focus, from individual representation to a broader commitment to national well-being. This suggests a potential move from disillusionment to a renewed sense of purpose, advocating for a more inclusive form of political engagement that prioritizes Indonesia's progress over ethno-religious identity (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020).

Furthermore, the existential deliberations about remaining in Indonesia or seeking opportunities abroad point not only to personal struggles but also to a potential human capital crisis (Heidhues, 2017). These highly educated professionals possess skills and qualifications that make them mobile in the global job market. Their emigration would pose a significant risk to Indonesia, representing a loss of valuable talent essential for the nation's development (Walujono, 2014). This underscores the need for a reevaluation of the socio-political environment. Cultivating an inclusive and equitable space that recognizes and utilizes the diverse talents of all its citizens is crucial to mitigate the impetus for emigration among Indonesia's most capable individuals.
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