

## **Abstract**

Since the end of 19th century, the Catholic Church has conducted missionary activities among the Javanese in Muntilan, Indonesia, establishing it as the first Catholic mission site in Java. The missionary work not only impacted the Javanese but also the Chinese descendants in Muntilan. The conversion of the Chinese to Catholicism sparked debates among the Chinese community, who perceived it as a contributing factor to the abandonment of Chinese characteristics. Conversely, the Catholic Church argued that it still accommodates local characteristics so as to adapt to the local community's conditions. This contest leads to the dynamic and diverse identities of Chinese Catholics within the community, as Chinese characteristics and Catholic faith mutually influence each other. Therefore, this study aims to address two key research questions.

1) How do the Chinese Catholics in Muntilan construct their hybrid identity as a Chinese Catholic? 2) To what extent does perception in the church and/or the Chinese temple signify their identity as Chinese Catholics? This research employs Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity identity and Frans Wijzen's official/popular Christianity concept, analyzing it through thick description methods. For this study, the main way the data is gathered is through interviews and participant observation in the field in the Chinese Catholic community in Muntilan. In addition to their religious beliefs, Chinese Catholics chose to convert to Catholicism as the attempt of mimicry act towards the restriction of the Indonesian government of Chinese characteristics in the New Order era. It was because Catholicism is officially recognized as a religion by the Indonesian

government. The family, Catholic education institutions, the formalization of religion, and national-scaled events played significant roles in contributing to the hybridity of Chinese Catholic identity. This contributes to the development of a diverse manifestation of Chinese Catholic identity, surpassing the boundaries of official Christianity and evolving into a popular form. Furthermore, the adequate financial capability of the Chinese Catholics significantly contributed to their agency in the church. It is conveyed through the annual Chinese New Year Mass that has been held for more than two decades in Muntilan.

Keyword: Chinese Catholic, Hybrid Identity, Popular Christianity

## Abstrak

Sejak akhir abad ke-19, Gereja Katolik telah melakukan kegiatan misionaris di antara orang-orang Jawa di Muntilan, Indonesia, yang menjadikan daerah ini sebagai pusat misi Katolik pertama di Pulau Jawa. Gerakan misionaris ini tidak hanya berdampak kepada orang Jawa, namun juga para keturunan Tionghoa di Muntilan sebab banyak dari mereka memutuskan untuk menjadi Katolik, terutama setelah peristiwa G30S pada 1965. Konversi orang-orang Tionghoa melahirkan debat di antara komunitas keturunan Tionghoa sebab seringkali anggapan bahwa agama Katolik dianggap sebagai salah satu faktor yang membuat orang-orang Tionghoa meninggalkan karakteristik ketionghoannya. Di sisi lain, Gereja Katolik berargumen bahwa mereka masih mengakomodir karakteristik lokal guna beradaptasi dengan kondisi komunitas lokal. Kontestasi ini menciptakan dinamika dan keberagaman identitas Katolik Tionghoa di dalam komunitas mereka karena karakteristik Tionghoa dan Katolik saling mempengaruhi satu sama lain. Maka dari itu, penelitian ini dilakukan berlandaskan dua pertanyaan utama: 1) bagaimana individu Katolik Tionghoa di Muntilan mengkonstruksi identitas hibrida sebagai Katolik Tionghoa? 2) Sampai sejauh mana persepsi di gereja dan/atau klenteng mempengaruhi identitas mereka sebagai Katolik Tionghoa? Penelitian ini didasari pada konsep identitas hibrida yang dipopulerkan Homi K. Bhabha dan Kekristenan resmi/populer yang dikembangkan oleh Frans Wijsen melalui metode *thick description*. Di samping keyakinan terhadap Kekatolikan, sebagian besar Katolik Tionghoa memilih untuk menjadi Katolik sebagai respon dari

pembatasan terhadap karakteristik Ketionghoan yang diterapkan pemerintah Indonesia di era Orde Baru dan familiaritas mereka dengan Katolisisme di lingkungan mereka. Hubungan keluarga yang didasari pada bakti, institusi pendidikan Katolik, formalisasi agama, dan peristiwa berskala nasional seperti Orde Baru memainkan peran signifikan yang secara berkelanjutan mempengaruhi hibriditas identitas Katolik Tionghoa di Muntilan. Faktor-faktor tersebut juga mempengaruhi perkembangan manifestasi identitas Katolik Tionghoa yang beragam, melampaui batas Kekristenan resmi dan mengembangkan Kekristenan populer yang banyak ditemukan di tingkat individual dan keluarga. Selain itu, kemampuan finansial para Katolik Tionghoa secara signifikan berkontribusi untuk membentuk agensi mereka di gereja setempat. Hal ini salah satunya terlihat dalam perayaan tahunan Misa Tahun Baru Imlek yang telah diselenggarakan lebih dari dua dekade di Muntilan.

Kata kunci: Katolik Tionghoa, Identitas Hibrida, Kekristenan Populer

## List of Terms and Abbreviations

### Abbreviation

Baperki	<i>Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia</i> (Consultative Council for Indonesian Citizenship)
FIC	<i>Broeders van de Onbevleete Ontvangenis van Maria</i> (Congregation of the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary)
HCS	<i>Hollandsch-Chinees School</i> (Dutch Chinese School)
HIS	<i>Hollandsch-Inlandsche School</i> (Dutch School for Natives)
Inpres	<i>Instruksi Presiden Republik Indonesia</i> (Presidential Instruction of the Republic of Indonesia)
Ka Kyo So Kai	Overseas Chinese Association
Kepres	<i>Keputusan Presiden</i> (Presidential Decree)
KWI	<i>Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia</i> (Bishops' Conference of Indonesia)
MAWI	<i>Majelis Agung Waligereja Indonesia</i> (Supreme Council of Indonesian Bishops)
Mgr.	<i>Monsinyur</i> (form of address for a bishop)
Perpres	<i>Peraturan Presiden</i> (Presidential Regulation)
PKI	<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i> (Indonesian Communist Party)
SD	<i>Sekolah Dasar</i> (Elementary School)
SR	<i>Sekolah Rakyat</i>
SJ	<i>Societas Jesu</i> (The Society of Jesus – Jesuit Order – Jesuits)
SMA	<i>Sekolah Menengah Atas</i> (Senior High School)
SMP	<i>Sekolah Menengah Pertama</i> (Junior High School)

OSF	<i>Zusters van de Boetvaardigheid en van de Christelijke Liefde van de Derde Orde van de H. Franciscus</i> (Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity)
PTITD	<i>Perhimpunan Tempat Ibadat Tridharma</i> (Association of Tridharma Worship Place)
Pecinan	Chinatown
THHH	<i>Tiong Hwa Hak Hauw</i>
THHK	<i>Tiong Hwa Hwee Koan</i> (Chinese Association)
TK	<i>Taman Kanak-Kanak</i> (Kindergarten)
VOC	<i>Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie</i> (Dutch East India Company)

#### *Catholic Terms*

<i>Lingkungan</i>	The basic Catholic community in the Indonesian Catholic church structure
<i>Stasi</i>	Outer station, which under a parish in the territorial structure of the Catholic church

#### *Chinese Terms*

<i>Angpau</i>	(红包) Red envelope, refers to the envelope filled with money that is usually given to the young people during Chinese New Year
<i>Cheng Beng</i>	(清明 – <i>qīng míng</i> ) The specified date for the Chinese to pray for their ancestors
Gōngxǐ fācái	(恭喜发财) “Congratulations and may you become wealthy”
<i>Hio</i>	<i>Hioswa</i> (Joss sticks)
<i>Hio Lo</i>	Place to stick joss sticks for worshipping deities

<i>Jū gong</i>	(鞠躬) “bend down” as an act of respecting
<i>Klenteng</i>	Chinese temple
<i>Imlek</i>	(阴历/陰曆) Chinese calendar
<i>Sanjiao</i>	(三教) The teachings from China that consists of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism
<i>Thian</i>	(天) “Sky”, in the Tridharma understanding, it means “God Almighty”
<i>Thianzhu</i>	(天主) “Lord of Heaven,” equated translation of Allah or Yahweh
<i>Tridharma</i>	See <i>Sanjiao</i>
<i>Xīnnián kuàilè</i>	(新年快乐) Happy Chinese New Year
<i>Yongsua</i>	See <i>Hio</i>

## Chapter I

### Introduction

In September 2023, I visited the Mary Grotto of Sendangsono in northern Yogyakarta for the first time in celebration of my baptismal anniversary, as well as to acknowledge its historical importance. A water spring in the grotto area bears the sign "Sumber Air Pembaptisan Pertama" (the first baptism water spring), commemorating the baptism of over 100 Javanese by Father Frans van Lith, SJ, a Catholic pastor, on December 14, 1904 (Beck, 2018, p. 250). I observed several pilgrims using red *hios*, also known as joss sticks, near the prominent candles. In traditional Chinese culture, people use *hios* as a medium to communicate with deities, ward off unwanted spirits, drive out plagues, summon the spirits of the dead, cleanse spiritual filth, and improve their health (Habkirk & Chang, 2017, p. 168).

The similar moment of discovering *hios* also happened when I conducted a pilgrimage to Van Lith's tomb in *Muntilan Kerkhof*. In the *Kerkhof* area, I also found graves with two Chinese names among the majority of European and Javanese names buried there. This encounter between Catholicism and Chinese practice has raised two personal, ongoing concerns for me. The first concern pertains to the potential integration of Catholic teachings with Chinese elements. Secondly, I am intrigued by the possibility that Chinese people in Indonesia could be Catholic devotees, given the



prevailing opinion among most Indonesians that Chinese descendants predominantly follow *agama Khong Hu Chu* (Confucian religion).

This general assumption that the Chinese are adherents of the Confucian religion has its roots in Indonesia. According to Rodney Taylor (1986), the moral and religious teachings of Confucianism play a significant role in China, Korea, and Japan, making it considered a religion (p. 1). K'ung futzu, also known as Confucius, developed the teaching of *rujia* or *ru* traditions, which the western world labeled as Confucianism. He emphasized the importance of moral virtue in creating an orderly society that led to harmony (Young, 2005, pp. 124–127). Moreover, Taylor emphasized that “China has often been called the culture of three religious traditions—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism” (2004, p. 4). The Donghan Dynasty introduced the term *Sanjiao* during the early 1st century, referring to these three teachings that influence and complement each other in China (Tjan & Kwa, 2010, p. 7). The Chinese not only upheld these three religious traditions for generations, but also brought these customs with them when they migrated outside of mainland China and implemented them in their new locations.

Evi Sutrisno (2018) argued that the Dutch-racial policy implemented in Dutch East Indies promoted segregation politics, developed exclusion based on racial or ethnic communities, including the Chinese, and ultimately encouraged the development of Confucian religion (p. 34). Sutrisno distinguished the Confucian religion as a result of its modern construction, which is based on Confucian sacred books related to the ancient teachings of the Chinese. The Neo-Confucianism movement in the Dutch East Indies period influenced the Chinese, who later claimed

the Confucian religion as the "agama asli Tjina" (Chinese original religion). They promoted it as the better and more suitable religion for the Chinese, challenging the Dutch missionaries' efforts to proselytize them to Protestant Christianity.<sup>1</sup> In order to briefly distinguish between Confucianism and Confucian religion, Confucianism emphasizes the ethical system, whereas Confucian religion places more emphasis on the spiritual realm (Young, 2005, p. 127). However, this distinction is not merely rigid, as the debate surrounding the consideration of Confucianism as a religion continues to be active among religious scholars worldwide. From the Dutch East Indies era until Indonesia's post-colonial period, this Confucian religion has been the subject of discussion regarding its definition or consideration as a religion (Sutrisno, 2018, p. 3).

In addition to the institutionalization of Confucianism as a religion in Indonesia, Confucian thoughts continue to influence the Chinese, even though they are not formally Confucian adherents. The Chinese incorporate this significance into their ethnic identity, allowing them to adapt and practice religious traditions like *xiao* (孝) or filial piety while becoming the adherents of other religions. Therefore, it is challenging to fully separate the Chinese ethnic identity from the religious dimensions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. These traditions, which have endured since the Chinese arrived in the archipelago, continue to foster estrangement in Indonesia, leading to numerous misunderstandings between the Chinese and other ethnic groups.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion regarding the dynamics of the Confucian religion and its influence over the Chinese descendants in Indonesia, please refer to "Negotiating the Confucian Religion in Indonesia: Invention, Resilience and Revival (1900 - 2010)" (2018) by Evi Lina Sutrisno.

Throughout history, the Chinese descendants have been facing continuous ups and downs in gaining full recognition as a part of Indonesian society. Having endured discrimination since the occupation of the VOC in the archipelago (Aziz, 2021, p. 220), the Chinese have been negotiating their understanding of their ethnic identity alongside their religious identity. Following Indonesia's independence in 1945, the distinction between Chinese descendants and the other local community, known as pribumi, persisted until recent times, adding a complex dimension to their understanding of their identity. Charles A. Coppel (2002) contended that the categorical distinction between "native-born Indonesians" and "persons of other nationality" in the 1945 Indonesian Constitution, reintroduced in 1959, stemmed from the colonial racial segregation rule (p. 114). At that time, the Indonesian government classified Chinese Indonesians under the "person of other nationality" category, which classified them as foreign among other ethnic communities despite their long-term residence in the archipelago. Furthermore, the majority of these individuals were the offspring of mixed marriages between Chinese and those considered to be "native-born Indonesian" ancestors.

In terms of the religious scope, the Indonesian government recognized Confucian religion in 1965 as one of the religions with the most adherents in Indonesia through the *Penetapan Presiden Republik Indonesia* (PNPS—Stipulation of the President of the Republic of Indonesia) Number 1 of 1965. As a result of this formal recognition, a growing number of Chinese individuals experienced a sense of alienation from "Chinese culture," rendering Confucian religion progressively less appealing to

the younger Chinese generation, a trend that has persisted since Indonesia's post-independence (Lan, 2017, p. 364).

Scholars frequently cited Soeharto's New Order, the government's legalized discrimination against Chinese Indonesians, during his tenure as the country's second president. Although Soeharto passed policies of equality toward all Indonesian citizens, including the Chinese, he was also considered institutionally discriminatory against them through several actions (Coppel, 2002, p. 141). Following the 1965 *Gerakan 30 September* (G30S—30 September Movement), which the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI—Indonesian Communist Party) accused of initiating, the Indonesian government associated Chinese descendants in Indonesia with the PKI and communism, given that the communist party ruled mainland China at the time (Lan, 2017, p. 354). The Instruksi Presiden (INPRES—Presidential Instruction of the Indonesian Republic) Number 14 of 1967 on Religion, Beliefs, and Chinese Customs was mostly mentioned as a regulation that demonstrated Soeharto's regime's discrimination against the Chinese. The government issued the regulation based on the assumption that religion, beliefs, and Chinese customs from mainland China could negatively impact Indonesians and hinder the government's efforts to integrate the Chinese. As a result, the government forbade public display of any religious or cultural activities associated with the Chinese and limited their practice to private gatherings.

Subsequently, in 1979, Soeharto formally declared the demotion of Confucian religion from a religion to one of Buddhism's sects (Sutrisno, 2018, p. 192). This official pronouncement led to further discrimination against Chinese Indonesians who

are adherents of the Confucian religion, as their religion was not considered a religion by the Indonesian government. This official pronouncement also encouraged Chinese Indonesians to convert to the government-recognized religions, including Catholicism (Lan, 2017, p. 357). In addition to the younger Chinese feeling alienated from Chinese culture and religion, the majority belief that Buddhism, Protestant Christianity, and Catholicism could enhance their Indonesian identity led to a rise in the number of these religions within the Chinese community (Suryadinata, 2002, p. 187).

*Pusat Penelitian Atmajaya* (PPA—Atmajaya Research Center) (as cited in Boelaars, pp. 212–213) reported that in 1975–1980, there were 58% new Catholics in Jakarta and West Java that converted from Buddhism and Confucian religion. This research also noted that Catholic converts from Buddhism and Confucian religion, specifically those who resided in Jakarta and Central Java, had Chinese backgrounds. Further, the annual meeting of *Majelis Agung Waligereja Indonesia* (MAWI—Supreme Council of Indonesian Bishops)<sup>2</sup> in 1985 and 1986 (as cited in Boelaars, p. 216) stated certain notes that the conversion from the Chinese Buddhists and Chinese Confucians happened to the Chinese younger generation as a form of "integration movement" to the Indonesia as a whole nation and attempted to diminish the identities and attributes that correlate them with Chineseness.

Markus T. Suryanto (2001) stated that the general opinion among Chinese Indonesians strongly suggested that the Chinese should convert to Catholicism instead

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<sup>2</sup> In 1987, MAWI renamed itself as Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI-Bishops' Conference of Indonesia) which assembles all bishops across Indonesia.

of other Christian denominations, as Catholicism allows for the freedom to use *hios* for parental devotion (p. 10). This permission expresses the assumption that the Catholic Church allows its Chinese adherents to continue practicing their ancestral traditions. However, the history of the Catholic Church in Indonesia demonstrates that it did not always support its Chinese followers in maintaining their customs. Regarding *hio* usage, Mgr. Edmundus Sybradus Luypen, the Apostolic Vicar of Batavia, disagreed with a Chinese convert's request in Semarang to burn joss sticks for honoring their ancestors during his wedding in the church (Steenbrink, 2001, p. 72). This historical example demonstrates that the Catholic Church has historically expressed disallowance for several Chinese characteristics practiced by Catholics, despite many other Christian groups assuming that the church was more accommodating towards them. It also showed that the Catholic Church in Indonesia has experienced numerous ups and downs in adapting to the local characteristics of its followers.

The presence of Catholic churches such as Saint Mary de Fatima of Toasebio and other Catholic churches that emphasize Chinese attributes in their ornaments or teachings indicates that the Catholic church has been trying to establish several strategies to integrate its teachings with Chinese traditions. One of them through was through the teachings of inculturation theology that explains the permissibility of Catholicism in local cultures. Martasudjita (2021) defines this institutionalized Catholic's inculturation concept as a continuous process that expresses the words of God in a socio-political and religious-cultural context while simultaneously transforming the situation and the lives of local people through the gospel (p. 24). The

conceptual design of inculturation aims to safeguard the authenticity of the gospel and foster sensitivity to diverse cultural contexts (Doyle, 2012, p. 1). This consideration led the local Catholic church to justify the possibility of conducting Catholic Masses in the church to celebrate the Chinese New Year, or hosting a priest dressed in traditional Javanese clothing during the Eucharist.

Catholic scholars primarily mention van Lith's success in preaching the Gospel and fostering Catholic understanding within the Javanese context in a small sub-district of Muntilan, Central Java, as a prominent example of inculturation attempt (Begheyn, 2017, p. 471; Beck, 2018, p. 249; Rukiyanto, 2019, p. 57). Van Lith was a Jesuit from the Netherlands who worked among the Javanese in the Dutch East Indies since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Focusing his missionary works on education, a communal approach, and adaptation of Javanese culture, van Lith could introduce Christianity to the larger Javanese community (Dass, Windhu, & Hartana, 2013, pp. 27-28). Along with Father Petrus Hoevenaars, SJ, and his missionary works in Mendut, many historians labeled van Lith as the pioneer mission in Java at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Boelaars, 2005, p. 81). For many Catholics in Muntilan, these historical narrations of Van Lith to bring together Catholicism and the Javanese characteristics also labelled as “inculturation”.

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading regarding the biography of Van Lith and his missionary works in Muntilan, please refer to “Father Franciscus Van Lith, S.J (1863-1926): Turning point of the Catholic church’s approach in the pluralistic Indonesian society” (1997) by F. Hasto Rosariyanto.

The success of van Lith's pioneering missionary work in Muntilan led the Catholics in Java to recognize the territory as "Bethlehem van Java," a name inspired by the birthplace of Jesus Christ (Derksen, 2014, p. 34). Van Lith's inherited Muntilan mission site area remains active today, housing a Catholic church, a Catholic mission museum, and numerous Catholic schools. Catholicism, with 4,286 adherents in Muntilan in 2023, is the second largest religion after Islam ("Jumlah Penduduk Menurut Agama," 2024). Muntilan became one of the sub districts in Java with a high concentration of Catholic citizens, whereas most other areas in Java have a higher proportion of Protestant Christians.

Van Lith's significant efforts towards the Muntilan Catholics led to his burial in the Muntilan *Kerkhof* after his death in Semarang in 1924. His name was also selected as the name of *Sekolah Menengah Atas Pangudi Luhur Van Lith* (SMA PL Van Lith—Pangudi Luhur Van Lith Senior High School), established in 1991, where he previously built Xaverius College, the Catholic-based school complex for the local boys, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Derksen, 2021, pp. 76-78). The respect of Van Lith given beyond the Javanese Catholics as the used *hios* on his grave demonstrated the tribute of Van Lith from the Chinese Catholics and the presence of Chinese Catholics itself.

In addition to the Catholic community that emerged in Muntilan during Van Lith's era, the Chinese community has been residing there since the Dutch East Indies period. Since 1871, the Chinese have formally marked their presence in Muntilan with the establishment of *Klenteng* (Chinese Temple) Hok An Kiong. Currently the temple



is formally categorized as *Tempat Ibadat Tridharma* (TITD—Tridharma Worship Place). *Tridharma* temples prioritize and establish the concept of *Sanjiao*, which is translated as "tridharma" (three good teachings) in Sanskrit (Tjan & Kwa, 2010, p. 6). Currently, the majority of regular visitors to the temple in Muntilan are elders, with only a small number of Chinese youth frequently praying there. The members of the Chinese temple highlighted the decreased number of Chinese visitors to the temple in Muntilan, which they attributed to the high number of Chinese conversions to Christianity, including Catholicism.

The Chinese temple members referred to the New Order era as one of the significant aspects of Chinese religious conversion toward Christianity. They accused several Christian groups of developing the idea that the Chinese temple was a "devil house" that should be avoided. However, during my visits to the Chinese temple, I met several Chinese Catholics who frequently participated in it for various purposes, such as commemorating their ancestors, providing information about the temple, and socializing. On other occasions, I encountered a Chinese *prodiakon*, a layperson appointed by the local bishop to specific duties within the Catholic church (Martasudjita, 2010, p. 9), who rarely visited the Chinese temple because he argued that it was not aligned with his Catholic faith. These moments made me acknowledge the identity of Chinese Catholic not only have a singular interpretation complexity of being a Chinese Catholic.

The Chinese Catholic identity is not a singular form, as every Chinese Catholic continuously negotiates their identity as both Chinese and Catholic, including in

Muntilan, the historical center of the Catholic missionary movement in Java. The Chinese chose to be Christians, as Christianity has become the agency for the Chinese in Indonesia to negotiate their identity (Darmawan, 2014, p. 12). However, we cannot generalize that all Christianity provides the same agency for the Chinese, as each Christian tradition responds differently to ethnic identity.

I argue that the identity of Chinese Catholics in Muntilan is shaped by a continuous process of construction and negotiation, resulting in a hybrid identity that is diverse and constantly evolving. This research sought to understand how the Chinese Catholics experienced the hybridity process individually in order to develop a personal synthesis of the Chinese and Catholic characteristics. The Chinese identity embedded the filial piety value, which significantly contributed to the hybridity of the Chinese Catholic identity. Furthermore, the politics of religion that compartmentalized religiosity into the framework of monotheistic religion developed ambiguity for the Chinese Catholics, as the Chinese characteristics related to their Chinese identity were constructed to be limitedly associated with the Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism followers. Therefore, they adopted a hybrid identity as a strategy to reconcile and rearticulate their differences, which also contributed to the development of popular Christianity.

### **1.1 Research Objective**

This research aims to fill the knowledge gap about how Chinese Catholics construct their identities, particularly in their daily lives, and how they negotiate the constructed

polarization that exists between their Chinese and Catholic identities. It also examines that Catholic church's and the Chinese temple's influence on the hybridity of Chinese Catholic identity. The objective of this research aims to develop the understanding and practice of the Catholic adherents, specifically Chinese descendants in Muntilan, and how they construct their identities as Chinese Catholics. The results of this research may not be applied as a generalization to all Chinese Catholics in Indonesia. However, it offers various depictions of how Chinese Catholics construct their hybrid identities for each individual, a process that is both diverse and dynamic. This study specifically highlights how Chinese Catholic lay people construct their identity as both Chinese and Catholic, and how they manifest this identity through their daily practices.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This research concentrates on how Chinese Catholics, particularly laypeople, in Muntilan cultivate their hybrid identity, with a primary emphasis on explaining the process of identity construction. This research aims to understand the significance of Chinese Catholics' identity construction in the teaching and practice of inculturation.

This research addresses the primary topic through two sub questions:

1. How do the Chinese Catholics in Muntilan construct their hybrid identity as a Chinese Catholic community?
2. To what extent does participation in the Chinese temple, church, and Chinese New Year mass signify their identity as Chinese Catholics?

### 1.3 Literature Review

Christianity is not something new for the Chinese, especially in mainland China. Since the 17th century, the Jesuits advanced the Gospel in mainland China through four key characteristics: accommodation to Chinese culture, evangelization of the elite, indirect promotion of European knowledge, and tolerance of Chinese cultures (Standaert, 2017, pp. 160-165). However, the context of the religion itself not only influences its development but also the place in which it takes place. It is reasonable to conclude that the Christian faith in China and Indonesia possesses unique characteristics. Other significant factors, such as the Chinese descendants of Christian Indonesians, contribute significantly to the distinctive characteristics of Indonesian Christians.

Several scholars with expertise on the Christian Chinese in Indonesia directed their research towards the New Order and Post-New Order eras, a time when the "Christianization" of Chinese culture was at its peak. Soeharto's assimilation policy banned cultures and religions associated with "Chineseness" and forced them to convert to one of the "official" religions in Indonesia (Suryadinata, 1967; Aini, 2009; Hoon, 2013). On the basis of her research, Nurul Aini (2019) found that the decision to convert for the Chinese in the Soeharto era was part of their survival and consolidation strategy. Being adherents of the major religions in Indonesia (Islam and Christianity) made the Chinese more easily accepted by the "indigenous" Indonesians.

During Soeharto's era, the Indonesian government offered five officially "recognized" religions, including Protestantism and Catholicism, for conversion. There were several reasons for the Chinese to convert to Christianity. Dian Suwignyo (2020)

found that being Christian could give the Chinese a new identity that distinguished them from Chineseness, as Christianity is considered a western religion. Soeharto's assimilation program aimed to distinguish the Chinese identity from Chineseness. However, Christianity could also serve as a "sanctuary" for the Chinese, allowing them to preserve their Chinese identity. Markus Dominggus Lere Dawa (2016) conducted research at *Gereja Kristus Tuhan*, a Chinese church in Surabaya, and discovered that the Chinese Christians there interacted with each other to preserve their Chinese identity. They resisted the assimilation policies in private spaces but appeared to support them in public.

The history of violence against the Chinese in Indonesia also influenced the decision to convert to Christianity on a personal level. Hans Harmakaputra (2020) argued that the Chinese chose to be Christians as Christian teachings provide them with theological imagination that can reconstruct the trauma and memories of violence towards them through the story of Jesus' crucifixion. Moreover, Aini explained that the charismatic church specifically could not only produce transcendental meaning but also grant social and cultural dimensions that bind the Chinese in a sense of powerful self and community. Many different denominations within Christianity exist, each with its own unique set of beliefs that set them apart from each other. Given the formal separation of Catholicism from other Christian denominations in Indonesia, it is intriguing to explore the Chinese's selection of Catholic teachings. This church maintains strict and hierarchical doctrines, yet it prioritizes inculturation to adapt Christian teachings to the local culture.