

Qi Poured Out Upon All Flesh: A Proposal for an Asian Diasporic Pentecostal Pneumatology



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ABSTRACT: *This work endeavours to explore the contours of the pentecostal mind, “redeeming the languages” in engaging in contextual theological construction and attempting to dispelling charges of theological syncretism, thus reclaiming the East Asian philosophical understanding of Qi (Chi) by integrating it with a Christian theology of the Holy Spirit. While discerning the East Asian philosophical heritage of Qi, attempts will be made to construct a pentecostal pneumatology informed by East Asian and Asian American philosophical resources with special attention to Qi, therefore yielding an Asian diasporic pentecostal pneumatology of Qi in understanding 1) a Yin-Yang both-and model of the Holy Spirit’s personal and impersonal divine nature, and 2) Uncreated Qi as uncreated energy/being sustaining all created qi (created energy/being). Hence, an Asian (North American) pentecostal pneumatology of Qi will bear witness from and to the many voices the Spirit poured “upon all flesh” which includes the many languages, cultures, heritages, and philosophical systems. In doing a theological construction of an Asian (North American) pentecostal pneumatology of Qi, this work seeks to honour the Asian (North American) theologians or “theological elders” who have pioneered the exploration and intersections of the Holy Spirit and Qi.*

KEYWORDS: *Asian theology, Asian American theology, contextual theology, Pentecostal, pneumatology, Holy Spirit, Ling, 靈, 灵, Qi, Chi, 氣, 炁, 气, energy, being, Yin-Yang, both-and.*

Who is the Holy Spirit? What is the Holy Spirit? Does the Wind blow wherever it wishes? What does the word *Spirit* even mean? These questions all factor into our discussion about the person and nature of the third member of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals have always had a particular penchant for proclaiming personal perspectives of pneumatological phenomena. Oftentimes this manifests as Pentecostals testifying of their personal experiences with the Holy Spirit usually mediated through the work of the Holy Spirit such as the miraculous, signs, and wonders. Indeed, even

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Métis Canadian Pentecostal scholar Andrew Gabriel has noted that “for all their talk about the Holy Spirit, one might think that Pentecostals have a well-developed pneumatology.” Yet, he concedes that “historically, Pentecostals have tended to focus on interpreting their experiences of the Spirit—such as Spirit baptism or the gifts of the Spirit—rather than on developing a formal and comprehensive pneumatology,” thus putting a premium on personal encounters with the Divine mediated through the Spirit.²

Yet, relevant to Pentecostal personal experiences, Malaysian Chinese American Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong’s multicultural and multireligious witness of Pentecost attests to “the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh” that “preserves, validates and even in this sense redeems the many tongues, languages and cultures of the world, including those of the regions, nations and people of Asia.” Elsewhere he states that “even the religious traditions of the world for sake of the gospel,” thus, Yong’s invitation found in Acts 2 is for “Asian Pentecostals in particular, and those across the Asian diaspora in general, to declare and testify in their own tongues and languages about the wondrous works of God.”³ Given Yong’s assessment that “if the Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh, then the public of theological reflection is as wide as humankind,” this further broadens the intellectual scope of the “pneumatological imagination” and pentecostal mind.⁴ Hence, as a self-identified Asian North American Pentecostal, I gladly take up this challenge to explore the dimensions and contours of the Holy Spirit in reclaiming and redeeming the notion of 氣/氣/气,⁵ Romanised as *Qi* (or its alternatives of *Chi/Ch’i/Ki*)⁶ through East Asian and Asian North American resources available to bear witness to a much needed fuller and more holistic depiction of who and what the Holy Spirit is and the implications thereof.⁷ Thus, as an instance of the “pentecostal mind” taking on Asian flesh including its philosophical heritage and systems, I propose we adopt a contextual Pentecostal approach that discerns the Scriptural and theological witness through “the redemption of

² Andrew Gabriel, “Pneumatology: Eschatological Intensification of the Personal Presence of God,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (London: Routledge, 2020), 206.

³ Yong was a pastor’s kid in Malaysia turned missionary’s kid to the United States back to a pastor’s kid of a Chinese Assembly of God church in Northern California the United States and is now a Malaysian Chinese American pentecostal theologian who previously held credentials with the General Council of the Assemblies of God and currently holds credentials with the International Church of Foursquare Gospel. Amos Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian Diaspora* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 19, 137; Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 266.

⁴ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh*, 10, 28, 236, 254.

⁵ If there are two Chinese characters with a / in between them, this denotes that the first character is written in the traditional Chinese script, while the next is written in the simplified Chinese script like 靈 (traditional Chinese) / 灵 (simplified Chinese). In this case, I have included a third character in the middle 氣, to denote the diversity of how *Qi* has been written throughout East Asia/the Sinosphere that is mainly used in Japan, hence: 氣 (traditional script), 氣 (mainly Japanese), 气 (simplified script). For simplicity’s sake, I have elected to limit my use of Chinese to the traditional script unless otherwise specified. In Chinese, 氣/气 can take on different radicals like 瀛/汽 (water radical for vapour) 餼/飪 (food/eat radical for gift or grain rations), 愾 (heart radical for hate, wrath) and some obsolete characters now with radicals for: 熾 (fire), 鑛 (metal/gold), 犛 (animal), 飄 (cloud), etc. Additionally, 气 can also serve as a radical to form words to have more air, gas-like chemicals or energy meanings: 氛 atmosphere, 氧 oxygen, 氫/氢 hydrogen, 氮 nitrogen, 氦 helium, 氯 chlorine, 氖 neon, etc.

⁶ *Qi* can be Romanized as *Qi*, *Chi* or *Ch’i*, from Chinese or *Ki* from Korean or Japanese.

⁷ I recognize that China is not a monolith, much less the Sinosphere and the Chinese diaspora along with other East/Southeast Asian countries. Consequentially, there might be differences in how each region understands *Qi*. Other non-East Asian countries likewise have similar understandings of *Qi* as breath worth considering such as the Indian idea of *prana* or the Hawaiian concept of *Ha*. See Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other: A Model of Global and Intercultural Pneumatology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 27-28.

the languages”⁸ as we examine *Qi* and its relation to the Holy Spirit through a both-and model or *Yin-Yang* model⁹ that sees 1) the Holy Spirit or 聖靈/圣灵 in Chinese as both *Yang* personal (*Ling* 靈/灵) and *Yin* impersonal (*Qi* 氣), and 2) *the Qi of qis*: in which *Qi* can be understood as both Uncreated *Qi* (God the Spirit) and created *qi* (energy/being).¹⁰ Here, I wrestle with the implications of the *Yin-Yang* model of non-personal/impersonal and personal categories of the Holy Spirit as *Qi* and *Ling* in hopes of a more nuanced pneumatology to add to our global understanding of the Spirit at large informed by East Asian and Asian American resources. However, before developing an integration of *Qi* and the Holy Spirit on the whole, we will first address the charges of syncretism.

Contextualization Not Syncretism¹¹

The first impulse of doing any contextual theology is the worry of syncretism or at least the charges and accusations made thereof when engaging in missiological and theological work. Indeed, as Korean American theologian Young Lee Hertig observes, “despite Christianity’s long-standing history of Judaization, Hellenization, Westernization, and others, a persistent fear of syncretism remains a stumbling block in approaching Christianity through cultural lenses”¹² as even Kim writes “it is common for Asian North Americans to syncretize and assimilate their cultural religious beliefs into their theology, and thus it is not surprising that the same could be done to their pneumatology.”¹³ Thus, it is unsurprising that those looking at this discussion of *Qi* and the Holy Spirit to deem it syncretistic. Yet Kim further attests Christianity’s porous and adaptable nature:

Christianity has been hybrid and syncretistic from its earliest beginnings, emerging from Palestine, where Judaism intersected with Greco-Roman cultures, beliefs, and practices. Throughout its history, Christian thinkers and leaders have adopted and assimilated cultures, values, and practices of their own and of their neighbors. Christianity was never pure and never pristine as some nostalgically wish it to be.¹⁴

This element is reflected in Christianity’s adoption of Greco-Roman philosophical systems in Christian thought and theology within the Roman empire. For instance, exchanges of ideas and

⁸ David Shang Ehil Han, “Toward an Asian Pneumatology: A Reflective Reading”, in *T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology*, ed. Daniel Castelo and Kenneth M. Loyereds (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), 281-2; Yong’s comments are important, “From a missiological and theological perspective, this represents the Christian message of redemption, in this case, the redemption of the languages, cultures, and even religious traditions of the world for the sake of the gospel.” Yong, *Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 247, 266.

⁹ Although the term “*Yin-Yang* model” risks being an essentialist trope, thus stereotyping and totalizing Asians and Asians in the diaspora in how they think, I find a strong resonance with the concept drawing inspiration from Heup Young Kim in thinking about the Holy Spirit as personal and impersonal through his appropriation of Jung Young Lee’s trinitarian *Yin-Yang* model where he mentions that “God is not only both male (*yang*) and female (*yin*), but also personal and non-personal and ultimately transcends all these categories as the ineffable *Dao*.” Heup Young Kim, *A Theology of Dao*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 65-6.

¹⁰ John Wei-Leung Cheng here is invaluable in discerning between the Essence/energies distinction of God and uses *Qi* to refer to being-energy hence informing my thoughts about the *Yin-Yang* model in the first place. John Wai-Leung Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies: Insights on Catholic Theology of Energies?” in *A Handbook of Catholic Theology of Energies*, Vol. 7: An Exploration of Catholic Theology of Energies, ed. John Wei-Leung Cheng (Toronto: Grace Institute Press, 2015), 1-35.

¹¹ Syncretism can be thought of as the mixing or negotiation of different religions, cultures, or ideas together to form a new amalgamation.

¹² Young Lee Hertig, *The Tao of Asian American Belonging: A Yinist Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), 40.

¹³ Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*, 122.

¹⁴ Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*, 101.

culture in the Roman Empire were ubiquitous. In the area of first-century Judea in Palestine, Hellenism had a long history of influencing the Jewish inhabitants which affected the various groups of Judaism to varying degrees and ways along with their ideas and theology.¹⁵ Korean missiologist Wonsuk Ma reflects this history through identifying that “the West had the benefit of two thousand years of diluting, redefining, and refining old ‘pagan’ symbols, rituals, and concepts.”¹⁶ Yet, fast forward two millennia, Chinese Filipino missiologist David S. Lim notes “many Protestants have no effective ‘theology of culture’ beyond a rejectionist position, so they do not consider the useful function of indigenous ways.”¹⁷ As such, Korean Canadian Presbyterian theologian Grace Ji-Sun Kim laments the self-erasure of Asians and specifically Koreans when it comes to their own philosophical traditions “even Korean Christians ignore *Chi*... The majority resist their own heritage, deferring to the dominant, Eurocentric understanding” as Hertig herself testifies of her own “internalized syncretism” which in this case means the rejection of her own Asian cultural and philosophical heritage.¹⁸ This sentiment is “most pointedly” articulated by Yong when “Asian American Evangelicals have traditionally understood their Christian conversion to involve either a turning away from their Asian cultural roots or a minimizing of such aspects of their identity. That Christian conversion actually involves Americanization is quite prevalent across the Asian American scene.” Yet, this is not reciprocal with Canadian or American Christians. Instead, Canadian or American cultural identity, or Western philosophical systems of thought, ways of knowing, or ways of being, is assumed in the contextual backdrop of becoming followers of Jesus, a first century Palestinian Jew living under Roman occupation.¹⁹

Yet, many Asian Christians and diasporic Asian Christians, such as the Chinese and even Koreans, do not seem to have “a cultural rootedness” in their theological reflection and do not “affirm the centrality of the category of culture for theological reflection.”²⁰ Given Asian North American Pentecostals’ and Evangelicals’ strong affiliation with what Amos Yong calls the “confluence of Confucian and evangelical conservatism” in evangelical spaces sustained by what Korean American theologian, Soong-Chan Rah calls the “cultural captivity” of the West as Babylon for Asian American Evangelicals, I submit this space breeds a certain disposition for Asian Pentecostals to submit to the

¹⁵ Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Philo of Alexandria: A Thinker in the Jewish Diaspora* (Boston: Brill 2012), 202-3; One instance of Christianity’s Jewish roots intermixing with Hellenistic influences found in the Gospel of John’s prologue testifying of the Greek concept of Λόγος or *Logos*, being in the beginning with God and very God, tabernacling among humankind (John 1:1-2, 14). *Logos* first was a verb to “gather, collect.” Minar, Edwin L., “The Logos of Heraclitus,” *Classical Philology* (1939), 323. Such an idea has reincarnated itself in many forms across the Greco-Roman world from its first documentation of Heraclitus as that which holds all things together through its power, divine personalities, and fire, Minar, “The Logos of Heraclitus,” 326, 329. Then the idea of *Logos* morphed when picked up by Stoic Philosophers, demonstrating *Logos* to be reason or a divine mind as “the soul of the world which in their view renders it identical to God”, Hadas-Lebel, Mireille, *Philo of Alexandria*, 184-8. The Jewish Philosopher, Philo of Alexandria sought to connect Hellenism to his Judaism via *Logos*’ connection to the monotheistic God of the Hebrews by linking *Logos* as a “second God” to have and “the second Cause” of the divine mind and as the “First-born Son of God” finding affinity with Colossians 1:15’s “Firstborn of all creation,” Hadas-Lebel, Mireille, *Philo of Alexandria*, 186, 211. The Johannian prologue and the Epistle to the Hebrews then incorporate Philo of Alexandria’s understanding of *Logos* to the incarnate Jesus Christ of Nazareth which was then defended by Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria.

¹⁶ Woksuk Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia Revised Edition*, ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, 2nd ed. (2011), 61, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcrbt.10>.

¹⁷ Hertig, *The Tao of Asian American Belonging*, 40; David S. Lim, “Contextualizing Ancestor Veneration: A Theological Survey and Practical Steps for Implementation,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2015), 188.

¹⁸ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Reimagining Spirit: Wind, Breath, and Vibration* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 115; Hertig, *The Tao of Asian American Belonging*, 40.

¹⁹ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 105.

²⁰ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 239.

“theological eldership” of white pastors, missionaries, and theologians.²¹ Thus, doing theology from a distinctly Asian or Asian North American perspective can be seen as questioning the perceived elders, a task that obedient Confucian children seek to avoid like the plague in order to maintain their legitimacy as orthodox Christians in good standing with dominant culture Christianity in the West.

In effect, this perpetuates a sense of self-erasure that Asian (North) American and Diasporic Christians are forced to grapple with in service to Korean American Presbyterian theologian Daniel D. Lee’s and Yong’s observations of Eurocentric theology’s granted status as “implicit normativity with a hegemonic force, which has also made it more vulnerable to cultural captivity.”²² Eurocentric theologies along with evangelical theologies have assumed a nature that transcends its own cultural and historical confines, which has influenced evangelical theologies to follow suit in assuming an acontextual and ahistorical nature, as Yong argues that the majority of self-identified Asian American Evangelicals have been “formed theologically according to the sensibilities of the dominant evangelical culture in North America, have internalized the white evangelical worldview and in that sense mostly do not see the need to think explicitly from an Asian American vantage point. Asian American evangelical views are therefore, at best, no more than a minority theological perspective.”²³

Thus, Eurocentric theologies in general and evangelical theologies in particular are assumed to look and sound more authentically robust as they assume the ability to speak into any context globally with uncritical and not self-aware Asian (North) American Christians continually championing such theologies. This further accents their legitimacy as global Christians since many are prone to further the acultural, ahistorical and acontextual theologies of Western missionaries, pastors, and theologians, effectively called “theological elders.” Yong observes “that there is little else available on Asian American evangelical theology... Part of the reason is that many Asian American Evangelicals, even those who are theologically trained, have basically replicated the majority evangelical (white) approaches to Scripture,” though over the past decade we have since seen more Asian American Christian scholars take up the mantle to embrace their heritage in doing theology, like Daniel D. Lee’s *Doing Asian American Theology*.²⁴ Also in the context of Western Christians on the mission field, Euro-American missiologist Brad Vaughn, formerly writing under the pseudonym of Jackson Wu, writes, “when interpreting the Bible, we might ignore the main point of a text or simply be ignorant of the ways our own context influences our reading” which have ramifications and even ‘hindrances’ in ‘its application of Scripture.’²⁵ He further notes the dilemma of contextualization that verges onto “syncretism oriented to a denomination, theological tradition, or the missionary’s home culture” as some Chinese Christians in China might run the risk of internalizing standard Western hermeneutics as standard or “biblical” heuristics for Christian living, formation, and interpretation.²⁶ Vaughn further elucidates:

²¹ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 105; Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 18.

²² Daniel D. Lee, “Spirit of Integration and Solidarity: Asian American Pneumatologies,” in T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology, ed. Daniel Castelo and Kenneth M. Loyereds, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), 291.

²³ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 114.

²⁴ Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 102; Daniel D. Lee, *Doing Asian American Theology: A Contextual Framework for Faith and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

²⁵ Brad Vaughn, *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2015), 25-6.

²⁶ Vaughn also notes, “for example, a Chinese Christian may understand the importance of group identification as a Chinese person yet be quite individualistic in his or her involvement with the church. We compromise the gospel when we settle for what is merely true, because many ‘right’ answers can lead to applications that are not appropriate to the text or the local context. These so-called ‘contextualizations’ may lead to an unexpected sort of syncretism. This is a syncretism oriented to a denomination, theological tradition, or the missionary’s home culture.” Vaughn, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 25-6.

People who minister cross-culturally need to be especially conscious of this fact: they too have blind spots that could unknowingly affect their teaching and practice. Ironically, local Christians may inherit the missionaries' cultural blind spots (when it comes to their faith), even though that area of weakness is not inherent to the local culture.²⁷

Given such a reality, “the result is the subordination of their racial and ethnic identities and modes of thinking” which then leads to Asian Americans being “content to persist with the status quo of evangelical theology inherited from their evangelical teachers,” since “Asian American Evangelicals have traditionally understood their conversion to involve either a turning away from their Asian cultural roots or a minimizing of such aspects of their identity... Asian American Evangelicals are first and foremost Christians, and only secondarily, if at all, Asians.”²⁸ Hence, Lim notes that Chinese in particular and yet Asian more generally pay a high premium on respect for elders,²⁹ this phenomenon of “theological elders” reflects the reality of Eurocentric “cultural captivity” that legitimates orthodox Christianity as Asian American Christians defer towards white American pastors, preachers, and theologians that make up the “Western cultural captivity” of Babylon for Asian American Evangelicals that Rah names.³⁰ In other words, Asian North American Christians on the whole know little if any about their own histories, let alone their theologians.

However, instead of engaging Asian and Asian American resources as theological syncretism—that is the mixing of different religions and their ideas with Christian theology—I suggest we follow Lee’s assessment in noting that “all theology is contextual theology” whether it is done through an Asian, African, African American, Latino, Indigenous, European, or even a White American or Canadian lens, all theology is done from heritages, cultures, social locations, and histories, that brings a witness of God’s work in their lives and communities.³¹ If concerns of contextual theology are charged as syncretism, Lee names the issue at hand through stating, “we cannot ignore the danger of syncretism and cultural distortions for our faith, but we should also acknowledge how White-normative theology has been so quick to raise this warning all the while remaining persistently blind to its own Western or ‘American’ cultural engagements. A deep racist and orientalist bias must be overcome if we are to begin taking up these heritages theologically.”³²

Hence, the present task is judiciously and faithfully to reclaim Asian heritage, exemplified in East Asian traditions like Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shamanism, Shinto, etc. as instances of “redeeming the languages” or valuable lived cultural resources for theological reflection and to deal with these lived implicit and explicit traditions. These Asian traditions are the lived cultural waters in which at least the first and second generations of Asians in the diaspora swim and live, similar to how Westerners live and swim in the waters of Greco-Roman philosophical traditions that we have witnessed above. As Lee models a methodology engaging the Asian heritage of Asians and Asian American, “by identifying Asian heritage as vital for Asian American theology, we can connect the Asian American Christian experience to the disciplines of missiological research, interreligious dialogue, and Asian theologies, all of which together form a considerable resource.”³³

²⁷Vaughn, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 25-6.

²⁸Yong, *The Future of Evangelical Theology*, 102, 105.

²⁹Lim writes, “Respect for the ancestors is the only moral virtue common to almost all Chinese.” Lim, “Contextualizing Ancestor Veneration,” 186; for a more thorough treatment of the role of ancestors, family and honor in Chinese cultural frameworks see Russell M. Jeung, Seanan S. Fong, and Helen Jin Kim, *Family Sacrifices: The Worldviews and Ethics of Chinese Americans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

³⁰Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009).

³¹Lee, *Doing Asian American Theology*, 28.

³²Lee, *Doing Asian American Theology*, 80.

³³Yong, *Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 247, 266; Lee, “Spirit of Integration,” 291; Daniel D. Lee, *Doing Asian American Theology: A Contextual Framework for Faith and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 28, 69.

Indeed, Vaugh states, “contextualization protects us against syncretism”³⁴ because contextualization is the intentional act of theologizing from one’s context replete with critical awareness and understanding of the nuances of history, identity, personal experience, heritage, racialization, gender, and Western culture where one can be free to use or not use reclaimed resources as heuristic tools for Asian diasporic theological formation. Models of contextualization like Lee’s Asian American Quadrilateral (AAQ) integrating: Asian heritage, migration experience, American culture and racialization serve as helpful starting points for Asian American theological formation, instead of an unexamined or unfounded jumbling of different religious sources to fit into a syncretistic paradigm, as Lee elucidates, “we cannot meaningfully ask the theological question of what the gospel means in a particular context if we cannot even grasp the scope and boundaries of that context.”³⁵

To be sure, this dichotomy of contextualization and syncretism is not always such a neat and tidy reality. Not all attempts at theological contextualization are created equal. In some attempts to contextualize the gospel, syncretism might still occur, however humble, noble, honest, or earnest one might be. Hence, Ma stipulates, “when it comes to contextualization..., one requires extreme care” which is true of any missiological methodologies.³⁶ *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* edited by Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang on the whole, Ma and Simon Chan’s articles therein in particular, along with Simon Chan’s *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking Faith from the Ground Up* would be great starting places to dive into the discussion of Asian Pentecostal missiology’s engagement with contextualization and the relevant issues surrounding syncretism.³⁷ For instance, Ma’s article “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context” in *Asian and Pentecostal* problematizes the dichotomy of contextualization and syncretism through an engagement of Pentecostal spirituality with Asian practices such as *Tai chi*, *Chi-Gong*, or acupuncture, stating, “*Chi* is an old Chinese concept referring to a universal energy of life. Street-side ‘institutes’ claim to be able to charge this cosmic energy of life into individuals. How Pentecostal churches should discern and judge this practice is a uniquely Asian Pentecostal theological issue and challenge”.³⁸ These practices do have the potential to be prime intersections that might bear some contextual fruit as martial artists have had spiritual and sometimes even Christian experiences of *Qi* through their embodied practice, though Christian discernment and wisdom is much required to avoid syncretism.³⁹

Thus, my goal here in attempting to explore the Holy Spirit as *Qi* is not to antagonize or upend the global theological establishment and enterprise as a whole, but to theologize faithfully from a contextual vantage point drawing from East Asian and diasporic Asian resources. Again, I realize the risk of syncretism or at least the charges thereof when engaging with terms found in different cultures and even religions not traditionally associated with Christianity. Effectively, I simply ask for the same intellectual humility and curiosity of considering *Qi* from East Asian resources as Christians from the past have learned to integrate *Logos* into Christian theology from Greco-Roman philosophy. Therefore, the work for Asian and Asian Diasporic Christians and Pentecostals is to faithfully contextualize Christian faith and spirituality, or in this case the “pentecostal mind” into Asian and Asian American settings and to faithfully discern Asian and Asian diasporic cultures through the Christian faith, as

³⁴ Vaugh, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 12.

³⁵ Admittedly, this work primarily concerns itself more with the realm of the philosophies and traditions of Asian heritage than any other area of the AAQ, yet their prevalence can have ample significance on the lived realities of Diasporic Asians. Lee, *Doing Asian American Theology*, 57.

³⁶ Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” 60-1.

³⁷ Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia Revised Edition*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcrbt.10>; Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014).

³⁸ Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” 71.

³⁹ For a more robust engagement of martial artists’ spiritual experience of *Qi* in their practice, see Veronica Cibotaru, “The Spiritual Features of the Experience of *qi* in Chinese Martial Arts,” *Religions* 12, no. 10 (2021): 836. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100836>.

Yong says “the gospel comes in cultural dress,”⁴⁰ and Vaughn writes “Jesus saves all nations; becoming Christian does not mean rejecting non-Western culture.”⁴¹ Hence, the work here in contextualization, far from syncretism, I propose we adopt a contextual Pentecostal approach that discerns the Scriptural and theological witness as Yong elsewhere encourages us to do, so as to redeem the languages, cultures, and perhaps even religious traditions “for the sake of the gospel” as we examine *Qi* and its relation to the Holy Spirit.⁴²

A Word Study of *Qi*, *Ling*, *Feng*, *Chui*, *Ruach*, and *Pneuma*

First, some definitions are in order as we discern what *Qi* means. *Qi* is “a term which encompasses such a variety of meanings as spirit, force, material force, energy, vital energy, vapor, breath, and air” along with movement, vibration, space, light, gas, etc.⁴³ Indeed, *Qi* is the living-giving “force that interpenetrates all entities, animate and inanimate.”⁴⁴ Elsewhere, Kim elucidates, “*ch’i*” is “a vital, dynamic, original power that permeates the entire universe and leads to an ultimate reality. *Ch’i* brings cohesiveness and order as it essentially holds the universe together.”⁴⁵ Chan also notes in Lee’s Asian trinitarian theology of the Spirit, “the Spirit is the *qi*, the activity of *yin* and *yang*. *Qi* is the wind or breath that flows through the universe and the microcosm of the human body bringing healing.”⁴⁶

Linguistically, the word 氣 *Qi* in Chinese can serve as a prefix or suffix (in linguistics we call this an affix) in Chinese morphology that then gives rise to new meanings, thus giving further credence to *Qi*’s pervasiveness in East Asian thought.⁴⁷ *Qi* as an everyday phenomenon is also found replete throughout the pages of the Chinese translations of Christian Scripture.⁴⁸ In addition, to *Qi* there is also *Ling* 靈/灵 which is used to connote the Spirit’s and the spirits’ agency as personal actors with a will, desires, emotions, etc. Modern Chinese Christians, to their credit, have employed the term

⁴⁰ Yong, *Spirit Poured out on All Flesh*, 240.

⁴¹ Vaughn, *One Gospel for All Nations*, 48.

⁴² Yong, *Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 247, 266.

⁴³ Koo Dong Yun, *The Holy Spirit and Ch’i (Qi): A Chiological Approach to Pneumatology* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 1-2; Han, “Toward an Asian Pneumatology,” 286-9; Kim, *Reimagining Spirit*, 36-59.

⁴⁴ Hertig, *The Tao of Asian American Belonging*, 51.

⁴⁵ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, “In Search of a Pneumatology: *Chi* and Spirit,” *Feminist Theology* 18, no. 1 (2009): 121.

⁴⁶ Chan further observes in Lee’s Asian trinitarian theology of the Spirit “this concept underlies the healing techniques of acupuncture, *Tai Ji* and so on, which seek to let the *qi* flow harmoniously through the body.” Chan, *Grassroots Theology*, 58.

⁴⁷ For a quick sketch of how *Qi* works in the Chinese language, it can stand alone word as 氣 *Qi*, but generally forms new meanings when it occurs as the first or second character of a word in the category of noun, verb, or adjective such as the following everyday words such as 生氣: ‘life-energy, living breath, to become angry’; 氣息: ‘breath’; 吹氣: ‘breathe’; 吸氣: ‘to inhale’; 呼氣: ‘to exhale’; 口氣: ‘a spoken word, breath’; 氣口: ‘air tub opening’; 風氣/氣候: ‘atmosphere’; 天氣: ‘weather’; 氣象: ‘meteorology’; 動氣: ‘movement’; 氣氛/氣場: ‘feeling, mood, character, aura, vibe’; 氣力/力氣: ‘strength’; 氣化: ‘gasify’; 熱氣: ‘hot air’; 香氣: ‘aroma’; to more abstract words such as 勇氣: ‘courage, bravery’; 義氣: ‘righteousness, loyalty, brotherhood’; 福氣: ‘blessing’; 氣和/和氣: ‘peace’ or ‘harmony’; etc., as noted above, the Chinese character 氣 can likewise take on different radicals. Needless to say, 氣 *Qi* is pervasive in standard Chinese, yet this same attitude can be reflected in many languages in the Sinosphere as well.

⁴⁸ With a quick search on biblegateway.com, one can find 395 occurrences of the word 氣 *qi* in the Chinese Union Version (CUV) alone, many of which do not have a direct correlation to *ruach* or *pneuma* yet given *qi*’s semantic range in Chinese, one can see the clear ubiquity and pervasiveness of *qi* in the world, which can inform our understanding of the work of the Spirit in the world:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=%E6%B0%A3&version=CUV&resultspp=250>.

Ling judiciously to safeguard the active and personal agency of the Spirit.⁴⁹ Next, *feng* 風/风 is wind and follows the English translations, mostly when associating with the Hebrew word *ruach* or Greek word *pneuma*. Last, *Chui* 吹 is a verb that means to blow, characteristic of wind, spirit, and breath. The concept of the Hebrew word רוח *Ruach* and its Greek equivalent πνεῦμα *Pneuma* can mean “spirit, force, energy, vapor, breath, and air” and additionally “the divine energetic force or presence” or “Divine energetic presence within us.”⁵⁰ The Hebrew *Ruach* is mentioned “about 380 times” in the Old Testament, Hebrew Bible, or Jewish Scriptures, and “27 times” in its association with Yahweh or the Divine in some way.⁵¹ Similarly, the Greek *pneuma* occurs a little over 400 times in the New Testament.⁵²

However, Kim has noted the difficulty to “translate the Hebrew word *ruach* into English because it does not hold the dualistic connotations of the Greek *pneuma*, the Latin *spiritus*, and the German *geist* as they are antithetical to matter and body. They mean something immaterial” which is quite telling of how we conceive of the word ‘spirit’ in English.⁵³ She continues, “Whether we are speaking Greek, Latin, German, or English, the phrase Spirit of God meant something disembodied, supersensory, and supernatural in the language of classical theologians and hence Western Christians through the ages,” and that it has been imposed upon global expression of Christianity through Western imperialism which splits the world into physical and spiritual yet remains incommensurate to the Hebrew understanding given, “Yahweh’s *ruach* is not the antithesis to matter and body but rather a tempest, a storm, a force in body and soul, humanity and nature”—a semantic range very similar to *Qi*’s gradually expanded its semantic range into areas of “heaven, earth, humanity, and all living things. Thus, *Chi* is connected not only to the Divine but also to the earth”.⁵⁴ Kim further notes Western languages and their proclivities to translate *Qi* as “air, wind, vapor, breath, gas, vital spirit, anger, appearance, intelligence, vital fluid, energy, material force, vital force, and subtle spirits. All

⁴⁹ *Ling* has been by far the word most associated with the Holy Spirit. However, another point of interest is to note that the Chinese Bible translations have three terms for the word *God* which are *Shangdi* 上帝: ‘Lord on High’, *Shen* 神: ‘spirit(s)’, and *Tianzhu* 天主: ‘Lord of Heaven’. The Chinese word *shen* 神 has connotations of spirit(s) which makes one wonder why translators made the move to use *shen* instead of *ling* as the word for God.

⁵⁰ Yun, *The Holy Spirit and Ch’I (Qi)*, 1-2; Koo Dong Yun, “Pneumatological Perspectives on World Religions,” in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium : A Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, ed. Chung, Paul S., Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Kyöng-jae Kim (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 168; Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*, 38.

⁵¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 40; Elsewhere, Lee Roy Martin notes the occurrence of the word *ruach* 378 times in Hebrew with 11 times in Aramaic; while Wilf Hilderbrant puts it at 389 occurrences of רוח in the Old Testament with references to “the divine Spirit” 107 times. Lee Roy Martin, “The Spirit and the Old Testament,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology*, ed. Daniel Castelo and Kenneth M. Loyereds (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), 75; Wilf Hilderbrant, *An Old Testament Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 1.

⁵² The verb “πνέω occurs only 7x in the NT, always with ref. to the wind (incl. John 3:8, which compares the wind with the activity of the Spirit)” within various compound configurations like θεόπνευστος, lit., “breathed by God,” with ref. to the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16, whereas “the noun πνεῦμα is used with great freq. in the NT, occurring c. 380x...”, the adjective “πνευματικός occurs 26x”, and the adverb πνευματικῶς occurs twice. Silva, Moises, ed. 2014. “Πνεῦμα G4460 (Pneuma), Breath, Wind, Spirit, Disposition; Πνευματικός G4461 (Pneumatikos), Spiritual; Πνευματικῶς G4462 (Pneumatikōs), Spiritually; Πνέω G4463 (Pneō), to Blow; Πνοή G4466 (Pnoē), Wind, Breath; Εκπνέω G1743 (Ekpneō), to Breathe out, Expire, Die; Εμπνέω G1863 (Empneō), to Blow or Breathe on; Υποπνέω G5710 (Hypopneō), to Blow (Gently); Θεόπνευστος G2535 (Theopneustos), God-Breathed, Inspired by God.” Moisés Silva, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Second edition / [Enhanced Credo edition] (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Boston, Massachusetts: Zondervan, Credo Reference, 2014), <http://www.credoreference.com/book/zonttae>.

⁵³ Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*, 40; Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 40.

⁵⁴ Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi and the Other*, 10.

these translations depict *Chi* as vital to life.”⁵⁵ Thus, given her proposal to see the Holy Spirit as *Chi*, we see much resonance between these various Chinese words with the corresponding Hebrew and Greek words that can be reflected in passages like Genesis 2, Ezekiel 36-37, Psalm 104 and John 20. These are some of the key passages to consider when exploring the translation work and the association of between *pneuma*, *ruach*, *ling*, *qi*, *feng*, and *chui*, though the scope of this oeuvre gives limited space to dig deep into these biblical passages in Chinese.

Theological Construction of *Qi*

There are now more conversations around the discussion over the use and comparison of *Qi* as the Holy Spirit between Asian, Asian American, and non-Asian Christians, as many recognize the indelible similarities between the two.⁵⁶ Encouragingly, I am not the first to explore the intersections of *Qi* and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, many have already gone before me and laid the groundwork, thus I am truly grateful for Asian and Asian American theologians and scholars who have spilled much ink on the topic of the Holy Spirit and *Qi*.⁵⁷ For example, Koo Dong Yun confesses that “after only a few days of research, it did not take me long to realize that the best Chinese translation of the biblical term ‘Spirit/spirit’ (*ruach* and *pneuma*) ought to be *ch’i* (C. 氣)”, along with Kim among others, there is a sizable following among Asian and Asian American theologians who find some resonance identifying the Holy Spirit with *Qi*.⁵⁸ Even Yong, who though does not directly take the last step of naming the Holy Spirit as *Qi*, nonetheless endorses the project and considers it a worthwhile investigation as he has even written a book entitled, *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Triologue*, which is his attempt at bridging the gap between Asian philosophical traditions and resources, cosmology, science, and Christian pneumatology.⁵⁹

However, given the relative novelty of the discussion comparing the Holy Spirit and *Qi*, there has been virtually no published pushback, except for the recent articles written by the Vicar Rev. Canon Daniel Tong of the Anglican Diocese of Singapore and Matthew Atkins at the academic level. For instance, chief among Tong’s arguments is that *Qi* hails from *fengshui*, that humans can “orient,

⁵⁵ Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi and the Other*, 10.

⁵⁶ Justin T. T. Tan, “You Made All Things Beautiful in Their Time,” in *Spirit Wind: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Global Theology: A Chinese Perspective*, ed. Peter L. H. Tie and Justin T. T. Tan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications), 2021, 72; Amos Yong, “Renewing Global Christianity,” in *Spirit Wind: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Global Theology: A Chinese Perspective*, ed. Peter L. H. Tie and Justin T. T. Tan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 207; William L. Atkins, “Apples and Cherries: A New Perspective on Comparing *Qi* and the Holy Spirit,” *The Journal of World Christianity* 13, no. 2 (2023): 117–27. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jworlchri.13.2.0117>; William L. Atkins “Divine Illumination Traditional Chinese Medicine and the spirit field theory of Wolfhart Pannenberg” (PhD in Systematic Theology, University of Edinburgh, 2019), 265-8, 269-88, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7488/era/2115>; David Shang Ehil Han, “Toward an Asian Pneumatology: A Reflective Reading,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology*, ed. Daniel Castelo and Kenneth M. Loyereds (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), 281-2.

⁵⁷ Some of these Asian and Asian American theologians and scholars include the works of Asian theologians Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Koo Dong Yun, Simon Chan, Jacob Chengwei Feng, Jung Young Lee, Heup Yong Kim, Young Lee Hertig, John Wei-Leung Cheng, Justin Tan, and Daniel D. Lee. However, Amos Yong was the very first theologian who invited me to embrace the possibility of bringing all of who I am to the task of theology from my own context and situatedness, for which I am forever indebted. The title of this work is in homage to Yong’s work, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005). These are the theologians I want to grow up and become one day by honouring them as my “theological elders” in my work.

⁵⁸ Yun, *The Holy Spirit and Ch’i (Qi)*, 1.

⁵⁹ Amos Yong, *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Triologue* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Yong, “Renewing Global Christianity,” 207.

place, ingest and manipulate” and while *Qi* can be “directed and captured through actions,” is a “supernatural force,” and “not the ‘pneuma’ (spirit) of God” or the Holy Spirit “cannot be manhandled by us—we are humans!” given that “the Holy Spirit is not *Qi*. God is not the source of the supernatural power of *Qi*” as he ends with a cautionary warning that “Supernatural forces not of God are not to be dabbled in.”⁶⁰ Tong’s argument resonates with Yong here, “We do not own the Spirit, but simply comply with what the Spirit is doing in the world.”⁶¹ While, Atkin’s perspective, on the other hand, is more nuanced in advancing that a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) perspective of “*Qi* may find consonance with Pannenberg’s thoughts on divine action in relation to the human body” or find an actual point of connection in “the actions of *Qi* in pulse diagnosis and the actions of the Spirit in spirit field theory,” which surprisingly in a spiritual sense seems to resonate with Yong again, as he states “the ‘heart’ is the unifying center for the human mind, will, emotions and body as shaped by the encounter with the Spirit. In this connection, charismatic experiences are initial signs of the believer’s entry into the force field of the Spirit.”⁶²

Still yet, on a historical note, it is noteworthy that the Church of the East, the earliest Christian presence in China during the seventh to tenth century in the Tang dynasty, also known as the *Jingjiao* 景教, or the Luminous Religion, did in fact use *Qi* when referencing the Holy Spirit before defaulting to *Feng* for ‘Wind’ when a new bishop arrived in China, which helps to give more credence to linking the Holy Spirit to *Qi* through how “the author of the Stele integrates the Holy Spirit with the Chinese metaphysical concept of *qi* 气 (or *Chi*, breath, pneuma, spirit). A further investigation of the word *qi* indicates that the word appears ten times in the entire Tang *Jingjiao* corpus.”⁶³ Feng surmises, “the dominant Chinese metaphysical concept of *qi* was most likely a convenient way for them to associate wind with the Holy Spirit,” a clear missiological impulse to relate to the Chinese imagination on the part of the Luminous Religion during their time in the Tang dynasty.⁶⁴ Elsewhere, in speaking about the three Abrahamic religions in classical China, Feng observes “each religion not only borrows Chinese terminologies but also integrates in unison the Chinese metaphysical concept of the Spirit and *qi*.”⁶⁵ Yet, perhaps one of the most salient points to this whole conversation is Kim’s observation that “Even Korean Christians ignore *Chi*... The majority resist their own heritage, deferring to the dominant, Eurocentric understanding” which only exacerbates charges of syncretism and heresy against Asian (and Diasporic Asian) Christians when they seek to engage this discussion in “redeeming the languages.”⁶⁶

A Yin-Yang Model of the Personal and Impersonal Spirit

⁶⁰ Daniel Tong, “Is *Qi* compatible with the Christian faith?” The Methodist Church in Singapore, Methodist Message, 1 May 2024, <https://www.methodist.org.sg/methodist-message/is-qi-compatible-with-the-christian-faith/>.

⁶¹ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 177.

⁶² Atkins, “Divine Illumination,” 4, 5, 229, 288; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 175.

⁶³ Jacob Chengwei Feng, “Christianity’s Earliest Encounter with the Ancient Techno-Scientific China: Critical Lessons from *Jingjiao*’s Approach,” *Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology*, New Series, Vol. 2 (2023), 94, <https://journal.iscast.org/past-issues/christianitys-earliest-encounter-with-the-ancient-techno-scientific-china-critical-lessons-from-jingjiaos-approach>.

⁶⁴ Feng, “Christianity’s Earliest Encounter,” 98.

⁶⁵ Jacob Chengwei Feng, “Holistic Wisdom from Abrahamic Faiths’ Earliest Encounters with Ancient China: Towards a Constructive Chinese Natural Theology,” *Religions* 14, no. 9 (2023): 7, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091117>.

⁶⁶ Kim, *Reimagining Spirit*, 115; Yong, *Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 247, 266.

The Christian assertion is that God is by nature personal. However, can we come to understand God is beyond personal because God in the Trinity is Tri-Personal? If the Spirit is God, then the Spirit should solely be viewed through personal language. However, we see many impersonal metaphors of the Spirit and for Pentecostals, chief among them, as Gabriel notes, is “the way that Pentecostals frequently speak of the Spirit as ‘filling’ people or of the need to be ‘re-filled’ with the Spirit might sound like understanding the Spirit in impersonal ways” even if Pentecostals desire to understand the Spirit to be both divine and personal.⁶⁷ Even in the Hebrew Bible, we fail to see any clear connotations of the Spirit as personal yet we still hold to the New Testament’s witness of the Spirit’s personhood, however faint, under-developed, or burgeoning it might be.⁶⁸

Building on the work of other Asian and Asian American scholars, I propose a *Yin-Yang* 陰陽 / 阴阳 or *both-and* model to see the nature of the Holy Spirit as both personal and impersonal, that is, the Holy Spirit is equally personal to the Father and the Son in the Trinity, fully alive with will, agency, desire, etc. and also holds space to fill in for all the impersonal metaphors of wind, breath, air, fire, water, space, life force, vibrancy, energy, etc. effectively establishing the harmonious relationship of the Spirit’s personhood and im-personhood might be sustained through the Spirit’s active and passive presence.⁶⁹ Or as Yong elucidates, “epistemically, then *yin-yang* is both-and holism, rather than either-or binarism, while culturally and operationally, East Asian idealism presumes *yin-yang* interrelationality and inter-connectedness,” hence on my proposed *Yin-Yang* model, the personal and impersonal nature of the Holy Spirit work well in relationality with each other as they complement and work in tandem with each other.⁷⁰ Therefore, my hope here is to somehow give voice to the nature of God being both *personal* and *impersonal*, of which I find the language of *Yin-Yang* to be most helpful although potentially essentializing as a stereotype if this method of thought reduces all of East Asian religio-philosophical thinking into the *Yin-Yang* with little nuances or afterthought. I do not mean to imply that the Holy Spirit is good and evil, light and darkness, but that two opposite features of the personal and the impersonal can harmoniously sit together in the unity of God the Spirit. Further, this notion of im-personhood can be akin to German theologian Paul Tillich’s concept of God as the “ground of being” which in this case we can argue that the Spirit is the ground of *qi* or being, essence, or energy itself that sustains all creation, and Yong and Kim give voice to, which I propose can help understand a *Ying-Yang* model of God the Spirit as *Ling* (personal) and *Qi* (impersonal), thus setting us up to discern a discussion about Divine Energies afterwards.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Gabriel, “Pneumatology,” 208.

⁶⁸ Wonsuk Ma, “The Empowerment of the Spirit of God in Luke-Acts: An Old Testament Perspective,” in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Robbert P. Menzies (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 28; Hilderbrant, *An Old Testament Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 88-9; Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 19.

⁶⁹ Other attempts at adopting a *Yin-Yang* model have been made in Asian Trinitarian theology and Christology, and even on the Complementarian vs. Egalitarian arguments as Yong talks about a “*Yin-Yang* Cosmology.” Amos Yong, “Yin-Yang and the Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: An Evangelical Egalitarian East-West Dialogue on Gender and Race,” *Pricilla Papers* 43, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 23. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/yin-yang-and-spirit-poured-out-all-flesh/>. For a more robust account of the *Yin-Yang* model in Asian trinitarian theology see the following: Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 58-9; Jaeseung Cha, “A Dialog between Patristic Christology and the Yin-Yang Perspective on the Relationship of Christ’s Nature with his Person,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7, no. 3 (2013): 294-309.

⁷⁰ Yong, “Yin-Yang and the Spirit,” 23-4.

⁷¹ Tillich states, “many confusions in the doctrine of God and many apologetic weaknesses could be avoided if God were understood first of all as being-itself or as the ground of being.” Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume I* (Chicago, IL: the University of Chicago Press, 1951), 235; John Wei-Leung Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies: Insights on Catholic Theology of Energies?” in *A Handbook of Catholic Theology of Energies, Vol. 7: An Exploration of Catholic Theology of Energies*, ed. John Wei-Leung Cheng (Toronto: Grace Institute Press, 2015), 8-10; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 175; Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*, 39-40, 143.

The Yang 陽/阳 of the Spirit: Personal Notions of the Holy Spirit as Ling 靈/灵

On a Pentecostal pneumatology, Gabriel notes the insistence of the “Holy Spirit as person in order to develop a genuine Pentecostal pneumatology.”⁷² In addition, the language of the translators have always favoured *Ling* to signal the personhood of the Spirit. Following in the traditions of the translators, I elect to keep *Ling* to safeguard the meaning of the Holy Spirit’s personhood, thus designating the *Yang* 陽/阳 nature of the Spirit, yet not to the detriment of *Qi*, which we will cover next. Pentecostals have vivid and vibrant personal experiences with the Holy Spirit, which only serves to heighten the desire to emphasize that “the Spirit is a personal, immediate, dynamic and perfect guide.”⁷³ Gabriel hints at many traits that demonstrate the Spirit’s personhood such as the Spirit’s passion for how “the Spirit suffers with creation” among other things.⁷⁴ Also, Italian American Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia cautions us not to “depersonalize the Spirit” given the personal nature of Pentecostal experience with God in the Spirit.⁷⁵

Further excursions of Scripture demonstrate the personhood of the Spirit in the following: the Spirit is associated with God as a member of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19), the Spirit searches and knows the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), the Spirit glorifies Jesus (John 16:14), the Spirit can be lied to (Acts 5:3-4), the Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), the Spirit can be blasphemed against (Matthew 12:32; Luke 12:10), the Spirit is the comforter/counsellor (John 14:26), the Spirit suffers with all of creation with “groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26-27), the Spirit is the giver of the charismata (1 Corinthians 12:11), the Spirit dwells in humans who are known as the temple of the Holy Spirit implying the Spirit’s divinity or godhood (1 Corinthians 6:19), the Spirit has agency and can make value judgments (Acts 15:28), and the Spirit can speak and teach (Acts 8:29; 13:2), etc. For each of these passages, translators employed *Ling* to demonstrate the active agency of the Holy Spirit in the Chinese translation of the Bible. However, could the Spirit be more than simply personal? How else can we make sense of the impersonal metaphors of the Spirit in Scripture? Here, I propose that we can see God as beyond personal – not simply as personal, but also impersonal insofar as the impersonal metaphors of Scripture testify to that impersonal reality, which leads me to propose the use of *Qi* for understanding such impersonal metaphors of the Spirit.

The Yin 陰/阴 of the Spirit: Impersonal Metaphors of the Holy Spirit as Qi 氣/气

Although the Spirit is fully and wholly personal and divine as God, thus warranting the use of *Ling* to connote personhood, Scripture does use impersonal metaphors to explain the Spirit’s presence, activity, and manifestations in the world. Then, the idea of the ubiquitous Spirit or *Qi* found in and sustaining in all creation becomes all the more relevant through engagement with a Chinese theology of Divine Energies. Asian (diasporic) Pentecostals in particular and Christians in general can then learn to benefit from and incorporate an East Asian understanding of *Qi* in their pneumatology, which can help to open their scope of the Holy Spirit in a more holistic dimension. I propose that *Qi* be the main terminology to talk about the Holy Spirit’s im-personhood, not to the erasure of the Spirit’s personhood or divinity but still maintained by *Ling* but to complement it and make sense of the many impersonal metaphors including fire, water, wind, and many others witnessed in Scripture.

New Testament Metaphors of the Spirit as Wind, Fire, and Water on the Day of Pentecost

⁷² Gabriel, “Pneumatology,” 206.

⁷³ Gabriel, “Pneumatology,” 208.

⁷⁴ Gabriel, “Pneumatology,” 208-9.

⁷⁵ Frank Macchia, *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010), 302.

Although metaphors are not exact depictions of reality, they nonetheless colour our thoughts and inform us of how we see our world. Here, I elect to see the metaphors of wind, fire and water in the New Testament, testifying about the Day of Pentecost. For wind, Spirit and wind are the same word in Greek, thus we need not look any further than John 3:8, “The wind blows where it pleases.” We see that the Spirit is associated with fire in Luke 3:16 and Matthew 3:11, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” For water, the Spirit is the life-giving and rejuvenating water in Titus 3:5-7, “the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” along with the Gospel of John’s reference to the Holy Spirit as the “rivers of living water” (John 7:37-39). All these impersonal and elemental metaphors of the Holy Spirit culminate on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 where “a violent wind came from heaven and filled the house,” followed by “tongues of fire” resting on each person gathered, the Spirit “‘poured out’ like water on all flesh.”⁷⁶

Given that *Qi* can be culturally understood in East Asia to be the primordial energy emitting the five Chinese elements or “material-forces” (五行) of metal (金), wood (木), water (水), fire (火), and earth (土) among others like air, I contend that it is the Spirit’s *Qi* that manifests all these miraculous events on the Day of Pentecost, which in a sense, the impersonal metaphors reflect.⁷⁷ We see God the Spirit acting with agency in choosing to act with impersonal elements featured in Scripture, though this is not an exhaustive list of impersonal metaphors of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ Hence, we can potentially say the Spirit’s *Ling* chose to work out of the Spirit’s *Qi* to affect these works, and perhaps most pointedly in Acts 4:31 with an earthquake after the disciples’ prayer in correlation to Psalms 104:32, “May the LORD rejoice in his works – he who looks at the earth, it trembles.” In other words, we can see the Spirit’s *Yin-Yang* operation in both the Spirit’s personal *Ling* and the Spirit’s impersonal *Qi*.

The Qi of qis: Qi/qi as being through Uncreated Energy and created energies

However, how do we make sense of the world being filled with and sustained by the Spirit? If *Qi* is the impersonal nature of God who is Spirit, then are Pentecostals filled with *Qi*? In keeping in step with Yun and Kim, they elucidate that “Yahweh’s *ruach* has two sides, namely, transcendent and immanent”, which hints at the *Yin-Yang* model of the Spirit I propose. In an attempt to integrate these two sides of the Spirit’s transcendence and immanence, I move to adopt Chinese Catholic theologian, John Wei-Leung Cheng’s Chinese Catholic theology of *Qi* or Energies who has argued that being and energy can be translated as *qi* in Chinese and constructs a Chinese Catholic theology through an Eastern Orthodox understanding of Divine Energies, into the *Yin-Yang* model of the *Qi/Ling* model, particularly through an Uncreated or Divine Energy and created energy distinction.⁷⁹ In the end, we will see how the Spirit relates to our “*Qi*-filled world.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Grabiell, “Pneumatology,” 211.

⁷⁷ Yun, *The Holy Spirit and Ch’I (Qi)*, 67, 69.

⁷⁸ Many more metaphors can be found in Scripture in both Old and New Testaments, like truth, wisdom, power, wind, etc.; “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31); “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works — he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke” (Psalms 104:30-32).

⁷⁹ Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies?,” 1-35; Yun, “Pneumatological Perspectives on World Religions,” 168; Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi and The Other*, 38.

⁸⁰ I derive this phrase from the Wisdom of Solomon 1:7 (NRSVUE), “the spirit of the Lord has filled the world,” though not within the Protestant canon, nonetheless is useful in this case in expressing *qi* or the Spirit’s ubiquity as “that which holds all things together knows what is said” to showcase the “ubiquity of the cosmic Spirit,” Yun, “Pneumatological Perspectives on World Religions,” 165-8.

Here I draw on Cheng, who has proposed a Chinese Catholic theology of *Qi* (中國天主教氣神學), or a Chinese theology of energies (中國氣神學) wherein he defines it as, “a study of the ongoing interactive relationship between God’s omnipresent Uncreated Energy and created energies, such that God’s creation, in particular human beings, for the glory of God, would increasingly activate and partake in God’s omnipresent Divine Energy or divine nature in divinization (or *theosis*).”⁸¹ Earlier Cheng draws on the witness of Chinese wisdom by footnoting “the fact or phenomenon that everything is *qi* or *qi* source (which does not cease radiating its *qi*) is part of the time-tested Chinese civilization” thus giving an overview of his presentation of a Chinese “Catholic Theology of *Qis* or Energies” as “an incultural [contextual] theology which utilizes the traditional incultural concept of *qi* or energy to systematically express and affirm the Catholic faith.”⁸² Here, Cheng elucidates that a Chinese Catholic theology of *Qi* can be defined as the following:

Given that every ‘thing’ in the totality of reality is ceaselessly transcendentally radiating *qi*, energy or energy-like being, all ‘things’ in this universe can be divided into two categories accordingly, i.e., God’s Uncreated Energy (or Energies) and created energies. Being faithful to the Magisterium, this Theology can, therefore, be defined as a study of the ongoing interactive relationship between God’s omnipresent Uncreated Energy and created energies, such that God’s creation, in particular human beings, for the glory of God, would increasingly activate and partake in God’s omnipresent Divine Energy or divine nature in divinization (or *theosis*), in and through Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church, even forever and ever in Heaven, directly and indirectly.⁸³

Instead of adopting Eastern Orthodoxy’s language of Essence and Energies, Cheng uses the term Uncreated Energy and created energies instead as important distinctions between what he calls “Uncreated Personal Radiating Energy-Being and creatures viewed as created radiating energy-beings.”⁸⁴ The West has a strong tradition of trying to name the substance of divinity in opposition to creation whereas the East does so less.⁸⁵ Cheng articulates that *qi* can be known as “*dynamic* being” in East Asian views, whereas Western views being as static, hence, God is the “unmoved mover,” or more pointedly Cheng states, “it is important to note that, metaphysically speaking, just as every ‘thing’ in the Western civilization is static ‘being,’ every ‘thing’ in the Chinese civilization for the last three or four thousand years has been dynamically experienced as ‘*qi*’ and inextricably related to the energetic conception of ‘*qi*’.”⁸⁶ Yet, if we take this language of *Qi/qi*⁸⁷ or Energies/energies seriously, then we can see that it is Being that begets being. Put differently, Uncreated Energy energizes created energies into being. If we say that it is the Spirit that sustains all things and indeed renews all things (Psalm 104:30), then I propose it is the Spirit’s *Qi* that sustains and holds all of Creation with its energies, or as Amos Yong has put it as “cosmic breath” or potentially even the energetic “force field” that sustains all Creation.⁸⁸ Yong also argues that “charismatic experiences are initial signs of the believer’s entry into the force field of the Spirit,” which might find some purchase if *Qi* is also seen and felt as the “force field of the Spirit.”⁸⁹ In a similar but different vein as Yong’s energetic “force field of the Spirit,” Kim further articulates that *Qi* can become the very sacred space in which Divine encounters might occur,

⁸¹ Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies?,” 7-8

⁸² Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies?,” 7-8

⁸³ Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies?,” 8.

⁸⁴ Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies?,” 10.

⁸⁵ Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies?,” 8.

⁸⁶ Cheng, “What is Catholic Theology of Energies?,” 8, 10-1.

⁸⁷ *Qi* is Uncreated *Qi*, whereas *qi* is created *qi*; Cheng makes use of the capitalization system in English.

⁸⁸ Amos Yong, *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/9789004230491>; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 175.

⁸⁹ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 175.

stating:

To experience *ruach* is to experience what is Divine as space, the freedom in which the living can unfold. That is the experience of the Spirit: ‘Thou has set my feet in a broad place’ (Ps. 31:8).’ ‘You also he allured out of distress into a broad place where there is no cramping’ (Job 36:16).’ So not only does *ruach* give life, but it provides space for those in need, a place of safety for those who need a haven, and a space to be liberated and free.⁹⁰

Kim additionally argues that “the reign of God is built in the areas between us; therefore, that space becomes sacred ground. The Divine exists in a space beyond our imagination. We can begin to theologize and encounter the Divine in this space, which is open, vibrant, and infinite.”⁹¹ Thus, *Qi* can be seen filling in the in-between space and the “sacred ground” of being, the “energy field” or the very continent on which we stand as we find in Wis. 1:7, “the spirit of the Lord fills the world and that which holds all things together knows what is said,” thereby allowing us to see the Spirit as the pneumatological space where we can live in an “enchanted universe,” “Spirit-charged universe,” or what I call a “*Qi*-filled world.”⁹² Hence, God is the Uncreated *Qi* that sustains all creation with their created *qi* through the Spirit’s Uncreated *Qi*. Indeed, the Spirit is the dynamic, ever-pulsating *Qi* that creates and sustains all *qis* (energy-beings). Together sharing the same Uncreated *Qi* nature with the Father and the Son in the Trinity, God the Spirit is the Divine Energy, the *Qi* from which all *qi* flows.

Potential Asian Pentecostal Applications of a Pneumatology of *Qi*

After our theologizing of the potential resourcing of Asian (diasporic) pneumatology, one could propose that, contextually, to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with *Qi* though even Ma cautions Asian Pentecostals when integrating the Holy Spirit and *Qi* in Asian spirituality.⁹³ However, some nuances are needed to clarify this point. In this model, the world and all that live within it is created, held, sustained, and “live, move and have their being” (Act 17:28) through the Spirit’s *Qi*. However, each living thing/being: person, creature, or spirit, is given their own *qi* or energy-being as their specific gift from the Creator. Then, can Pentecostals be filled with *Qi* in so far as the charismatic gifts of the Spirit are concerned? Yes, and no. If we take Macchia’s claims that Spirit Baptism is a mystical “theophanic encounter,” then we can say that Pentecostals encounter the living Spirit’s *Ling* who then baptizes them into the Spirit’s *Qi*, thus one can maintain having a personal encounter with Spirit’s impersonal baptism, since the Spirit can be experienced personally through the Spirit’s impersonal “one baptism” and “main fillings.”⁹⁴

However, just because everyone already has *qi* flowing in and through them does not mean that they have the *Qi* of the Spirit in them, thus we must still seek the Giver of the charismata, for it is an encounter with the Spirit’s *Ling* that we sense the Spirit’s *Qi* as the Divine energetic presence of God

⁹⁰ Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*, 39-40.

⁹¹ Kim, *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other*, 143.

⁹² The coinage of “Spirit-charged universe” comes from reading James K.A. Smith’s and Cheryl Bridges Johns’ works. James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 2010), 30; Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Re-Enchanting the Text: Discovering the Bible as Sacred, Dangerous and Mysterious* (Ada: MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 59.

⁹³ Again, reiterating Ma who stresses caution for Asian Pentecostals when integrating *Chi* into their spirituality, “*Chi* is an old Chinese concept referring to a universal energy of life.” Yet, “street-side ‘institutes’ claim to be able to charge this cosmic energy of life into individuals.” Ultimately, “how Pentecostal churches should discern and judge this practice is a uniquely Asian Pentecostal theological issue and challenge.” Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” 71.

⁹⁴ Frank Macchia, “Sighs Too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1992), 48-9, 54-7, 60-1, 6-70, 72; William Menzies and Robert Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, Haper-Collins Christian Publishing, 2000), 59.

which can be truly felt, or as Yong puts it, “charismatic experiences are initial signs of the believer's entry into the force field of the Spirit.”⁹⁵ Perhaps then, integrating an East Asian understanding of *Qi* might have experiential ramifications for exploring other ways the Spirit is poured upon all flesh through fresh eyes recognizing the charismatic gift of artistry or craftsmanship not found New Testament spiritual gift lists but in Exodus 31 and 35 for example among others. Justin Tan’s proposal is intriguing for someone from an Asian Pentecostal background to consider the intersections of *Qi*, art, and charismatic gifts as he writes:

Religions in China have always relied on the Arts to convey their ethos. What the ancient Greek termed the inspiration of artists that come from the Muses, the Chinese look to as inspiration by the Great and Universal *Qi*. And this, may we suggest, is the meeting point of the Spirit of Beauty with Eastern Universal *Qi*. What is termed *Qi* has been subject of many investigations in conjunction with the Theology of the Holy Spirit. Among other things that are said about *Qi*, one that is relevant here is to find the origin of inspirations in *Qi*, a creative spirit, that is inherent in the human spirit in response to the world around them. Art is a visible response to the prompting of *Qi*. This has particular relevance to the indigenization of Christian theology, as humans are looked at in our analysis below, as co-creative partners of the creative Spirit.⁹⁶

Yet, in spite all this venturing into the theological aesthetics of the Spirit’s creative *Qi* and willingness to engage the multitude of cultures, philosophies, and traditions, we no less live in the last days. Therefore, Pentecostals in particular and Christians in general are all called to discern the Spirit and the spirits, thus we, in following the Spirit’s leading in *Ling* and *Qi*, must grow in our ability to discern the Spirit’s activity, presence, and absence, in all the world, including world religions, which can include even principalities and powers such as demonic entities, forces, or elements.⁹⁷ The call to discern the spirits thus is a call into the Spirit’s mysteries to know God personally and impersonally.

Conclusion

This proposal helps to give language for Pentecostals to understand their experiences of the Holy Spirit in a fuller and more holistic way, as we hear the witness of the many multitudes testifying about the wonders of God through the redemption of their languages, cultures, and even religious traditions. Instead of a syncretistic model, I have endeavoured to put forth a contextual model that attempts to be critical and self-aware in East Asian and Asian American understandings for theological reflection. Here we have explored the connections of the Holy Spirit (*Ruach* and *Pneuma*) and *Qi* and have attempted to discern a way forward by employing a *Yin-Yang* Model, derived from East Asian and Asian American resources, to give language to the Spirit’s personal *Ling* and impersonal *Qi* along with bringing in an understanding of *Qi* as being, or the energetic and dynamic presence of the Living God who is Spirit. Hence, the integration of the Uncreated *Qi* energizing created *qi* (or Uncreated Energy and created energies), therefore being the *Qi* of *qis*, helps to inform us of the being and activity of God the Spirit in our world through *Qi*. Thus, all of Creation is *Qi*-filled and sustained by the Spirit’s *Qi* that gives all things their living *qi*.

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⁹⁵ Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 175.

⁹⁶ Tan, “You Have Made All Things Beautiful in Its Time,” 72.

⁹⁷ Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 250-3, Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 236-40.

pursue further studies into this under researched topic. Likewise, I am indebted to the Rev. Kelly Johnson and Lily Wu for championing and encouraging me to take a step of faith and submit this article for publication, along with many others who have seen merit in my work. Lastly, I thank Stephanie Alexandre and Fiel Sahir for reviewing some initial drafts.

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