PART II

POLICY AND DIGNITY:
CHINESENESS DURING AND AFTER THE NEW ORDER
CHAPTER TWO

BUSINESS, BELIEF, AND BELONGING:
SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS AND CONVERSION TO CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY

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Introduction

This chapter discusses religious conversion among Chinese Indonesians during the turbulent times of the late 1990s, in which Indonesia witnessed a political regime change.¹ I shall in particular explore conversion to Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity of a group of Chinese Indonesian business people in the city of Yogyakarta.

Departing from the position that conversion should be understood both at the individual level as in a broader societal context (Hefner 1993, Kipp 1995, Rambo and Farhadian 1999), ample attention will be paid to several decisive events of the late 1990s such as the economic crisis (1997), the riots and anti-Chinese violence (May 1998), the fall of the Suharto regime two weeks later, the Reform Era (1998–2004) and the election of the first democratically-elected president (2004). The positioning of Chinese Indonesians within this broader societal and nation-state context will be combined with how individual Chinese Indonesian business people narrate about these events and their religious endeavors. The central aim is to come to a better understanding of why some Chinese Indonesians have turned to Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity at this particular moment in time. What are the hopes and dreams that go along with the status of being a born-again, Chinese Indonesian, Christian in Muslim dominated Indonesia? What has inspired the choice for Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity?

¹ I will use the term Chinese Indonesians for those Indonesians with a Chinese descent line in stead of ethnic Chinese as it does better justice to the dual affinities most of them feel and express (see also Koning 2007). For a further discussion on this terminology see Coppel (2003). The term “ethnic Chinese” is only used if I refer to literature that uses this terminology.