

The Existence of the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) Bondowoso, 1962-2019

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14710/ihis.v8i2.22696>

Abstract

This article presents a historical analysis of the growth of GKI Bondowoso, a Protestant Christian church in Indonesia. Employing a sociological approach and functionalism theory, to analyze the social functions of the church within its community as well as the interactions between the church and other social institutions. GKI Bondowoso, established on a land grant from a Muslim community, has a unique history. It became a founding member of the seven church clusters that led to the formation of GKI East Java. Since 1962, the church has strived for self-sufficiency and actively participated in the efforts to unify the GKI into a single organization. Throughout its history, GKI Bondowoso has experienced changes in pastoral leadership and commission activities. It has actively sought to positively influence its surrounding environment, including fostering integration with the ethnic Chinese community and learning about Madurese customs. The ethnic Chinese population in Bondowoso has successfully adopted the local language, facilitating better relationships within the community. However, the church's growth and sustainability have been supported by its positive relationships with the local community and other religious groups, demonstrating its positive influence on its environment.

Received:
May 29, 2024

Revised:
August 29, 2024

Accepted:
30 August, 2024

Keywords: Pastoral Leadership; Local Community; Commission; GKI Bondowoso.

Introduction

Christians often refer to a church as a physical building, considered a house of God. However, in a broader sense, the term "church" derives from the Portuguese word Igreja and the Latin word ecclesia, both meaning "congregation" or "community of believers." According to Van den End (2008a, 202), the core elements of a church are individuals who share a common faith in God and rely on God as the savior in their lives. The growth of Christianity in Indonesia is closely linked to the historical context of its arrival. The development of Protestant Christianity in Indonesia differs significantly from the introduction and spread of Islam in the region (Van den End, 2008b). Islam's rapid spread in Indonesian society can be attributed to the peaceful introduction by Muslim traders who settled in various regions (Vlekke, 2008, 3). In contrast, European colonization, driven by the 3G mission (gold, glory, and gospel), led many Indonesians to perceive Christianity as the default religion of the colonialists (Eriksen, 1999).

The growth of various Christian churches across Indonesia has resulted in diverse patterns influenced by the specific zending (missionary) activities and the social context in which each church was founded. For example, the growth of the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI), the Jawi Wetan Christian Church (GKJW), and the Protestant Church in Western Indonesia (GPIB) has been shaped by unique factors.

In East Java, the growth of GKI has been influenced by Chinese elements, local Javanese culture, and the zending efforts of missionaries. While many people associate Chinese individuals with Buddhism, it's important to note that there are significant Chinese populations in Indonesia who adhere to Taoism, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam (Iswanto, 2013, p. 163). This demonstrates that the Dutch colonial efforts to spread Christianity did not exclude the possibility of conversion among non-indigenous populations (Padmo, 2004, p. 25).

The evangelization of Peranakan Chinese in East Java was not solely undertaken by the *Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap* (NZG) missionary organization. Many conversions were initiated by individuals within the Peranakan Chinese community itself (Wulandari, 2022, p. 296). Oei Soei Tiong, a prominent figure in the establishment of GKI East Java, is considered the founding father of the organization (Lombard, 1996, p. 102). Baptized in 1898, Oei Soei Tiong actively preached the Gospel to Chinese communities in Bangil, Malang, and Mojokerto. In 1933, he was appointed as the pastor of the first Chinese congregation in Surabaya.

GKI is a church that was originally called *Tiong Hwa Kie Tok Kauw Hwee* (THKTKH), the name means the same as "The Church of Christ" in China (Gunawan, 1989, pp. 18-19). To appreciate the meaning of the name of the church, on June 26 1932 the Chinese Christian Conference decided to upgrade the status of the association from an "association" to a "church". Efforts to achieve independence for the Peranakan Chinese finally resulted in a decision, that on February 22 1934 in Bangil the East Java Klasis THKTKH was officially established.

Pastor Drs. HAC Hildering (Surabaya) and Oei Soei Tiong (Bangil) came to serve worship activities for the Chinese congregation in Bondowoso. The two of them were part of the consultant pastors in the congregation, so once a month Oei Soei Tiong came to give a sermon to the Bondowoso Chinese Protestant Christian congregation. Efforts to spread the Gospel to the Chinese Christian congregation were carried out by pastors Oei Soei Tiong and Ds. HAC Hildering arrived in the Bondowoso area in 1933. At that time, Oei Soei Tiong was in charge of serving worship and carrying out the first baptism of five members of the congregation located at GKI Bondowoso.

While there is limited research specifically on GKI Bondowoso, several studies related to Protestant missions (*zending*) and the contributions of GKI churches to Indonesian society can provide valuable insights. The study from Intan (2015) which explore the presence and challenges faced by Protestant churches in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country. The historical context of Protestant missions in Indonesia, from the Dutch colonial era through the Japanese occupation and the Indonesian independence struggle, including the Old Order and New Order regimes. While the Christian mission in Indonesia has not been driven by military force or

economic greed, churches have encountered numerous challenges and hardships in fulfilling their God-given mission, encompassing both the Evangelical Mandate and the Cultural Mandate. Despite these challenges, Indonesian churches remain entrusted by Christ and are called to faithfully and joyfully carry out their divine calling. Meanwhile, Aritonang (2020) several factors contribute to the persistence of zending theology in certain churches today, including a pessimistic mindset, an unbalanced ministry focus, and a dichotomous view of the church and the world. This paper offers a theological reflection aimed at reinforcing the church's social responsibility.

Bondowoso is part of the Tapal Kuda area, where the customs are still heavily influenced by Madurese culture, but in matters of belief, the Bondowoso community is heterogeneous. There are two major ethnic groups that inhabit the Bondowoso area, namely Javanese and Madurese, there are also a small number of Ambonese, Chinese, and Arabs. Madurese is of course the language in their daily lives, it is even the language used in religious activities, but most Bondowoso people can use two languages, namely Javanese and Madurese. Islam is the majority religion for the Madurese population in Bondowoso, so the strong influence of Islam can be an obstacle to the spread of the Gospel message in Bondowoso, so it can be said that Protestant Christianity is a minority religion among the community.

GKI Bondowoso grew up in a Madurese environment where the majority were Muslim. This church was built on land given by a Muslim named Atmodiwirijo who was a wealthy tobacco businessman and owned a tobacco factory called "Tjintjin Mas". Atmodiwirijo is known to the public as a generous person and maintains good relations with Chinese people. Atmodiwirijo's giving of a plot of land to the Chinese congregation was not motivated by any particular reason, such as establishing cooperation in business matters or trading with Chinese people (HUT GKI Bondowoso LXXV).

During the tenure of the second pastor, Rev. TJ Lintang, GKI Bondowoso initiated the construction of its church building, marked by the laying of the foundation stone. The completed church was subsequently inaugurated on December 2, 1964. This historical overview highlights several key issues: (1) Background of GKI Bondowoso's Founding: Understanding the circumstances surrounding the church's establishment; (2) Dynamics of GKI Bondowoso: Examining the church's role in the growth of the Protestant Christian community in Bondowoso; (3) Contributions of GKI Bondowoso: Identifying the various roles and contributions made by the church to the community.

To provide a clear and focused research scope, this article examines three key areas: (1) Spatial Scope: The study focuses on the GKI Bondowoso congregation, a significant historical entity in the growth of Protestant Christianity in Bondowoso; (2) Temporal Scope: The research covers the period from 1962 to 2019, with 1962 marking the beginning of GKI Bondowoso's construction and 2019 notable for its unique Christmas event; (3) Scope of Study: This research utilizes institutional history to analyze the church as an institution. The choice of the 2019 Christmas theme reflects GKI Bondowoso's commitment to environmental awareness and its efforts to address

issues like waste pollution. In addition to this event, the church has engaged in various activities related to interchurch relations and social outreach within the broader community.

Method

The research method used by the author is the historical method according to Kuntowijoyo's opinion, in this case, Kuntowijoyo divides the historical research method into five stages, including: 1) Topic selection, 2) Source collection, 3) Verification, 4) Interpretation, analysis and synthesis, and 5) Writing or historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2003, p. 91; Koentjaraningrat, 1986). The first stage is topic selection, where the topic selection must be in accordance with the interests of researchers who have emotional closeness so that writing history will be subjective.

The choice of research topic must also be based on intellectual proximity so that the form of writing will be objective. The topic of GKI Bondowoso was chosen because this church has quite a unique historical value. To collect sources, the author conducted interviews with several figures who knew the historical process of GKI Bondowoso, including the GKI Bondowoso pastor, the GKI Bondowoso council, and parties from the Atmodiwirijo family as people who had the land granted for the establishment of the church.

Meanwhile, secondary sources were obtained by researchers in writing this article, namely in the form of scientific articles such as books, journals, theses, dissertations, and sources from the internet (Newmark, 1997). Writing history really requires documents, so there are no documents that are meaningless to be able to write history. In the verification process, the author tries to double-check efforts to obtain credible sources, while obtaining the authenticity of the sources can be done by comparing the research sources that have been obtained based on their time. The next stage is interpretation or attempts to interpret historical facts. As for the final stage, namely historiography, this part is the most important in carrying out the process of presenting and compiling all the data, then it will be compiled into a form of writing that has been reconstructed and put into writing about historical research.

The Establishment of GKI Bondowoso

The East Java region has several tribes that have existed for a long time, such as the Osing, Tengger, Javanese, and Madurese tribes. The local community's habits, which are so strongly embedded in Islamic and Javanese traditions, make it difficult for other religions to develop in the East Java region, such as the entry of Protestant Christianity, whose initial presence was rejected by the community (Hakim, 2024). This rejection occurred because the local community did not easily accept new things or teachings that were not in accordance with their old traditions, as well as the preaching of the Gospel to the Madurese community, the results of which could be said to be less fertile or less likely to produce many congregations, as happened in preaching the Gospel in the Bondowoso area.

The Madurese ethnic community makes Islam a religion that they firmly adhere

to as a guide in their lives so that the Madurese ethnic community also trusts kyai as people who are considered to have great influence, this makes it difficult to preach the Gospel within the Madurese ethnic community. Evangelists who are tasked with serving the people of East Java must learn about the local culture or language, this is useful so that they can approach the local community.

Zendeling, who served in the East Java region, took several approaches to preach the Gospel, such as taking a Madurese language crash course conducted by an evangelist in Bondowoso and using gamelan as a medium to accompany the songs performed by the evangelist when serving the Javanese community (Joedanti, 2006, p. 12). In the Bondowoso area, the activities of preaching the Gospel to Madurese and the Chinese were assisted by the Java Committee *Zending* in the early 1880s, namely by sending an evangelist named H. van der Spiegel.

When Van der Spiegel served in the Bondowoso area, he provided a form of service, namely by building a pastor's house, building a church, building a hospital, and moving his evangelism to places that were easily accessible to the public, such as in the Chinatown area in the center of Bondowoso (Jodeanti, 2006, p. 13). They provided a form of service to the Chinese by opening schools intended for their children. The work of the Christian mission carried out among the Chinese congregation in Bondowoso obtained real results, namely missions in the field of education, this can be proven by producing an obedient child of God named Tjan Kian Pa.

Since the 19th century, missionary work in the field of education has been intensified by missionaries in several churches in Indonesia, including in the Bondowoso area. The target of this mission work will be given to children and teenagers, as well as adults who are serious about learning. The services provided by evangelists in educational missions are by providing teaching such as reading, and writing, and there are also Christian religious lessons, where the Bible is the main lesson for Peranakan Chinese children. The feeling of interest in Christian schools that can provide intellectual needs has become the answer to educational needs in the future, so in this case, there are many Bondowoso Peranakan Chinese who then send their children to attend the Christian school foundation.

In 1932 the Bondowoso congregation was initially served by an evangelist named J. van den Blin as hoofd onderwijzer (school principal) at the Christelijke Hollandse Chinese School (Chr. HCS) Bondowoso, with seven congregations served by adult baptism and sidi since 1928 -1932. The service among the Chinese congregation was carried out by Pastor HW van den Berg in Bondowoso and assisted by Rev. Kisbri from the Situbondo Pentecostal Church.

Drs. HAC Hildering and Oie Soie Tiong came to the Bondowoso area and served the Chinese Protestant Christian congregation in 1933. Oei Soei Tiong performed his first baptism on 26 August 1933 at THKTKH Klasis Bondowoso with a total of 5 members being baptized. When the number of members who had completed the baptism process increased, on September 9, 1933, a church was formed which was named Djemaat Kristen Tiong Hwa Bondowoso, before the formation of Tiong Hwa

Kie Tok Kauw Hwee (THKTKH) Bondowoso which was only formed on February 22, 1934.

GKI Bondowoso is a unique church because it grew within the Madurese community where the majority of the population embraces Islam, then a Muslim named Haji Atmodiwirijo who is the owner of a tobacco company called: "Tjintjin Mas" has given a plot of land for the development process of GKI Bondowoso. The location of the land grant given by Atmodiwirijo is in a strategic position and is in the center of Bondowoso so that when the GKI Bondowoso assembly surveyed the construction of a church, they strongly agreed that the GKI Bondowoso building should stand on that land.

This situation is closely related to the policy regarding the issuance of Presidential Regulation Number 10 of 1959, where the regulation contains a prohibition on Chinese people who can no longer carry out economic activities (trade) in rural areas (RI Presidential Regulation No. 10 of 1959, concerning Prohibition for Foreign Small Trade and Retail Businesses Outside the Capital of Level I and II Self-Regional Regions and Residency). GKI Bondowoso will be established in a location close to the center of the people's economy and the Bondowoso Chinese residential area called Chinatown. As time went by, the GKI Bondowoso congregation grew rapidly, making the GKI Bondowoso assembly enthusiastic to soon have their church building.

Before having its church building, the GKI Bondowoso congregation rented the GPIB Bondowoso building in 1952, then after the lease expired the GKI Bondowoso assembly returned to renting Mas Katjungkamari's house which took place in 1960. Efforts to build the church building were not easy, because of the condition. it relates to the funds owned by the church. The implementation of the construction of GKI Bondowoso in 1962 was based on the publication of a statement letter Number: 389/XIII.a/62 on 2 October 1962 (Certification Letter 2 October 1962, concerning the Handover of a Plot of Yard Land in Bondowoso). The construction of GKI Bondowoso took around two years until finally the church building was inaugurated in 1964.

Dynamics and Influence of GKI Bondowoso to Society

The Bondowoso area only has one GKI church, namely GKI Bondowoso. GKI Bondowoso was part of the church members from the beginning of the formation of the forerunner of GKI East Java. Every year GKI Bondowoso always prepares and divides its duties in providing services to its congregation, so that it can move the circle of activities and organizational wheels within the church.

An institution must have a clear vision and mission, which means that the development of an institution such as a church must be able to experience progress and transformation from time to time so that a church can influence society and other churches. A church that strives always to develop, be able to live, and grow is a church that has a clear direction. If an institution such as a church experiences stagnant conditions, then the church will be said to be an institution that has forgotten its duties and roles, so it can also be called a dead church because it is not by the teachings in the

Bible.

The growth and development of GKI in Indonesia went through several long processes, until on February 22 1934 in East Java a church was founded which was named GKI East Java (Gunawan, 1989, p. 306). Likewise, on March 24 1940 in West Java a church was founded which was later called GKI West Java, and on August 8 1945 in Central Java a church was founded which was called GKI Central Java. On March 27, 1962, the three churches began efforts to unite themselves to merge the churches into the GKI General Synod.

The GKI General Synod is a new face that is different from the faces of other synods that have been formed previously. This reason is because the forum is based on and motivated by the unity of the church in Indonesia. This condition is in line with the basis and objectives of the Council of Churches in Indonesia (DGI), whose three church members consist of GKI West Java, GKI Central Java, and GKI East Java, to merge to become members of the church. Furthermore, on August 26, 1988, the three churches were finally pledged to become one church which was named the Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) (Gunawan, 1989, pp. 225- 228)

The dynamics in a church will occur in every leadership of the pastor in charge, these dynamics can be seen based on the rise and fall of the congregation or can also be seen from the development of church activities (Nugroho, 2020). For activities within the church to run well, several commissions working within it need to be assisted. GKI has five commissions, namely the Children's Commission (Sunday School), women's or Adult Commission, music and Liturgy Commission, service and Testimony Commission, and Youth or Youth Commission. These five commissions carry out several tasks which are arranged based on the results of the decisions of the work meetings that have been determined.

GKI Bondowoso was once led by a consular priest when the GKI Bondowoso congregation experienced a priest vacancy. Conflict is a part that some institutions never fail to experience, such as the internal conflict that occurred within GKI Bondowoso where the GKI Bondowoso congregation felt that there was a mismatch with the priest who served them, namely Rev. Edi Sumartono because he was considered to prefer his interests to matters concerning the church. This internal conflict occurred in 2004, until finally Pdt. Edy Sumartono had to be moved to serve congregational activities at GKI Tulungagung, this method was taken as a step to resolve conflicts within the GKI Bondowoso congregation.

The role of the pastor is to handle these internal problems so that the pastors on duty must then be able to understand the characteristics of each congregation which has different characteristics. In 2009, namely when the Rev. Martin K. Nugroho, began to restore the GKI Bondowoso congregation which had disappeared from church activities. Gradually, GKI Bondowoso was able to demonstrate its existence in providing a positive role to the community, namely by establishing relationships with other churches or with the community around the location where GKI Bondowoso was founded.

GKI Bondowoso carries out several forms of activities that relate directly to the

outside community, including assisting in the form of installing water pipes at the Raudhatul Jannah Islamic Boarding School in 2013, providing sacrificial animals at the Al-Mubarak Islamic Boarding School (Nugroho, 2020). GKI Bondowoso has also provided donations in the form of necessities and building materials to victims affected by natural disasters, as was done by GKI Bondowoso together with the Disaster Preparedness Cadets (TAGANA) in providing galvalum houses to fire victims in Gg. Pentecostal (Bondowoso) which occurred in 2015.

The five Report of GKI Bondowoso congregation in (2019) During the leadership of Pastor Martin K. Nugroho, GKI Bondowoso gave its role to an Islamic-based school, namely at SMK NU Tenggarang, where Pastor Martin taught about music and choirs. This activity took place in 2018. In 2019, GKI Bondowoso collaborated with the John Fawcett Foundation (JFF) and LP2SM in holding free treatment and cataract surgery activities at the NU Wonosari Clinic (Bondowoso), which succeeded in helping 2000 patients, including 200 cataract surgery patients, this activity was aimed at economically disadvantaged people.

The role given by GKI Bondowoso to other churches is not only carried out in spiritual services but also in helping to develop the potential of GKJW Sumberpakem, Jember. GKI Bondowoso collaborates with GKI Sanjose Surabaya to collaborate in developing the GKJW Sumberpakem community and congregation in the fields of agriculture and animal husbandry so that when agricultural products from the GKJW Sumberpakem congregation are to be sold, the three churches help to sell them to GKI Sinwil East Java. Development in the agricultural sector has also reached the katul planting business, so this role has had many positive impacts on society. As for the livestock sector, GKI Bondowoso and GKI Sanjose Surabaya provided several goats for breeding, then developed further into the lemosin cattle farming business, as well as teaching the GKJW Sumberpakem congregation to process livestock manure to become organic fertilizer for their agricultural land (Lastri, 2021).

Conclusion

GKI Bondowoso was able to develop amid the Bondowoso community, where the majority of the people are of the Madurese tribe who are very strong in Islamic values and traditions. It is called a unique church because GKI Bondowoso stands on a land grant given by a businessman and owner of the Tjintjin Mas tobacco company. The owner of the land is named Atmodiwirijo, who the community calls a generous Muslim. Apart from donating his land for the establishment of GKI Bondowoso, Atmodiwirijo also gave some of his money to support funds for the church building materials.

The sense of unity that has been realized by the two evangelists who have provided service to the Bondowoso Chinese Christian congregation, which previously was only a bond of Chinese Christian bonds, has made GKI Bondowoso a legitimate institution. THKTKH Bondowoso, which was originally pioneered by a young man named Tjan Kian Pa (Pangestu), is said to be the fruit of a real gospel message from *Zending* efforts in the Bondowoso area which originated from an educational mission.

Chinese people attach more importance to education for future intellectual needs, compared to Madurese who do not easily believe in things that come from outside their culture.

GKI Bondowoso has actively sought to positively influence its surrounding environment, including fostering integration with the ethnic Chinese community and learning about Madurese customs. The ethnic Chinese population in Bondowoso has successfully adopted the local language, facilitating better relationships within the community. GKI Bondowoso's role in community engagement is evident in its various activities with other church members and the broader community. The church has collaborated with organizations like FKUB, TAGANA, LP2SM, and JFF to provide social assistance to those in need. GKI Bondowoso's commitment to inclusivity aligns with the first principle of Pancasila, promoting an open and tolerant attitude towards individuals of different backgrounds. This approach demonstrates the church's ability to implement life guidelines based on Pancasila values.

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