



The Formation of Chinese Ethnic Political Representation through Social Recognition in Local Public Spaces in Bangka Regency

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Abstract

Political representation of ethnic minorities is often explained through electoral competition and institutional democratization, while the role of social recognition in shaping political legitimacy remains underexplored, particularly in locally grounded democracies of the Global South. This study analyzes how social recognition contributes to the formation of Chinese ethnic political representation in Bangka Regency, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research was conducted in Sungailiat District through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving members of the Malay and Chinese communities. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman and interpreted through Honneth's Recognition Theory and Pitkin's Political Representation Theory. The findings reveal that political representation is preceded by a gradual process of social recognition manifested in social acceptance, reciprocal trust, and active participation in local public spaces. Long-standing interethnic interaction has enabled the Chinese ethnic community to gain public legitimacy, which subsequently strengthens opportunities for political representation. Rather than emerging solely from electoral processes, political representation is constructed through continuous everyday relationships embedded in neighbourhood organizations, mutual assistance, and shared civic activities. The study contributes to Southern sociological perspectives by treating Bangka not merely as a site for applying Euro-American theories, but as a location from which recognition-based political representation can be theorized. It demonstrates that, in a postcolonial multicultural setting, political legitimacy is generated through historically situated and locally meaningful practices before it is expressed through formal democratic institutions.

Keywords: Chinese ethnic community; political representation; recognition theory; multicultural democracy; Southern sociology

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INTRODUCTION

The Political representation has become a central issue in contemporary democratic societies, particularly in multicultural countries where ethnic diversity shapes interactions between citizens and political institutions. Democratic governance is expected to ensure equal political rights while creating opportunities for minority communities to participate in public affairs. Nevertheless, equal constitutional rights do not automatically guarantee equal political representation. Minority groups often continue to encounter social barriers, limited public acceptance, and unequal recognition that influence their access to political participation. Consequently, political representation should not be understood solely as the outcome of electoral competition or institutional arrangements but also as the product of broader social processes that enable minority communities to gain legitimacy within society (Pitkin 1967).

Recognition Theory proposed by Axel Honneth offers an important perspective for explaining this process. Honneth argues that recognition enables individuals and social groups to develop self-confidence, self-respect, and social esteem through reciprocal relationships. Social recognition therefore functions as the foundation for democratic inclusion because communities that receive public acceptance are more likely to participate actively in public life, whereas experiences of exclusion may reinforce social marginalization (Honneth 1995). This perspective suggests that political representation is preceded by social recognition established through everyday interaction rather than by electoral competition alone.

Indonesia provides an important setting for examining this relationship because its multicultural society has undergone significant democratic transformation since the Reform era. Political decentralization and constitutional reforms have expanded opportunities for citizens from diverse ethnic backgrounds to participate in public life, including Chinese Indonesians whose political and cultural expressions were previously restricted. Democratic reform has also encouraged broader public acceptance of Chinese ethnic communities, allowing them to become increasingly involved in civic organizations, economic development, education, and local political processes (Pratama 2016). These developments demonstrate that democratization involves not only institutional change but also the gradual reconstruction of social relationships through recognition and mutual respect (Suryani and Azmy 2020; Kiptiyah and Kamila 2025).

The experience of Chinese ethnic communities, however, varies across regions because local history, demographic composition, economic structures, and patterns of interethnic

interaction shape different forms of social acceptance. Bangka Regency represents an important empirical context for examining these dynamics. As one of Indonesia's multicultural regions, Bangka has experienced a long history of interaction between the Malay and Chinese communities since the expansion of the tin mining industry. Historical encounters gradually evolved from economic cooperation into broader social and cultural relationships that embedded ethnic diversity within everyday community life rather than positioning it as a persistent source of conflict (Amilda and Otoman 2024).

Previous studies indicate that the political dynamics of Bangka Belitung are closely related to its multicultural social structure and historical development. Although ethnicity continues to influence local politics, democratic processes increasingly reflect cooperation, negotiation, and shared public interests that transcend ethnic boundaries (Kavin 2017). Research conducted in Sungailiat District also demonstrates that harmonious relations between Malay and Chinese communities have strengthened social cohesion, encouraged civic participation, and supported inclusive democratic practices within local society (Pradipta et al. 2026). These findings suggest that positive interethnic relations provide an important social environment for broader public engagement.

The findings of this study support these observations while offering a different analytical perspective. Interviews with Chinese ethnic informants indicate that acceptance from Malay communities is reflected through routine interaction, reciprocal assistance, participation in neighbourhood organizations, and involvement in collective community activities. Informants consistently described themselves as an integral part of local society rather than as a socially separated minority. These experiences indicate that political legitimacy develops gradually through everyday social interaction, allowing recognition to emerge before formal political representation becomes possible. Such findings reinforce the importance of social legitimacy in strengthening local democratic processes (Pradipta and Hidayat 2025).

Existing scholarship has extensively examined political participation, identity politics, multiculturalism, and democratic inclusion among Chinese ethnic communities in Indonesia. Previous studies have explained the expansion of minority political participation following democratic reform (Pratama 2016), the reconstruction of Chinese political identity after the New Order period (Suryani and Azmy 2020), and the contribution of multicultural social relations to local governance in Bangka Belitung (Supriatna et al. 2019). Other studies by Pradipta highlight the importance of political culture in shaping democratic behaviour (Pradipta

2025), the relationship between local political institutions and community legitimacy (Pradipta and Hidayat 2025), as well as the influence of social cohesion on political participation among Malay and Chinese communities in Sungailiat District (Pradipta et al. 2026).

Despite these valuable contributions, previous studies have primarily emphasized political participation, electoral behaviour, identity politics, and democratic inclusion. Limited attention has been given to explaining how social recognition functions as the mechanism through which minority communities gradually acquire legitimacy before attaining political representation. As a result, the relationship between recognition and political representation remains insufficiently explored within the context of local democracy.

Beyond this empirical gap, the literature also reflects a broader geography of knowledge. Dominant theories of recognition and political representation have largely been developed from Euro-American intellectual and institutional histories, while societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are frequently positioned primarily as sites of empirical application. Southern sociology challenges this unequal division of intellectual labour by insisting that concepts should also be generated from the histories, institutions, and everyday practices of societies located outside the metropolitan centres of social science (Alatas 2006; Connell 2007; Santos 2014). From this perspective, the Bangka case is analytically significant not because it simply confirms an existing universal theory, but because it reveals how recognition is produced through locally meaningful practices such as *gotong royong*, neighbourhood participation, reciprocal assistance, and shared religious and cultural activities. These practices show that democratic legitimacy in a postcolonial multicultural society is built through historically embedded social relations that may not be fully captured by institution-centred accounts of minority representation.

This study addresses these empirical and epistemological gaps by positioning Recognition Theory as the principal analytical framework while employing Political Representation Theory to explain its political consequences. It argues that political representation is not merely an institutional outcome but the culmination of a continuous process of social recognition constructed through public acceptance, reciprocal trust, and participation in local public spaces. By bringing Honneth and Pitkin into dialogue with Southern sociological perspectives, the study does not treat Bangka as a peripheral case used only to test concepts developed elsewhere. Instead, it uses the social experience of Malay-Chinese coexistence to theorize an everyday-before-electoral pathway in which minority

political legitimacy is generated through vernacular institutions and repeated interethnic relations before it becomes visible in formal representation. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the forms of social recognition experienced by the Chinese ethnic community, explain how such recognition contributes to political representation in the local public sphere of Bangka Regency, and demonstrate the contribution of this locally grounded process to broader debates on multicultural democracy in the Global South.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the formation of Chinese ethnic political representation through social recognition in the local public sphere of Bangka Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and social interactions underlying the process of social recognition (Moleong 2018).

The research was conducted in Sungailiat District, Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province. The research site was selected purposively because Sungailiat represents a multicultural area where Malay and Chinese communities have maintained long-standing social interactions and actively participate in local social life.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experiences, and involvement in community life. The informants consisted of local community members who were considered capable of providing relevant information regarding interethnic relations and the formation of Chinese ethnic political representation in Bangka Regency.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The interview data were complemented by field observations and relevant documents to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman 1994; Engle 1999). To ensure the credibility of the findings, source triangulation and technique triangulation were applied by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation conducted in Sungailiat District, Bangka Regency. The

findings reveal that the formation of Chinese ethnic political representation is closely associated with the process of social recognition experienced in everyday social life. Rather than emerging solely through electoral competition or formal political institutions, political representation develops gradually through social acceptance, mutual trust, and active participation within local public spaces.

The findings are discussed using Recognition Theory proposed by Honneth as the primary analytical framework to explain how recognition is constructed through reciprocal social relationships. Furthermore, the discussion employs the concept of political representation proposed by Pitkin to explain how social recognition subsequently contributes to the emergence of political representation in local democracy. Accordingly, each subsection demonstrates the relationship between empirical findings, theoretical interpretation, and previous studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the formation of Chinese ethnic political representation in Bangka Regency.

Social Acceptance as the Foundation of Political Recognition

The findings demonstrate that social acceptance constitutes the primary foundation for the formation of political recognition among the Chinese ethnic community in Sungailiat District, Bangka Regency. Based on in-depth interviews with four informants, the Chinese ethnic community is generally accepted as an integral part of local society. This acceptance is reflected in harmonious relationships with the Malay community, active participation in neighbourhood activities, and the absence of significant social barriers in everyday life. Rather than being positioned as a minority separated from the wider community, the Chinese ethnic community has gradually become embedded within the local social structure through continuous interaction and shared community experiences.



Figure 1. Documentation of In-depth Interviews with Research Informants

Insert field documentation of interviews conducted in Sungailiat District, Bangka Regency.

The interview results reveal that social acceptance is manifested through routine interaction between ethnic communities in various aspects of everyday life. Informants explained that Malay and Chinese residents regularly interact through neighbourhood meetings, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), social gatherings, religious ceremonies, and other community activities. Such interactions have strengthened mutual respect and created an inclusive social environment where ethnic identity no longer serves as a barrier to community participation. These findings indicate that social acceptance is not merely symbolic but is continuously reproduced through everyday social practices.

The empirical findings further indicate that informants perceived themselves as having equal opportunities to participate in community activities and express their views within the local public sphere. Although minor stereotypes occasionally remain, these were not considered to significantly influence social relationships or limit participation in community life. The openness of local society, combined with long-standing coexistence between Malay and Chinese communities, has encouraged stronger interpersonal trust and a greater sense of belonging among members of the Chinese ethnic community. These conditions demonstrate that social acceptance is constructed through reciprocal interaction rather than through formal institutional arrangements alone.

From the perspective of Recognition Theory, these findings illustrate that recognition develops through reciprocal relationships characterized by acceptance, respect, and equal social treatment. Honneth argues that recognition emerges when individuals and social groups receive acknowledgment as equal members of society, enabling them to develop social confidence and legitimacy within the public sphere (Honneth 1995). In the context of Sungailiat, recognition is reflected in the willingness of local communities to engage in collective activities without distinguishing individuals based on ethnic background. Continuous interaction has therefore created a social environment in which the Chinese ethnic community is publicly recognized as an equal component of local society before obtaining broader political legitimacy.

These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Pradipta et al. (2026), which demonstrates that harmonious relations between Malay and Chinese communities strengthen social cohesion and encourage civic engagement. However, the present study offers a different perspective by showing that social acceptance functions not only as a factor supporting community participation but also as the initial stage in the formation

of political recognition. This finding extends previous discussions by explaining that political representation is preceded by a gradual process of recognition established through everyday interaction, mutual respect, and public trust rather than emerging solely through electoral competition or institutional mechanisms. Likewise, Kavin (2017) argues that the political dynamics of Bangka Belitung are increasingly characterized by cooperation across ethnic boundaries, while this study demonstrates that such cooperation is sustained by the social legitimacy generated through recognition.

To summarize these findings, the relationship between social acceptance, social recognition, and political representation is illustrated in Figure 2.

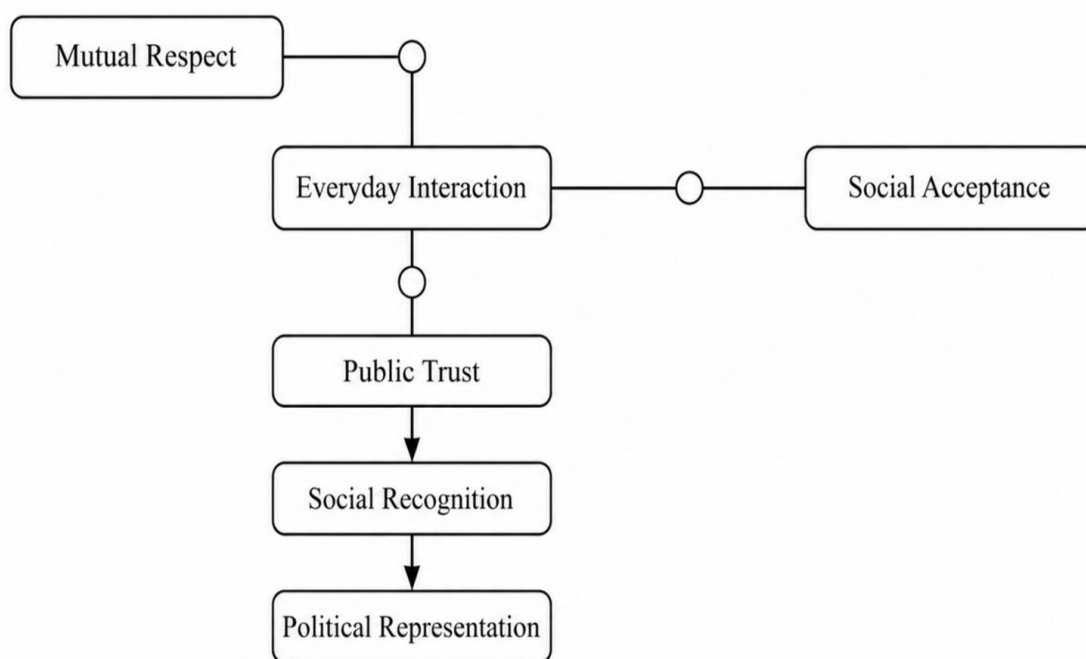


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Social Acceptance as the Foundation of Political Representation

Source: Developed by the authors based on empirical findings and adapted from Recognition Theory (Honneth, 1995) and Political Representation Theory (Pitkin, 1967).

Figure 2 illustrates that political representation is preceded by a gradual process of social recognition. Everyday interaction, mutual respect, and public trust collectively strengthen social acceptance within multicultural society. Sustained social acceptance subsequently generates social recognition, which provides the social legitimacy necessary for minority communities to participate more actively in the local public sphere and ultimately strengthens their political representation.

Public Trust and Community Participation in Local Public Spaces

The findings indicate that social acceptance has gradually fostered public trust, encouraging the Chinese ethnic community to participate more actively in local public life. The interview data show that public trust is reflected in the willingness of community members to engage in neighbourhood meetings, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), religious celebrations, social organizations, and democratic activities without experiencing significant social exclusion. These experiences demonstrate that participation in the public sphere is not merely a civic obligation but also an expression of mutual trust developed through long-term interethnic interaction.

The informants consistently explained that opportunities to participate in community activities are available to all residents regardless of their ethnic background. Participation in social activities has enabled the Chinese ethnic community to strengthen interpersonal relationships with the Malay community while reinforcing a shared sense of responsibility toward local development. Several informants also emphasized that the openness of local society has increased their confidence to express opinions, participate in public discussions, and become involved in democratic processes, including elections. These findings suggest that public trust encourages minority communities to engage more actively in the local public sphere.

From the perspective of Recognition Theory, public trust represents an important dimension of social recognition because reciprocal trust enables individuals and social groups to interact as equal members of society. Honneth argues that recognition is sustained through relationships characterized by respect, solidarity, and mutual confidence, allowing individuals to develop a stronger sense of belonging within their social environment (Honneth 1995). In Sungailiat District, this process is reflected in the increasing involvement of the Chinese ethnic community in collective activities that strengthen both social integration and civic engagement.

These findings complement previous studies conducted in Bangka Belitung. Pradipta et al. (2026) found that social cohesion between Malay and Chinese communities contributes to higher levels of political participation through mutual trust and cooperation. Similarly, Supriatna et al. (2019) argued that the increasing involvement of the Chinese ethnic community has strengthened local governance by promoting broader community participation. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that public trust functions as an intermediary mechanism linking social acceptance with broader participation in local public spaces. Rather

than emerging spontaneously, community participation develops through a continuous process of recognition that strengthens social legitimacy before political representation is formed.

To summarize these findings, the relationship between public trust and community participation is illustrated in Figure 3.

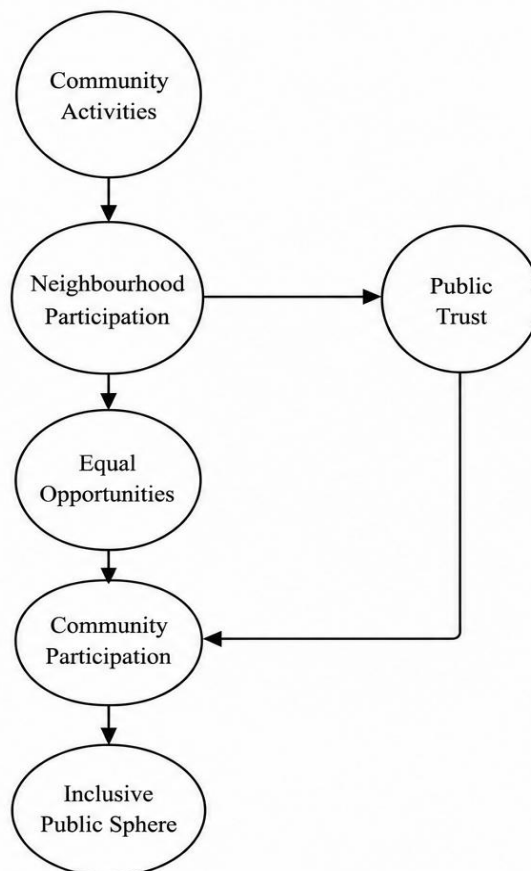


Figure 3. Public Trust and Community Participation in Local Public Spaces

Source: Developed by the authors based on empirical findings.

Figure 3 illustrates that participation in local public spaces is strengthened through public trust generated by equal opportunities, neighbourhood interaction, and collective community activities. These interconnected dimensions create an inclusive public sphere in which members of the Chinese ethnic community participate as equal citizens, thereby reinforcing the process of social recognition within multicultural society.

Social Recognition and the Formation of Political Representation

The findings demonstrate that social recognition serves as the principal mechanism underlying the formation of political representation among the Chinese ethnic community in

Bangka Regency. The interview data indicate that continuous social acceptance, reciprocal trust, and active participation in local public life have gradually strengthened the legitimacy of the Chinese ethnic community within society. Rather than emerging solely through electoral competition, political representation develops through a long-term process of recognition in which minority communities are accepted as equal members of the local social structure.

The informants consistently explained that the Chinese ethnic community has become increasingly involved in neighbourhood organizations, community meetings, religious and cultural activities, and other public forums. This continuous participation has strengthened relationships with the wider community while reinforcing the perception that ethnic background is no longer a determining factor in public engagement. Such conditions have enabled the Chinese ethnic community to gain broader public legitimacy, thereby creating greater opportunities to participate in local political life.

Recognition Theory provides an important framework for interpreting these findings. Honneth argues that recognition is achieved when individuals or social groups receive acceptance, respect, and equal treatment within society. These dimensions collectively generate self-confidence, social esteem, and legitimacy, enabling minority communities to participate more actively in public affairs (Honneth 1995). In Bangka Regency, the findings indicate that political representation is preceded by the establishment of social legitimacy through everyday interaction rather than by institutional mechanisms alone. Accordingly, political representation should be understood as the culmination of a broader process of social recognition.

The empirical conditions identified in this study are reflected in the contemporary political landscape of Bangka Belitung. The election of Chinese ethnic figures such as Rudianto Tjen and Bambang Patijaya as members of the Indonesian House of Representatives illustrates that political representation has become increasingly inclusive. Their presence in national political institutions demonstrates that members of the Chinese ethnic community are broadly recognized as legitimate political actors by society. While electoral success is influenced by multiple political factors, the findings of this study suggest that sustained social recognition constitutes an important social foundation that enables minority candidates to gain wider public acceptance.

These findings complement previous studies while offering a different analytical perspective. Pratama (2016) explains that the post-Reform era expanded political participation

among Chinese Indonesians through democratization. Suryani and Azmy (2020) further argue that multicultural democracy has strengthened the public recognition of Chinese ethnic identity in Indonesia. In the Bangka context, Pradipta et al. (2026) demonstrate that social cohesion between Malay and Chinese communities encourages civic and political participation. Nevertheless, the present study extends these discussions by demonstrating that social recognition functions as the connecting mechanism between social cohesion and political representation. Political representation is therefore not merely the result of electoral competition but also the outcome of continuous recognition constructed through everyday social interaction.

To summarize the findings, the process through which social recognition contributes to political representation is illustrated in Figure 4.

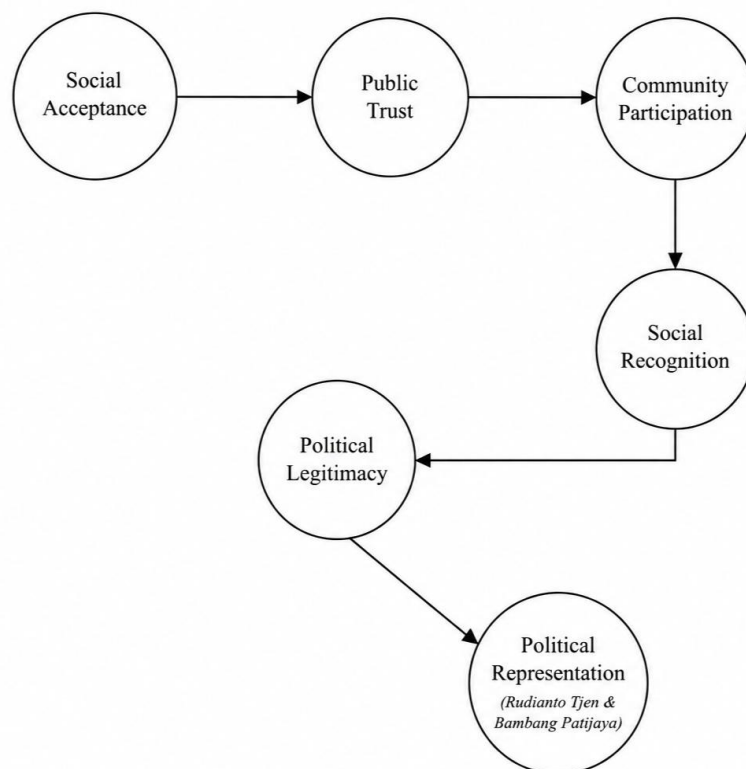


Figure 4. The Formation of Political Representation through Social Recognition

Source: Developed by the authors based on empirical findings and adapted from Recognition Theory (Honneth, 1995) and Political Representation Theory (Pitkin, 1967).

Figure 4 demonstrates that political representation is the culmination of a gradual social process rather than an isolated electoral outcome. Social acceptance encourages public trust,

which strengthens community participation. Continuous participation subsequently generates social recognition and political legitimacy, enabling members of minority communities to attain representative positions within democratic institutions. This conceptual model highlights that the emergence of Chinese ethnic political representation in Bangka Regency is closely associated with the long-term process of recognition embedded in local public life.

Recognition as a New Perspective on Ethnic Political Representation

The findings of this study provide a broader understanding of ethnic political representation by demonstrating that political legitimacy is socially constructed before it is institutionally expressed through democratic representation. Rather than viewing political representation solely as the product of elections, political parties, or formal democratic institutions, this study reveals that representation is preceded by a continuous process of social recognition embedded in everyday social interaction. In the context of Bangka Regency, recognition is manifested through public acceptance, reciprocal trust, and equal participation in local public spaces, which collectively create the social legitimacy necessary for members of the Chinese ethnic community to be accepted as legitimate political actors.

This perspective extends previous studies on Chinese ethnic politics in Indonesia. Pratama (2016) argues that the post-Reform democratic transition expanded opportunities for Chinese Indonesians to participate in politics by removing institutional discrimination. Likewise, Suryani and Azmy (2020) explain that multicultural democracy has strengthened the political identity and public visibility of Chinese ethnic communities after the New Order period. Although these studies successfully explain the expansion of political participation, they primarily emphasize institutional democratization and identity reconstruction without sufficiently explaining how minority communities gradually acquire social legitimacy before entering formal political institutions.

The present study also complements previous findings within the Bangka Belitung context. Kavin (2017) demonstrates that local political dynamics increasingly reflect cooperation across ethnic boundaries, while Supriatna et al. (2019) highlight the contribution of Chinese ethnic participation to strengthening local governance. Furthermore, Pradipta et al. (2026) show that harmonious relations between Malay and Chinese communities reinforce social cohesion and encourage civic participation. Building upon these findings, this research identifies social recognition as the connecting mechanism that transforms harmonious interethnic relations into political legitimacy. Social cohesion therefore should not merely be

understood as a characteristic of multicultural society but as the social process through which minority communities become publicly acknowledged as equal members of society.

Recognition Theory proposed by Honneth provides a comprehensive explanation of this mechanism. Recognition develops through reciprocal acceptance, respect, and social esteem, enabling individuals and social groups to acquire self-confidence and legitimacy within the public sphere (Honneth 1995). The empirical findings indicate that these dimensions are reflected in the everyday experiences of the Chinese ethnic community in Sungailiat District. Long-standing interaction with the Malay community through neighbourhood associations, mutual cooperation, religious celebrations, and community organizations has gradually strengthened reciprocal trust and reinforced the perception that ethnic identity is no longer a barrier to participation in public affairs. Consequently, recognition becomes the social foundation upon which political legitimacy is constructed.

The findings also reinforce Pitkin's (1967) conception of political representation by demonstrating that representation requires not only formal electoral authorization but also public legitimacy derived from social relationships. In Bangka Regency, members of the Chinese ethnic community are able to obtain broader political acceptance because they have first been recognized as integral members of local society. Political representation therefore emerges as the culmination of an inclusive social process rather than as an isolated electoral outcome. This interpretation enriches the theoretical understanding of representation by emphasizing the importance of recognition as a precondition for democratic legitimacy.

The principal contribution of this research lies in the integration of Recognition Theory and Political Representation Theory into a single analytical framework for explaining ethnic political representation in multicultural societies. Based on the empirical findings, this study proposes that political representation follows a sequential process beginning with social acceptance, followed by the development of public trust, active participation in local public spaces, the formation of social recognition, and ultimately the emergence of political legitimacy. This conceptual sequence offers a new perspective that moves beyond conventional institutional approaches by positioning recognition as the fundamental social mechanism through which minority communities attain political representation. Accordingly, this study contributes both theoretically and empirically to the literature on multicultural democracy by demonstrating that sustainable political representation is rooted in everyday social recognition rather than electoral competition alone.

Contribution to Southern Sociological Perspectives: Theorizing Recognition from Bangka

The findings of this study contribute to Southern sociological perspectives by changing the analytical status of Bangka from a peripheral empirical setting into a site of concept formation. Southern sociology emerged partly as a critique of the unequal global organization of knowledge, in which theories are commonly produced in metropolitan academic centres while societies in the Global South are treated mainly as sources of data (Alatas 2006; Connell 2007). A similar concern is raised by the epistemologies of the South, which emphasize the need to recognize forms of knowledge that are embedded in historically marginalized social experiences (Santos 2014). Read through this perspective, the Bangka case does more than provide a local illustration of Honneth's Recognition Theory and Pitkin's Political Representation Theory. It demonstrates how a postcolonial, multicultural locality can generate a distinctive account of the social foundations of political legitimacy.

This theoretical move does not require rejecting Honneth or Pitkin simply because their concepts were developed in Northern intellectual traditions. Rather, it provincializes and reconstructs those concepts by asking how recognition and representation operate through the institutions, historical experiences, and moral vocabularies of a specific Southern society. In Sungailiat, recognition is not produced only through abstract legal equality or direct encounters between citizens and the state. It is enacted in neighbourhood meetings, gotong royong, mutual assistance, religious and cultural celebrations, and routine forms of cooperation. Local public space therefore appears not as a neutral arena that already exists before social interaction, but as a relational achievement continuously created through repeated interethnic participation. The concept of recognition is consequently expanded from an individual moral experience into a socially and spatially embedded process. The principal proposition emerging from the Bangka case may be described as an everyday-before-electoral pathway to representation. Formal citizenship and electoral rights are indispensable, but they do not by themselves ensure that an ethnic minority will be regarded as a legitimate representative of the wider public. The empirical sequence identified in this study begins with ordinary encounters and reciprocal assistance, develops into public trust and sustained community participation, and then produces social recognition and political legitimacy. Electoral representation becomes possible at the end of this cumulative process rather than at its beginning. This proposition supplements institution-centred explanations by showing that democratic inclusion in a postcolonial plural

society is partly constructed in social arenas that are conventionally categorized as informal, cultural, or nonpolitical.

This finding is especially relevant to debates on democracy in the Global South, where formal constitutional equality often coexists with unequal access to social legitimacy. Political inclusion may be legally available while remaining socially fragile because minority actors are still perceived as outsiders, temporary guests, or representatives of sectional interests. The Bangka experience shows a different possibility: long-term participation in shared local life can transform an ethnic minority from an object of tolerance into a recognized political subject. Recognition in this sense is not a ceremonial affirmation of diversity. It is a practical and cumulative authorization produced through the ability to cooperate, deliberate, contribute, and assume responsibility within the community.

The case also complicates rigid majority-minority binaries. The Chinese community remains demographically and symbolically identifiable as an ethnic minority, yet the informants describe an experience of being embedded within local society rather than standing outside it. Recognition therefore does not necessarily require assimilation or the disappearance of cultural difference. It can emerge through a form of relational belonging in which distinct identities are maintained while participation in common institutions and public activities produces a shared civic position. At the same time, the occasional stereotypes reported by informants caution against romanticizing interethnic harmony. Recognition should be understood as an ongoing and potentially reversible achievement, not as evidence that all inequalities, prejudices, or power differences have disappeared.

Bangka's historical formation further strengthens this Southern interpretation. Malay-Chinese relations were shaped through a long history of mobility, tin extraction, economic interdependence, and changing political regimes (Kavin 2017; Amilda and Otoman 2024). Contemporary recognition is therefore historically sedimented rather than produced only by recent democratic reforms. Everyday coexistence carries traces of colonial and postcolonial political economy, but local actors have also reworked those histories through cooperation and shared civic practices. This historical dimension shows why the same institutional reforms may generate different outcomes across regions: representation depends on the social histories through which communities have learned to recognize, mistrust, negotiate with, or depend upon one another.

Epistemologically, the study treats gotong royong, neighbourhood participation, and reciprocal assistance as analytical resources rather than as decorative examples of local culture. These practices reveal mechanisms of democratic legitimation that become less visible when analysis begins only with parties, elections, or state institutions. In this way, the study responds to the Southern sociological demand for concepts that are accountable to the social worlds from which they arise. The resulting framework is not proposed as a universal law for all societies in the Global South. Its value is analytical and comparative: it offers a grounded proposition that can be examined through South-to-South comparison with other postcolonial multicultural settings in Indonesia, Southeast Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

The limits of the present study are important to this claim. Its single-site qualitative design and small number of informants do not support statistical generalization or a claim to represent the full diversity of Chinese Indonesian political experience. The contribution instead lies in theoretical transferability: the Bangka case identifies a sequence and a set of mechanisms that future research can test, revise, or reject in other settings. Comparative work should examine when everyday interaction produces recognition, when it merely masks unequal power, and when historical conflict prevents social acceptance from becoming political legitimacy. Such research would allow Southern sociology to develop through dialogue among local cases rather than through the one-way application of theories from metropolitan centres.

Social Recognition as the Foundation of Inclusive Local Democracy in Bangka Regency

The empirical findings of this study indicate that the formation of Chinese ethnic political representation in Bangka Regency cannot be separated from the broader process of democratic inclusion occurring within everyday social life. Although democratic institutions formally guarantee equal political rights for every citizen, the findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of these rights depends largely on the existence of social recognition developed through continuous interaction among community members. Political representation therefore emerges not merely because democratic institutions provide electoral opportunities but because minority communities have first obtained recognition as legitimate members of local society. In Sungailiat District, this process is reflected in the harmonious relationship between the Malay and Chinese communities, where long-standing interaction has generated mutual trust, reciprocal respect, and a shared commitment to maintaining social cohesion. These empirical conditions illustrate that local democracy functions effectively when institutional equality is accompanied by social legitimacy.

The interview findings consistently reveal that members of the Chinese ethnic community perceive themselves as equal participants in everyday community activities. Informants emphasized that participation in neighbourhood meetings, religious celebrations, mutual cooperation, and local organizations has enabled them to establish close relationships with members of the Malay community. Such participation is not merely symbolic but represents a continuous process through which recognition is reproduced within local public spaces. Rather than perceiving ethnic identity as a source of separation, community members increasingly understand diversity as an ordinary characteristic of social life in Bangka Regency. Consequently, public acceptance becomes embedded in routine social interaction and gradually develops into broader political legitimacy.

These findings reinforce Honneth's Recognition Theory by demonstrating that recognition is fundamentally relational rather than institutional. According to Honneth (1995), recognition develops through reciprocal relationships characterized by respect, solidarity, and equal treatment. Individuals and social groups become capable of participating fully in public life only after they experience recognition from others within society. The empirical evidence obtained in Sungailiat District reflects these theoretical propositions. Continuous interaction between Malay and Chinese communities has strengthened reciprocal trust, allowing members of the Chinese ethnic community to develop self-confidence and social esteem while simultaneously increasing public acceptance from the wider community. Recognition therefore becomes a dynamic social process continuously reproduced through everyday interaction rather than a condition created exclusively through state policy or electoral institutions. The findings further demonstrate that local public spaces function as important arenas for democratic learning. Community meetings, neighbourhood organizations, social associations, religious activities, and collective community programmes provide opportunities for individuals from different ethnic backgrounds to communicate, cooperate, and negotiate shared interests. These interactions gradually reduce social distance while strengthening interpersonal trust among citizens. As trust becomes institutionalized within everyday community life, social recognition becomes increasingly stable and eventually provides the legitimacy necessary for minority communities to participate more actively in political affairs. This process indicates that local democracy is strengthened not only through elections but also through routine civic interaction occurring outside formal political institutions. Another important implication emerging from this study concerns the relationship between social cohesion and political legitimacy. Previous discussions often describe social cohesion as an indicator of harmonious

multicultural society. However, the present findings suggest that social cohesion performs a more substantial democratic function. Harmonious relations between ethnic communities create opportunities for reciprocal recognition, enabling minority communities to be perceived as equal members of society rather than as outsiders. This transformation subsequently influences public perceptions regarding political leadership because citizens become more willing to accept political representatives based on competence, integrity, and commitment to public interests instead of ethnic identity alone. Political legitimacy therefore develops gradually through social cohesion before becoming visible within electoral politics.

The Bangka experience also illustrates that multicultural democracy should not simply be interpreted as peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic communities. Democratic inclusion requires active participation, reciprocal communication, and continuous interaction capable of generating public trust across ethnic boundaries. Informants repeatedly explained that cooperation between Malay and Chinese communities has become an ordinary aspect of everyday social life. Such cooperation includes participation in neighbourhood associations, mutual assistance during community events, collaborative economic activities, and involvement in religious and cultural celebrations. These experiences indicate that recognition emerges because individuals repeatedly encounter one another within shared public spaces, thereby creating opportunities for mutual understanding and social acceptance.

The empirical findings also contribute to broader discussions concerning minority political representation in multicultural societies. Existing scholarship generally explains minority representation through institutional reform, affirmative political policies, or electoral competition. Although these factors remain important, the present study demonstrates that institutional opportunities alone cannot guarantee successful political representation. Minority candidates require broader public legitimacy that develops through social interaction before electoral competition takes place. Accordingly, political representation should be understood as the culmination of cumulative social processes involving recognition, trust, participation, and legitimacy. This interpretation enriches Political Representation Theory proposed by Pitkin (1967) by emphasizing that representation requires both formal democratic authorization and informal social acceptance.

Furthermore, the integration of Recognition Theory and Political Representation Theory proposed in this study offers a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding ethnic political representation within multicultural democracies. The findings indicate a

sequential process beginning with social acceptance, followed by reciprocal trust, active participation in local public spaces, the emergence of social recognition, the development of political legitimacy, and finally the formation of political representation. Each stage strengthens the next, creating a cumulative process through which minority communities gradually become legitimate political actors. This integrated framework therefore explains why some multicultural societies are capable of producing inclusive political representation despite ethnic diversity.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that local governments should continue encouraging programmes that strengthen interaction among different ethnic communities. Community organizations, youth associations, neighbourhood forums, cultural festivals, religious dialogue, and collaborative social activities should be viewed not merely as instruments for maintaining harmony but also as important democratic spaces where recognition and political legitimacy are continuously developed. Policies designed to strengthen inclusive participation are likely to reinforce democratic resilience because they cultivate reciprocal trust and equal opportunities among citizens regardless of ethnic background. Consequently, recognition should be considered an essential component of local democratic governance rather than merely a social or cultural phenomenon.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the success of ethnic political representation in Bangka Regency is inseparable from the existence of recognition embedded within everyday community life. The empirical evidence consistently indicates that long-standing interaction between Malay and Chinese communities has generated acceptance, trust, solidarity, and active participation that collectively strengthen public legitimacy. Political representation therefore represents the culmination of an inclusive social process rather than a purely electoral achievement. This finding confirms that sustainable multicultural democracy requires continuous recognition among citizens, enabling minority communities to participate fully in both social and political life while maintaining harmonious interethnic relations. The Bangka experience consequently provides valuable empirical evidence that recognition constitutes one of the principal foundations for strengthening inclusive local democracy in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the formation of Chinese ethnic political representation in Bangka Regency is a gradual social process that begins with social recognition rather than

formal political competition alone. The findings reveal that social acceptance by the Malay community, reciprocal trust, and active participation in local public spaces collectively create the social legitimacy necessary for members of the Chinese ethnic community to be recognized as equal members of society. This legitimacy subsequently enables broader participation in political life and strengthens political representation within local democratic institutions. Accordingly, political representation should be understood not merely as an electoral outcome but as the culmination of continuous social interaction embedded in everyday multicultural life.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by integrating Recognition Theory proposed by Axel Honneth with Political Representation Theory developed by Hanna Fenichel Pitkin. This integrated framework explains that political representation emerges through a sequential process of social acceptance, public trust, community participation, social recognition, and political legitimacy. From a Southern sociological perspective, the contribution lies in treating Bangka not simply as an empirical testing ground for theories developed elsewhere, but as a site from which the everyday-before-electoral pathway to minority representation can be conceptualized. The findings show that recognition in a postcolonial multicultural setting is historically embedded in vernacular institutions, reciprocal assistance, and routine participation in shared public spaces. This locally grounded proposition is analytically transferable rather than universally generalizable, and it invites comparative examination across other societies in the Global South. Practically, the study suggests that strengthening interethnic interaction, inclusive public participation, and mutual recognition within multicultural communities can reinforce democratic legitimacy and foster more inclusive political representation. Future research should examine the applicability and limits of this framework through comparative studies involving different ethnic communities and regions.

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