

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Construction of Acehnese-Chinese Ethnic Identity in Socio-Political Dynamics

Komunitas: International Journal of
Indonesian Society and Culture
17 (1) (2025): 73-88
DOI: 10.15294/komunitas.v17i1.21199
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p-ISSN 2086-5465 | e-ISSN 2460-7320
<https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals/komunitas>

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Submitted: December 23, 2024; Revised: February 27, 2025; Accepted: March 22, 2025

Abstract

This study explores how ethnic identities of Acehnese and Chinese communities are constructed through digital discourse, focusing on narratives of prejudice and integration as expressed on Facebook. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main framework, complemented by Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and Foucault's discourse-power relationship, this study examines how language, ideology, and social memory shape interethnic representations. Data were collected from public Facebook posts between January and September 2024 using keywords such as "Aceh and Chinese" and "Chinese and Aceh," and supported by interviews with selected users. The findings reveal a pattern of dualistic representation: historical tensions and symbolic prejudices persist, while efforts towards coexistence and shared identity also emerge. The dominant narratives often come from the Acehnese community, with the Chinese group showing a more cautious approach in digital expression. Labeling, metaphor, polarization, and references to historical trauma and moments of integration are key linguistic strategies identified in the discourse. Social media platforms like Facebook play a paradoxical role—both reinforcing ethnic bias through algorithmic echo chambers and enabling counter-narratives that foster intercultural understanding. Identity construction is shaped by both internal factors (such as education and ideology) and external factors (such as collective memory, interethnic experiences, and digital infrastructure). This study highlights the importance of critical media literacy in multicultural societies, especially in post-conflict areas like Aceh. It suggests the use of inclusive digital spaces and educational interventions that promote reflective historical awareness, reduce prejudice, and support cultural integration in online and offline environments.

Keywords

critical discourse analysis, ethnic identity, digital discourse, Acehnese-Chinese relations, social media

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INTRODUCTION

The history of the origins of the Acehese people is often constructed based on the acronym Asia-China-Europe and Hindia. Julius Jacob refers to this as *mixtum anthropologi* (Chalid, 2014). This implies that the Chinese ethnic group has historical and genealogical connections in the formation of the Acehese nation. Sutrisno (2018) indicates that a portion of the Acehese population is descended from the Chinese and is skilled in trade as well as in making noodles, a food characteristic of Chinese cuisine.

The relationship between Aceh and China was established through trade with Pasai in the 13th century. The Chinese community also held a privileged position during the Aceh Darussalam government under Iskandar Thani's reign. During that period, they settled in an area at the city's edge, near the sea, and built houses close to one another. This settlement became known as *Kampung Cina* (Lombard, 1996). The large-scale arrival of Chinese ethnic groups in Aceh occurred in 1875 (Reid, 2004). The Chinese population in Aceh, according to the first census conducted after the Aceh War in 1930, was recorded in significant numbers. At that time, the Chinese ethnic group in Aceh numbered 21,649 individuals, alongside 3,251 Europeans, 976,265 Acehese (Rosihan, 1986).

However, the relationship between Aceh and China has undergone unique dynamics over time. The social integration of the Chinese ethnic group in Aceh has often been marked by prejudiced relations. The Acehese people, who are historically *mixtum*, are observed to be consolidating into a more defined Acehese ethnic identity, with the remnants of other ethnic fragments gradually diminishing. The historical and genealogical ties between the Acehese and Chinese as part of the Acehese people have weakened over time.

The fading of the concept of *mixtum anthropologicum* in Aceh along with the Aceh-RI conflict shows the consolidation of Acehese ethnic identity (Nadia, 2020). After the Helsinki MoU, there was a process of reconstructing Acehese identity as an

ethnicity and nation that was different from national identity, through the institutionalization of symbols, language, sharia law, and historical narratives (Aspinall, 2009). Van Klinken (2007) assessed this consolidation as the impact of the conflict that strengthened the dominance of certain ethnicities and eroded pluralism. Galtung (1990) called it symbolic violence, where Islamic law and identity politics dominate non-Acehese groups. Feener (2013) added that Islamic law in Aceh also became an identity project, often ignoring cultural diversity. The conflict worsened perceptions of the Chinese community, which experienced symbolic delegitimization in the public space (Suryadinata, 2005; Reid, 2010) and withdrew from social participation (Hasballah, 2019). This phenomenon is a strengthening of Aceh's ethnic boundaries in a political context (Barth, 1969; Ramazan & Riyani, 2020; Riyani et al., 2022, 2023). Acehese-Chinese relations are often colored by prejudice—such as stereotypes of stinginess, anti-Chinese New Year attitudes, or negative comments on social media, which associate ethnic Chinese with “non-Muslims” and “non-natives”.

However, behind the tension, there are moments of integration through mixed marriages and economic cooperation, which are also recorded on social media. This study uses a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to analyze Facebook posts related to ethnic Acehese and Chinese, in order to reveal the construction of identity and social narratives. CDA, as used in previous social research (Hamad, 2004; Abidin et al., 2017), allows for analysis of texts, discourses, and social practices that reflect the collective cognition of society.

The focus of the study is on the dual narrative—between prejudice and integration—in digital interactions. This study also refers to the approaches of Briscoe & Khalifa (2015) and Khan et al. (2019), who used CDA to examine racial and religious discourse in a political context. Analysis of linguistic features such as diction, metaphor, labeling, and polarization is expected to show that the construction of ethnic identity is dynamic, shaped by collective memory, social ex-

perience, and digital structures. This study anticipates that both user cognitive factors and platform design influence discourse production patterns.

METHOD

This study uses the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach as the main analytical method. This approach reveals the social and cultural factors that shape the representation of identity in online interactions. CDA in this context is not only a linguistic approach, but also a multidisciplinary approach that examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology. Fairclough's version of CDA (1992, 2005) is the main framework used in analyzing the data.

Fairclough's CDA is influenced by Michel Foucault's discourse theory (1980), which sees discourse as a social practice that is closely related to the production of knowledge and power. Foucault emphasized that discourse not only reflects reality, but also shapes it. Concepts such as the 'regime of truth', 'power/knowledge', and 'discursive formation' which are important foundations in the critical approach to language which later became an inspiration for Fairclough and other CDA figures. However, Fairclough did not directly adopt Foucault's approach in its entirety, he developed CDA by combining elements of functional systemic linguistics (Halliday), ideology theory (Althusser and Gramsci) and communicative action theory (Habermas). Fairclough then developed this idea with a three-dimensional structure in CDA: text (textual analysis), discourse practice (discourse practice), and sociocultural context (sociocultural practice). These three levels are used to understand how Chinese and Acehnese ethnic identities are constructed in social media discourse, especially through Facebook.

In addition, this study also adopts the approach of Teun A. Van Dijk (1993, 1998) who broadens the scope of CDA by emphasizing the importance of cognitive structures in discourse analysis. The cognitive aspects in question include mental representations,

such as perceptions, collective memory, and biases formed in social interactions. In this context, Facebook posts are analyzed not only as texts, but also as expressions of social cognition of society formed by historical experiences and inter-ethnic interactions.

In the data collection process, posts containing propaganda narratives or information that is indicated as false are not immediately excluded. Instead, the data is analyzed critically as part of the production of discourse that forms collective perceptions and ethnic biases. In the context of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), objective truth is not the only focus; what is more important is how a 'social truth' is constructed and used as a basis for social action or attitudes. Therefore, fake news and propaganda are involved as part of the data with an emphasis on the analysis of its ideology, not on its factual validity.

Data were collected from public Facebook posts over a period from January to September 2024, using keyword searches such as "Cina dan Aceh" and "Tionghoa. The posts analyzed were selected based on their openness (public access), thematic relevance, and the presence of elements that can be dissected discursively (text, images, videos and comments). The posts were then categorized based on their narrative content—whether they were prejudiced, integrative, or neutral. The analysis was conducted using Fairclough's CDA approach with three levels: textual, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice, and considering aspects of user social cognition as developed by Van Dijk.

To strengthen the cognitive and interpretive dimensions of CDA, in-depth interviews were also conducted with several informants who were active in groups or had personal posts with the keywords used. This was done in order to gain an understanding of the meaning, image, and motives underlying the identity narrative that emerged.

Teun A. Van Dijk's approach (1993, 1998) was also used to expand the analysis by emphasizing the role of cognitive structures in shaping social perceptions and collective memories that emerge in digital

discourse. In this study, not only texts are analyzed, but also how texts reflect mental representations and biases that are formed in social experiences and interactions between ethnicities.

The analysis was conducted with a focus on several key linguistic features that help shape and construct ethnic identities in digital discourse. These features include:

1. Diction (Word Choice): Word choice is used to reveal ideological values in discourse, such as the use of terms that have negative or positive connotations towards certain ethnic groups (for example, the use of the terms “Cina” or “Tionghoa” in certain contexts).
2. Metaphor: Metaphors are often used to describe ethnic relations indirectly, such as “bridges of understanding” or “walls of tension”. Metaphor analysis will reveal how relations between ethnic groups are described, whether as conflict, cooperation, or encounters.
3. Labeling and Categorization: This study will identify how labels and categorizations are used in the text to create differences in social identity between the Acehese and Chinese ethnic groups, as well as to construct or reinforce social separation between groups.
4. Polarization: The polarization that occurs in discourse will be seen by analyzing how terms such as “us” vs “them” are used to clarify differences between the Acehese and Chinese ethnic groups. This pattern often reinforces social differentiation.
5. Euphemism and Irony: The study will also explore how euphemism and irony are used in discourse to hide or soften controversial narratives related to the Acehese and Chinese ethnicities.
6. Narrative and Discursive Structures: This analysis will look at how narrative and discursive structures are used to shape certain discourse patterns, for example whether there is a focus on victim or hero narratives in inter-ethnic relations.

By combining Foucaultian and Faircloughian approaches and considering Van

Dijk’s cognitive dimensions, this study aims to explore more deeply how ethnic prejudice and integration are formed and negotiated in digital discourse. This study was conducted with the following stages:

1. Formulation of Research Focus and Objectives. The researcher determines the main focus, namely the construction of Acehese and Chinese ethnic identities through social media interactions, especially Facebook. The main objective is to reveal the relationship between discourse, power, collective memory, and ethnic prejudice.
2. Digital Data Collection. Data is obtained from the Facebook platform using keywords such as “Aceh and China” and “Chinese and Aceh”. Collection is carried out by filtering relevant public posts, comments, images, and videos.
3. Data Selection and Classification. The collected data is classified based on the type of discourse: narrative text, comments, visuals, or a combination. Data is also grouped based on the direction of the discourse (for example: from the Acehese to the Chinese, and vice versa).
4. In-Depth Interview. Several active users who appeared in Facebook searches were interviewed to understand their social background, perceptions, and cognitive biases towards shared ethnic narratives. The selection of informants was done purposively based on their involvement in online discussions about the relations between Acehese and Chinese ethnicities. Criteria included the level of active participation on Facebook, the content of comments containing opinions or social reflections, and their willingness to be involved in interviews. The researcher also ensured the diversity of ethnic representations and maintained ethical principles by asking for explicit consent from all informants whose data were personal. Interview data were analyzed using a thematic approach based on CDA. The analysis was carried out through three levels: textual (the use of language and ethnic

labels), discourse practices (how narratives are produced or repeated from digital interactions), and socio-cultural contexts (the influence of social background on the construction of meaning). Validity was maintained through data triangulation between interviews, digital findings, and historical literature. Each informant's narrative was traced in relation to the representation of ideology, power, and ethnic relations. Starting with verbatim transcription and verification of content with informants, the thematic analysis was carried out in accordance with the CDA approach.

5. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) The analysis was conducted with three levels of CDA: Textual Analysis: dissecting the language structure, diction, metaphors, and labels in the text. Discourse Practice: examining the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse on Facebook. Sociocultural Practice: examining the social, historical, and ideological contexts that shape discourse.
6. Cognitive Interpretation (Van Dijk). The analysis is expanded by understanding the cognitive structure (collective memory, social perception, bias) that drives the emergence of certain discourses, both negative and integrative prejudices.
7. Compiling Findings and Drawing Conclusions. The findings are compiled in the form of tables, narratives, and charts that explain patterns, identity construction and social dynamics between the two ethnicities.

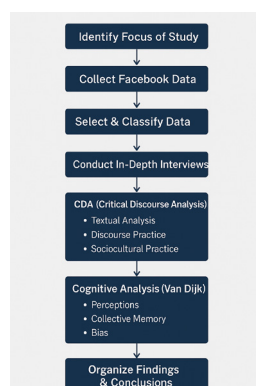


Figure 1. Research Procedure

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Identity Construction of Chinese Ethnicity by the Acehese Ethnic Group

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a unique contribution to this research because of its ability to read the relationship between text, social context, and ideology in depth. CDA allows researchers to trace how narratives about Acehese and Chinese ethnicities are shaped by symbolic power, collective memory, and social structures that live in digital spaces such as Facebook. With this approach, research can distinguish between prejudiced narratives that reproduce historical tensions, and integrative discourses that reflect the potential for inter-ethnic coexistence and reconciliation.

Based on keyword searches on Facebook, various posts were found containing excerpts from Aceh's historical narratives that mention its relationship with the Chinese ethnic group. These posts often appear in textual form, citing passages from books such as those by Amirul Hadi (2010), Van't Veer (1985), T.A. Talsya (1990), and collections from Peranakan Tionghoa literature. In Facebook groups, relevant posts were found in communities such as Pedir Museum, Aceh Darussalam Academy, MAPE-SA (Masyarakat Peduli Sejarah Aceh), and other historical discussion groups. These posts are frequently accompanied by images or videos. Text-based discourse is shared by individuals or groups (Facebook groups), sometimes with or without the original text. Additionally, many posts consist of reposted or re-shared news sources from various online media outlets, including portalsatu.com, aceh.tribunnews.com, and others. The narratives covered in these posts span different historical periods, including the Pasai Kingdom era, the golden age under Sultan Iskandar Muda, the advent of Dutch colonialism, the early independence period, the PKI incident, and contemporary events.

The table 1 illustrates how the Chinese ethnic group is labeled by the Acehese ethnic group. Negative labels such as "infidel" and "PKI henchman" reflect existing prejudices, while positive labels such as a strong

Table 1. The Construction of Chinese Ethnic Identity by the Acehnese Ethnic Group

Aspect	Narrative
Commonly Used References	China, Foreigners, Chinghua Regime
Negative Labeling	Infidel, PKI henchman, communist, brothel owner, opium business, evil nature (used for political propaganda).
Positive Labeling	Strong work ethic, honesty, perseverance.
Negative Prejudice	Bringing disaster (recent issues regarding foreign workers, source of COVID-19). Covert aid (the case of COVID-19 PPE donations by the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation). Receiving special privileges (the case of foreign workers in Aceh). Anything sent from China is impure. Chinese cultural elements as polytheistic (the case of lantern decorations in Langsa City). Pancasila as a 'deceptive strategy' by China.
Positive stereotypes	Positive Influence in Acehnese Culture Desire of some Chinese groups and figures to convert to Islam (cases of Masjid Ramlie-Mustofa and Lie Njok Kim). Shared prayers. Influence in Acehnese culture (ornamental motifs, weaving skills, architecture, and culinary traditions, particularly noodles). Formation of Acehnese society through interethnic interactions (marriages and family origins).
Disintegration Momentum	The PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) incident, socio-political crisis
Integration Momentum	Tsunami relief efforts. Peunayong as a shared communal space. Election of Chinese-Indonesian community members to public office (Irwan Nabawi, from the Tjhia clan, elected as Keuchik of Meunasah Teungku in Gading, Bireun, for the 2017-2023 period). Distinguished Chinese-Indonesian figures from Aceh. Chinese-Indonesian fighters (donating vehicles, charity for road construction during the revolutionary period). Committee for the establishment of Syiah Kuala University: Ir. Ong Hap Liap and Dr. Tjoa Kim Jaw. Architect of Baiturrahman Grand Mosque (Lie A Sie, 1879). Chinese ethnic groups refuting Dutch propaganda (November 19, 1947), affirming safety under the protection of the Aceh Resident. Supporting Indonesia during the Dutch Military Aggression. Backing Indonesia in times of crisis. The role of John Lie and the history of Radio Rimba Raya.

Source: Processed by the researcher

work ethic indicate recognition of the Chinese ethnic group's contributions. According to Wodak & Meyer, (2009), such labeling can either strengthen or weaken social relations between groups.

Furthermore, through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the emergence of prejudices related to specific events can be traced. In many Facebook posts, the language used is a mix of Acehnese, Indonesian, and, in some cases, English text. The use of mixed languages in Facebook posts reflects

the cultural diversity and various perspectives present. Van Dijk (2009) emphasizes that language analysis in a social context can reveal how identity and power are negotiated. The following is a Facebook post that illustrates negative prejudice against the Chinese ethnic group in Aceh, which affects perceptions of everything originating from China. Conversely, negative prejudice against China as a nation also impacts the Chinese ethnic group in Aceh.



Figure 2. The Use of Language as a Linguistic Strategy

Source: https://www.facebook.com/search/str/aceh+dan+cina/keywords_blenved_posts?f=Abpo_8DXtZ7ngDfYlQs6MNez8Bq7DL2vP-o3c7sLItqkOHKRMqDHIPjeEFEpcBhBAtkuE8sptCg3AuM8sY28pRfQk9Q2MdlJYQeO5B2W830KrVy2-FqxnfpR-2ZAVix-u05Din9nHQ12rPJy4acW4e0YB&epa=F-ILTERS&filters=eyJycF9jaHJvbm9fc29ydCI6IntcIm5hbWVcIjpcImNocm9ub3NvcnRcIixcImFyZ3NcIjpcIlwifSIsInJwX2xvY2F0aW9uIjoie1wibmFtZVwiOlwibG9jYXRpb25cIixcImFyZ3NcIjpcIjEwMzg0NjAxOTY1Mzc0M1wifSJ9

Similarly, the negative labeling of anything containing Chinese cultural elements as an act of polytheism is evident in the following post:



Figure 3. Labeling of Chinese Culture

Source: https://www.facebook.com/search/str/aceh+dan+cina/keywords_blenved_posts?f=Abpo_8DXtZ7ngDfYlQs6MNez8Bq7DL2vP-o3c7sLItqkOHKRMqDHIPjeEFEpcBhBAtkuE8sptCg3AuM8sY28pRfQk9Q2MdlJYQeO5B2W830KrVy2-FqxnfpR-2ZAVix-u05Din9nHQ12rPJy4acW4e0YB&epa=F-ILTERS&filters=eyJycF9jaHJvbm9fc29ydCI6IntcIm5hbWVcIjpcImNocm9ub3NvcnRcIixcImFyZ3NcIjpcIlwifSIsInJwX2xvY2F0aW9uIjoie1wibmFtZVwiOlwibG9jYXRpb25cIixcImFyZ3NcIjpcIjEwMzg0NjAxOTY1Mzc0M1wifSJ9

Negative prejudice is often rooted in historical events, including the Dutch colonial period and the post-independence era. As outlined by Wodak, (2001), historical discourse can shape social identity and prejudice through recurring narratives. Within social time, individuals tend to emphasize certain aspects of their social identity to assert both individual and group existence (Kalingis, 2020).

The Construction of Chinese Ethnic Identity in Relation to the Acehese Ethnic Group

The construction of Acehese perceptions of China is not widely represented on Facebook by Chinese Peranakan individuals. Most posts originate from the Acehese community (ethnic Acehese), often as a means of expressing respect and identifying themselves as part of the Acehese nation.

The term ‘geuntanyoe Syadara’ in several Facebook profiles of ethnic Chinese and gratitude for the grant of burial land from the local Acehese rulers show that the Chinese community chooses an integrative and careful approach in building an identity in the digital space. The construction built by ethnic Acehese in China is not widely displayed on Facebook by Chinese peranakans. Most of the posts come from the Acehese community (Acehese ethnicity) including to show respect and feel as part of the Acehese nation itself.

From the various posts identified through the selected filtering method, seven

Table 2. The Construction of Chinese Ethnic Identity in Relation to the Acehese Ethnic Group

Aspect	Narrative
Commonly Used References	Our Brothers (Geuntanyoe Syedara)
Negative Labeling	Not Found
Positive Labeling	Not Found
Negative Prejudice	Not Found
Positive stereotypes	The generosity of the Acehese ethnic group is demonstrated by providing both living and burial space (granting cemetery land by local rulers, business opportunities, freedom to practice religion and traditions, and interethnic marriages).
Disintegration Momentum	Denied land ownership rights Killings during the PKI era Expulsions during the New Order era
Integration Momentum	Chinese Cemetery Granted by the Ruler of Peusangan Interethnic Marriage Chinese New Year Celebration in Peunayong

Source: Processed by the researcher

ral interesting findings emerge regarding the construction of identity from two perspectives. This is particularly intriguing because these constructions are built upon historical knowledge derived from various sources, which are then reposted. These posts reflect prejudice, labeling, and documentation of events that represent both integration and disintegration between the two groups. Thus, in constructing their respective ethnic identities, Facebook groups and individual users engage in Discourse (with a capital D), which involves linguistic conventions as a component of discourse (with a lowercase d), alongside non-linguistic elements such as photographs. This serves as a means of reacting, interacting, expressing emotions, conveying beliefs, and making judgments—ultimately shaping how individuals recognize or acknowledge themselves and others. Through specific ways of performing various activities, perspectives, and ethnic identities, this process generates meaning, making identity construction both significant and impactful.

Discourse activities are carried out based on internal and external factors. Internally (as observed in this study), they are influenced by the educational background

of Facebook account holders and the prevalence of Facebook groups. Externally, they are shaped by experiences in social interactions and interethnic engagement. According to Gee (2010), these factors play a crucial role in shaping social discourse.

Societal cognition is a collection of collective memories preserved within historical narratives. Collective memory, therefore, is shaped and developed alongside the historical trajectory of a society itself (Liliweri, 2005). Negative prejudice emerged following the arrival of the Dutch. According to Van't Veer, after October 1875, the Dutch assigned a Chinese captain and two Chinese lieutenants to oversee the small Chinese colony in Aceh. Two years later, records indicate that 1,200 Chinese individuals had settled in Aceh. In addition to being traders, they also owned brothels, operated opium dens, and supervised gambling houses (the opium trade monopoly in Aceh in 1878 generated half a million guilders, equivalent to the total revenue of the entire region). During this period, the Chinese community also worked as contract laborers constructing roads from Kutaraja to Indrapuri, managing the transportation of goods through ox-cart convoys. Additionally, they served

as porters for Dutch military colonies. This post references Perang Aceh, pages 138–139 (Van't Veer, 1985).

Negative prejudice was further reinforced by various international cases, such as responses to news about the Uyghurs (<https://sumeks.co/hilangkan-jejak-kematian-china-hancurkan-makam-muslimig-hur/?fbclid=IwARoGZpwwfBamMlGaZ84RAtpibOK1HehgoYK3p2CJERV02DreEHvp-C9U4jb-A>) With the demolition of Islamic scholars' graves in Kampung Pande, Banda Aceh, which was repurposed as a waste disposal site by the local government. In this case, a clear cognitive bias is evident, as the local government does not represent any specific ethnic group. The negative labeling of "Chinese" in the political and governmental sphere has become prevalent in Aceh. In a Facebook post by Muammar Al Farisi on June 13, 2020, Daud Beureueh was accused of being of Siamese Chinese descent. Additionally, Chinese aid during the COVID-19 pandemic became a controversial topic in Aceh (https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=orang%20cina%20dan%20aceh&epa=SEARCH_BOX). Referred to as Abu Peureulak, the Gateway of East Aceh is Fragile (June 10, 2020), the post includes the labeling of the Chinese ethnic group within the Buddha Tzu Chi Foundation as "kafir" (infidel).

Based on historical studies, significant friction with the Chinese ethnic group began in the early years of Indonesia's independence. This critical period occurred as Acehnese society developed a divided stance toward the Chinese community. A similar situation took place in other parts of Indonesia. Wasino et al., (2019) notes that the Chinese community was categorized into three groups: those who were pro-colonial, those who supported the Allies (bringing troops from their homeland, including Chiang Kai-shek's forces), and a small faction that supported Indonesia. Referring to Talsya's, 1990 records on the post-independence period, particularly in the context of defending independence, he mentions that the Poh An Tui militia, formed by the Allies in Medan, acted arrogantly and caus-

ed disturbances among the indigenous population almost daily. Ling (2011) argues that this militia emerged out of a need for self-defense. In the volatile situation at the time, the Chinese community in Medan was caught in a dilemma—they could not fully rely on the colonial administration, yet they also could not fully align with the Indonesian government. Consequently, they formed the Poh An Tui militia to protect themselves from attacks by Indonesian youth militias. The Poh An Tui was armed by the NICA (Netherlands-Indies Civil Administration). From the rooftops of their homes, Chinese youths in Medan fired weapons at Indonesian fighters who infiltrated at night (Warsidi et al., 2022). This situation fueled anti-Chinese sentiment across various regions in Sumatra, including Aceh. Previously, a Chinese youth organization had been established in Banda Aceh on November 12, 1945, under the name The Oversea Chinese Young Man Association (OCYMA), led by Leo Foek Soen. The organization aimed to safeguard the business interests of the Chinese community in Aceh, especially following tensions between Acehnese nationalist youth groups and ethnic Chinese youths during the disarmament of Japanese forces by the Aceh Resident. To prevent further conflicts between the indigenous population and the Chinese community in Aceh, efforts were made to establish a joint organization. This organization, named the Indonesian-Chinese and Arab Joint Institution (LEGITIA), was officially formed on May 24, 1946, in Banda Aceh.

The Chinese ethnic group in Peunayong is known for their strong work ethic. The Chinese, particularly those who arrived in the 1875 wave, worked as laborers Usman (2009) in various sectors, including mining, ports, plantations, rubber estates, and other contract-based labor. A portion of their daily earnings was saved. Due to their diligence, many of them accumulated wealth more quickly than the indigenous population. These savings later became capital for purchasing land and establishing shops. Gradually, they ventured into trade while continuing to work as laborers. Once they

had accumulated sufficient financial resources, they transitioned from manual laborers to merchants, providing goods and services through their own businesses, similar to developments in other regions of Indonesia.

Before 1965, the Chinese ethnic group in Aceh dominated most sectors of goods and services businesses. They even expanded into small-scale enterprises such as market trading, snack stalls, restaurants, coffee shops, laundries, barbershops, grocery stores, vegetable agencies, and pig farming. Larger-scale businesses included construction contracting companies, inter-island trading, supermarkets, photo studios, import-export commodity businesses, and transportation companies (Srimulyani et al, 2018). Before 1966, the Chinese community in Banda Aceh had their own schools, which were organized based on religion, belief systems, or citizenship status. Ethnic Chinese who were Indonesian citizens had educational institutions established by the Indonesian Citizenship Consultation Body (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia—Baperki). Baperki itself represented the integration ideology promoted by the Old Order government. This mass organization of the Chinese ethnic group, Baperki, was founded on March 14, 1954, with the goal of integrating ethnic Chinese into Indonesian citizenship and opposing all forms of racial discrimination (Wasino et al., 2019). Additionally, Chinese citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC) had their own school named Chung Hua Chung Hui, while stateless Chinese groups also had a special educational institution located in Peunayong.

Unfortunately, the 1965 tragedy, which was linked to the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia—PKI), placed the Chinese ethnic community in Peunayong, Banda Aceh, and almost all of Aceh under severe scrutiny. The perceived association between the Chinese ethnic group and the PKI fueled growing anti-Chinese sentiment, particularly in 1966 (Coppel, 2003). They were also believed to have played a role in spreading communist ideology (Usman, 2009). This situation was ex-

acerbated by the belief that the Chinese ethnic group, through their country of origin, contributed financially to the dissemination of communism in Indonesia. For instance, it was alleged that the Chinese Consulate in Medan provided recommendations to the Bank of China Medan through the CHCH network (Yun Hin and associates, as well as Khu Bun Cang and associates) to invest in Min Fa (Anyi) from Baperki by establishing Toko Cendrawasih in the Peunayong area of Banda Aceh (Abubakar, 1995). On December 16, 1965, the Aceh Ulama Conference (Musyawarah Ulama Aceh) was held, issuing a fatwa declaring communism as *kufr* (heresy) and *haram* (forbidden). Subsequently, the Commander of Kodam I/Iskandar Muda, serving as the head of *Pepelrada*, instructed Kodim 0101 (covering Banda Aceh Municipality and Greater Aceh as KOSEKHAN) to form a Screening Team (Tim Screening) to investigate and process members of the PKI and its affiliated mass organizations. The screening process was intended to determine whether they were involved in the G30S/PKI movement or not (Abubakar, 1995).

The peak of the expulsion of the Chinese ethnic community in Aceh began in North Aceh, where many Chinese foreign nationals (WNA Tionghoa) were repatriated to China. As they departed, many of their shops were sold to indigenous residents (*orang Aceh*) (Sjamsuddin, 1985). On May 8, 1966, the military commander of Aceh, Brigadier General Ishak Djuarsa, issued an announcement stating that all foreign Chinese individuals must leave Aceh before August 17, 1966 (Usman, 2009). This ultimatum further fueled mass actions aimed at expelling the Chinese ethnic group. According to a research report by Ahok (1976) on the return of Chinese entrepreneurs to Aceh, the expulsion was spearheaded by the Indonesian Youth and Student Action Union (Kesatuan Aksi Pemuda Pelajar Indonesia—KAPPI) and the Indonesian Student Action Union (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia—KAMI). These actions were supported by the Student Regiment (Resimen Mahasiswa—Menwa) and backed by Kodam I Iskandar Muda. These events later became

an entry point in the collective cognition of the Acehnese society, reinforcing the stigmatization of the Chinese ethnic group as affiliates of the PKI and communism, a label that continues to appear in Facebook posts (Sukanta, 2013).

The prejudice that persists today is believed to stem from the long-standing social distance between the Chinese and Acehnese ethnic groups, which has been reinforced by residential segregation and cultural ethos differences. The extensive economic dominance of the Chinese in Aceh led to competition, which in turn caused setbacks for indigenous businesses. According to the sociologist Wartheim, this phenomenon is referred to as “the trading minority,” where a minority group, in this case, the Chinese, dominates a significant portion of trade-based enterprises. The prolonged business competition between the Chinese and the indigenous population in Banda Aceh fostered prejudice, mutual suspicion, and latent conflicts, ultimately leading to social tension. However, this tension never escalated into physical conflict. Such social dynamics are common in multiethnic societies (Arief, 2020). Interestingly, although it is often considered a sensitive topic, the strong work ethic of the Sigli community in Pidie, Aceh—often referred to as “the Chinese of Aceh”—is a source of pride. The people of Pidie are recognized for their entrepreneurial spirit, management skills, institutional development, artistic taste, and deep religious commitment, traits commonly associated with the Chinese business ethos.

The positive aspect of prejudice is linked to religious enthusiasm, as demonstrated through activities that promote integration. For example, the Hadrah (Islamic percussion) practice by the youth in Gampong Kuala Pidie (Gampong Cina) was highlighted in a Facebook post by Teuku Shadliar on May 23, 2020. Support for the conservation of architectural heritage that blends European, Chinese, and Acehnese styles can also be seen in several locations. One notable example is the Langsa shopping complex. A historian and academic from Universitas Samudra commented on this in a Facebook

post on September 7, 2014, in response to the demolition of several shops in the Citizen Pecinan (Chinatown) area, particularly in the well-known Kompleks Toko Belakang (Back Shop Complex) https://www.facebook.com/search/posts/?q=aceh%20dan%20cina&epa=SERP_TAB. Moments of integration also emerge during Chinese New Year (Imlek) celebrations in Banda Aceh.



Figure 4. The Chinese New Year Tradition in Peunayong

Source: https://www.vice.com/id_id/article/a3475z/esai-foto-merayakan-keragaman-di-aceh-pada-hari-perayaan-imlek?utm_source=viceidfb&fbclid=IwAR3tOX-4_yCVjFm7O-Ow3lf-LKJIA6Q_dC3IOB6lp7KnOhN9Ic4ky7pNu9M

Genealogical recognition and Acehnese-Chinese-Turkish mixtum anthropology are also demonstrated by Ida Fitri through the acknowledgment of her family lineage. Ida Fitri, a writer from Bireun, states that her grandfather was part of a group from Turkey, while her great-grandfather was of Chinese descent who resided in Pidie, Aceh. https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=orang%20cina%20dan%20aceh&epa=SEARCH_BOX (October 21, 2017).

Small lessons are often learned by the Acehnese ethnic group from their Chinese counterparts through narratives of journeys and encounters. Tjan Tjeng Kiong (73 years old, as mentioned in Saiful Mahdi’s post on July 31, 2017), known as Bang Madi or Botak, is the owner of the legendary coffee shop “Sudi Mapir” in Bireun. He identifies himself as “Acehnese, not Chinese.” This account simultaneously seeks to highlight positive ste-

reotypes and moments of social integration by recognizing the Chinese ethnic group as part of the Acehese community. Tjan Tjeng Kiong himself noted that the Chinese cemetery was a grant from Ampon Chik Peusangan (the ruler of Peusangan) in the 1920s in the Cot Gapu area. (https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=orang%20cina%20dan%20aceh&epa=SEARCH_BOX)

This post was also shared by Saiful Mahdi (the account owner) in response to the increasing reluctance of the Acehese community to recognize land ownership rights for the Chinese ethnic group in Aceh. In some regions, such as East Aceh, there is considerable caution in accepting prospective buyers of shops, houses, or land. This can be observed in the demographic composition of East Aceh, where the presence of the Chinese ethnic group is almost nonexistent. Even if present, their numbers are minimal and often categorized under “other ethnic groups” in demographic data. A population composition survey conducted by the East Aceh Regional Development Planning Agency (BAPPEDA) included only Acehese, Gayo, Malay, Javanese, Minangkabau, and Batak as ethnic categories. (Survey Data from BAPPEDA East Aceh, 2013).

Another aspect of the relationship between Aceh and China in the trade sector is not solely about competition. Instead, moments of shared business spaces, as seen in Peunayong, Banda Aceh, have also been highlighted in several Facebook posts. The relationship between Chinese traders and Acehese buyers is further illustrated by the latter’s reliance on Chinese merchants to supply rare commodities—an interaction that has existed for a long time. This information has been conveyed through Facebook posts <https://www.facebook.com/acehtempodoeloe/photos/a.384145711973175/395137714207308/?type=3&theater>, yang It provides information through a receipt from a trading activity in Sigli. This post contains a message that affirms the positive relationship between the Acehese and Chinese ethnic groups, and depicts the Chinese ethnic group in a positive light through recognition of their trading ethos.

Additionally, moments of integration are also reflected in the support of the Chinese ethnic group for the dissemination of nationalist ideology, particularly through newspapers as an effective mass media platform during the national movement struggle. This is highlighted in a post titled “Kop dari surat kabar zaman Kolonial Belanda di Aceh ‘SOEARA ATJEH’” (The Masthead of the Soeara Atjeh Newspaper from the Dutch Colonial Era in Aceh).



Figure 5. A Clipping of the Soeara Atjeh Newspaper Masthead

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/acehtempodoeloe/photos/a.384145711973175/450934655294280/?type=3&theater>.

This post highlights that the Chinese community in Sigli played a role in the establishment of Soera Atjeh as a media outlet, which was founded in November 1929. Moments of integration also emerge through the reposting of stories about John Lie and Radio Rimba Raya, the involvement of the Chinese ethnic group in the construction of Baiturrahman Mosque, Syiah Kuala University, and several key moments in the struggle for independence. The narrative contribution is more often represented by the Acehese side than the Chinese community itself. Bottom of Form

The various findings above show the relevance between collective memory and social cognition. Where collective memory is formed by historical narratives that are disseminated and influence people’s cognition towards ethnic Chinese and vice versa. Van Dijk (1998) explains that social cognition is a bridge between discourse and social structure, which allows an understanding of how prejudice is formed.

Dynamics of Discourse on Facebook

Facebook plays a dual role in reinforcing prejudice through algorithmic echo chambers and becoming a channel for the articulation of integrative collective memory. While in the linguistic structure (diction, metaphor, polarization) it clarifies how collective memory, historical experience, and contemporary social conditions shape the representation of identity.

From several things presented above, several points of findings were obtained as a result of the CDA process in the form of discourse analysis (scripts), in the form of text (discourse in written form), talks (discourse in spoken form), and Act (discourse in the form of actions) and artifacts (discourse in the form of traces), so this research provides some information:

1. A dualistic perception of the Chinese ethnic group has persisted from the past to the present. Some Acehnese individuals perceive themselves as having a genealogical mixture that includes Chinese ancestry as a foundational element of the Acehnese identity. Conversely, others view the Chinese ethnic group as a threat, often associating them with negative labels. This dualism is reflected in various forms of discourse, including texts (Facebook posts), talks (videos and daily conversations), acts (actions), and artifacts (digital traces left behind).
2. Efforts to construct a shared Acehnese-Chinese identity within the framework of social integration primarily originate from the Acehnese ethnic group. These initiatives are particularly driven by researchers affiliated with various communities or as independent individuals, most of whom are academics and writers. Through historical excerpts and narratives of interethnic interactions shared in social media posts, a positive image of social integration emerges from specific segments of the Acehnese community.
3. The Chinese ethnic group tends to be more reserved in publicly displaying their collective memory, which plays a role in shaping social cognition within

their community. This is evident in the limited presence of artifacts or digital traces on Facebook, except for a few instances, such as interethnic marriages and specific references in personal account profiles that describe the Acehnese as “brothers”—a deliberate attempt to project an image of a minority group seeking social integration.

4. The relationship between the two ethnic groups is often portrayed as ambiguous, largely due to religious differences, which contribute to a sense of duality in attitudes and perceptions.
5. The way identities are constructed and represented is influenced by internal factors (the subject’s mental processes, shaped by their educational background, ideology, and beliefs) and external factors (narratives shaped by external actors and interethnic interaction experiences).

The narrative patterns that are formed are:

1. Negative narrative: Appears dominantly in posts related to historical conflicts and contemporary crises.
2. Integrative narrative: supported by the Acehnese academic and historical activist community.

This dynamic confirms the finding that negative and integration narratives go hand in hand to form the ‘grey relationship’ of Aceh-China. This study reveals that ethnic discourse between Acehnese and Chinese groups on Facebook shows complex and non-uniform dynamics. On the one hand, Facebook functions as a new space for individuals and communities to challenge dominant narratives, voice marginalized experiences, and spread integrative narratives that do not always find a place in mainstream media. Social media opens up the possibility for the actualization of identity, expression of collective memory, and cross-identity dialogue that was previously limited by formal power structures.

The findings of this study are in line with Van Dijk’s (2008) thinking regarding the role of social cognitive structures in shaping and reproducing prejudice. He empha-

sized that ethnic bias and stereotypes do not merely emerge from texts, but are the result of collective experiences framed in a particular social context and reinforced through symbolic interactions, including those that occur in digital spaces. In this context, social media algorithms such as Facebook are not neutral; they actively shape the discourse landscape through the logic of content personalization that strengthens echo chambers. This is reinforced by the study of Cinelli et al. (2021) which shows that social media users tend to be exposed to information that is in line with their views, thus narrowing the space for cross-identity dialogue. Meanwhile, the ambivalent aspect of the role of social media as an arena for integration as well as reproduction of prejudice was also raised by Papacharissi (2010), who stated that digital spaces have the potential to be affective publics—emotional communities that can strengthen solidarity, but are also vulnerable to identity fragmentation. The finding that most of the integrative narratives actually came from the Acehnese academic community, and not from the Chinese group itself, can be studied using Fraser's (1990) framework on subaltern counterpublics, where certain groups choose to hold back or remain silent in public spaces due to imbalances in power relations or historical trauma.

The tendency of the Chinese group to be more closed in sharing their collective memories is also in line with the research results of Suryadinata (2010), who noted that the Chinese community in Indonesia tends to adopt a silent adaptation strategy as a form of identity protection amidst potential discrimination. In the Acehnese context, this attitude is reinforced by memories of the conflict and experiences of marginalization, which form a pattern of careful and selective self-representation in online spaces.

In addition, the construction of identity through historical narratives that appear in Facebook posts reflects what Halbwachs (1992) explained about collective memory as something that is not neutral, but is constructed through certain social media and is very dependent on actors who have

symbolic authority. In this case, accounts such as MAPESA or Aceh Documentary Academy act as memory-forming agents that try to balance the dominant narrative.

Thus, this finding enriches the study of ethnic discourse in the digital era by showing that social media is not just a communication channel, but also a cultural actor that is actively involved in the construction of identity and power relations. The discourse that emerges is not just a reflection of the past, but also a product of contemporary interactions between social structures, algorithms, and intersecting symbolic actors.

CONCLUSION

This study is not free from a number of methodological limitations, especially in terms of the validity of social media data which is fluid, not always verified, and limited to public posts. However, the Critical Discourse Analysis approach still provides space to read the dynamics of discourse that develops in the digital space, even though the data obtained does not represent the entire social reality.

The findings show that the discourse relationship between the Acehnese and Chinese ethnic groups on Facebook takes place in a complex tension. On the one hand, social media opens up space for individuals and communities to voice experiences that have been marginalized, revive collective memory, and encourage alternative narratives that rarely get a place in mainstream media. However, on the other hand, this platform also creates echo chambers that strengthen prejudice, accelerate the spread of stereotypes, and narrow the space for dialogue between identities.

In the context of Aceh, perceptions of the contribution of the Chinese ethnic group appear to have declined, especially during times of conflict, when political and social tensions increase. This experience reflects a tendency where minority groups often experience symbolic delegitimization in the public space, move away from open social participation, and are slowly eliminated from the collective narrative.

Although this study only touches on the online dimension, the implications produced are still significant. It shows that social media is not a neutral medium of communication, but rather a cultural actor that influences how people understand identity, history, and power relations. Therefore, it is important for policy makers to design interventions that support critical and ethical digital literacy, especially regarding cultural diversity and preventing discrimination.

For the world of education, these results underline the importance of integrating reflective and critical approaches in learning about media and local history. Meanwhile, for civil society, these findings can be a starting point for building new dialogue spaces—both online and offline—that are more open and inclusive.

In the future, further studies need to look more closely at the relationship between online and offline interactions, and consider the role of other media in shaping public opinion about ethnicity. The efforts of local communities such as MAPESA, Aceh Documentary Academy, and Pedir Museum show that grassroots cultural initiatives can be an important foothold for building a more just and balanced narrative.

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