

Tradition to Parliament: Dynamics of the Role of PSMTI and INTI in Ethnic Chinese Politics in the 2024 Election in Medan City

Valdesz Junianto Nainggolan¹, Humaizi², Heri Kusmanto³ and Nurman Achmad⁴

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of the roles of the Paguyuban Marga Sosial Tionghoa Indonesia (PSMTI) and the Ikatan Tionghoa Indonesia (INTI) in the local politics of Medan City ahead of the 2024 Elections, particularly how they adapt their traditional roles to influence election outcomes. Given the issues of social integration and political representation of ethnic minorities, this research is critical as it discusses how the Chinese ethnic group utilizes political mechanisms to advocate for their rights and interests in a developing democratic context. This study employs qualitative methods with a field study approach. Data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to gather data on the political strategies of PSMTI and INTI. The collected data will be analyzed using Miles and Huberman's techniques. The results indicate that both organizations have effectively utilized practices of clientelism to secure policies favorable to the Chinese ethnicity, while creating significant political support networks. This study reveals how strategic adaptations in identity politics by ethnic groups can influence local political dynamics, offering important lessons for a broader understanding of the interactions between ethnic minorities and national political structures.

Keywords: Tradition, Parliament, Political, Elections, Ethnic, Chinese.

INTRODUCTION

In the social and political matrix of Medan City, the Chinese ethnicity has held a significant role since the early 20th century. By 1930, they constituted the largest ethnic group in Medan, accounting for 35.63% of the total population, slightly more than the Javanese inhabitants (Kumparan, 2017). However, demographic dynamics underwent a significant shift in 1994; their proportion decreased to about 12% of Medan's two million residents, while the Batak Toba population reached 14%. The economic dominance maintained by the Chinese ethnicity in Medan, combined with perceptions of exclusivity, has long generated tensions with other ethnic groups who feel marginalized economically.

The long history of organizational involvement by the Chinese descendants is evident through the establishment of Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK) in 1900, which was an early symbol of their social and political awareness (Andi & Darmayanti, 2019; Sai, 2016; Saunia & Erniwati, 2023; Sumardi, 2023). This organization was not only a venue for education but also influenced other Chinese ethnic associations, including in Medan (Abidin, 2022; Yulianti, 2022). Previous research indicates that in Medan, the Peranakan Chinese have formed associations deeply rooted in tradition and politics, represented by PSMTI and INTI, which play central roles in fostering ethnic and political identities (Damanik, 2018; Faraidiany, 2017).

In the current political context, particularly leading up to the 2024 Elections, PSMTI and INTI are strategically positioned to influence local politics in Medan. These organizations have transformed from focusing solely on cultural and social activities to becoming more involved in political advocacy (Halim & Truna, 2023). Navigating through interethnic tensions and maintaining economic relevance, both organizations now have the opportunity to advocate for the interests of the Chinese community, while striving to build bridges of understanding and cooperation with other ethnic groups.

¹ Department of Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

² Department of Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia, Email: humaizi@usu.ac.id, (Corresponding Author)

³ Department of Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

⁴ Department of Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Leo Suryadinata notes that there are two major currents among Chinese organizations in Indonesia: one that preserves Chinese traditions, and another that promotes integration and assimilation with the indigenous population (Suryadinata, 2008, 2019). In Medan, this is manifested through PSMTI's focus on preserving Chinese culture, and INTI's emphasis on assimilation and political participation. Thus, both organizations take active roles in local politics, particularly during elections, by conducting selection and support for legislative candidates from the Chinese ethnicity.

The roles taken by PSMTI and INTI in Medan's politics are not only crucial for the Chinese ethnic community but also for the broader political and social structure of Medan City (Suryadinata, 1993). Their involvement can provide valuable insights into how Indonesia's highly pluralistic democracy accommodates and integrates the interests of ethnic minorities within a larger political framework. This study aims to elucidate how, through political participation, PSMTI and INTI contribute to a more inclusive and representative process in Medan and Indonesia as a whole.

The urgency of this research is to understand and articulate the roles and influence of ethnic Chinese organizations, specifically PSMTI and INTI, in the dynamic political context of Medan City ahead of the 2024 Elections. Considering the long and complex history of interethnic relations in Indonesia, particularly between the Chinese community and other ethnic groups, this study aims to explore how these organizations not only adapt to political and social changes but also how they potentially direct and influence local political outcomes. Thus, this study will provide significant insights into the strategies of adaptation and integration of ethnic minorities in local politics, which could serve as references in policy-making and enhancing social cohesion in pluralistic Indonesia.

Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Collective Identity in Ethnicity Studies

Understanding the political behavior of the Chinese ethnic group is inseparable from the concept of collective identity, which is a crucial element in ethnicity studies (Ignesius, 2022; Larasati, 2023). Theories of conflict in social science, such as Clifford Geertz's primordialism, Karl Marx's class conflict theory, and James Scott's patron-client theory, provide insights into how collective identity influences social and political dynamics (Farha et al., 2022; Pathurrahman et al., 2020; Siahaan & Arianto, 2020; Widyarini, 2022). Geertz's primordialism, in particular, elucidates how deep and prehistorical ethnic identities play a role in shaping group behavior, offering a framework to understand the depth of ethnic bonds and values that persist through social changes.

Identity, as described by Andrew Heywood (2015, 2017), serves as a bridge between personal and social aspects, facilitating individual growth within various cultural and social contexts. Social identity, manifested through tribalism, religion, gender, and citizenship, provides a framework for individuals to position themselves within society. The concept of identity politics highlights how these differences become dominant political categories, leading to the formulation of strategies in the political arena.

According to Manuel Castells, identity is a source of meaning for individuals or groups who see themselves and are seen by others (Castells, 2010). Castells distinguishes three types of identity: legitimacy identity, resistance identity, and project identity (Castells, 2023). Legitimacy identity reflects the process by which dominant institutions reinforce their dominance through social integration. Resistance identity is adopted by marginalized groups as a means to maintain their uniqueness against external domination. Meanwhile, project identity is a proactive effort to redefine their social position, often through widespread social transformation, as seen in the feminist movement in America, which successfully influenced women's rights and social status.

Understanding this framework is essential in analyzing how organizations like PSMTI and INTI operate within the political context of Medan ahead of the 2024 elections, particularly in how they shape, influence, and advocate for the interests of the Chinese community in the broader society. Collective identity, therefore, is not just a background but also a driving force that determines the direction and form of their political participation.

Clientelism Theory in the Context of Political Dynamics

Clientelism theory is a crucial approach in understanding the political and economic relations often occurring between individuals or groups with significant power or resources (patrons) and those less powerful or with fewer resources (clients) (Huntington & Fukuyama, 2006). In this context, the exchange of resources or support is conducted in the hope of securing political support or loyalty (Dahal, 2023; Gherghina & Tap, 2022; Ristiawan et al., 2023). Clientelism can sometimes involve direct material aid, access to services, or other forms of political support (Gherghina & Lutai, 2024; Kyriacou, 2023; Lindberg et al., 2022).

The clientelist system is not just a simple transaction, but often forms part of a broader social and political structure, regulating interactions among different groups in society. This includes informal arrangements that shape how policies are made and resources are distributed, often bypassing formal institutions and democratic processes (Gherghina et al., 2022). Clientelism tends to emerge in environments where state institutions are weak and unable to provide services or resources fairly and efficiently (Klaus et al., 2023).

In the political context, clientelism plays a crucial role in elections, where votes can be 'bought' or influenced through promises of benefit exchanges (Dawson et al., 2023; Gherghina & Marian, 2024). This may include everything from commitments to improve local infrastructure to promises of employment or protection. Powerful patrons use their resources to ensure loyalty and support, while clients offer their votes in the hope of gaining better access to these resources.

In many developing countries, clientelism is often seen as an obstacle to more inclusive and democratic political and economic development. By binding individuals and communities in a cycle of dependency that is difficult to break, this system can impede social change and political innovation (Rozaki, 2022). Furthermore, it often reinforces existing power structures and hinders reform processes that could lead to a fairer distribution of power and resources.

This theory can provide new insights into how the ethnic Chinese organizations operate as patrons in the local context. By leveraging their resources and influence, organizations like PSMTI and INTI may engage in clientelist practices that affect local political dynamics. This exploration will help understand how political and economic exchanges shape the political landscape in Medan, while illustrating how patrons and clients interact within this complex political arena.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this literature review, the author conducted preliminary observations by examining 1,000 previous studies using the Publish or Perish application. These studies were filtered with the keywords "2024 Elections" and "Ethnicity," limited to research from the year 2018 onwards. After collecting the data, the author used the VosViewer application to perform network analysis and density analysis to identify research gaps. The results are as follows:

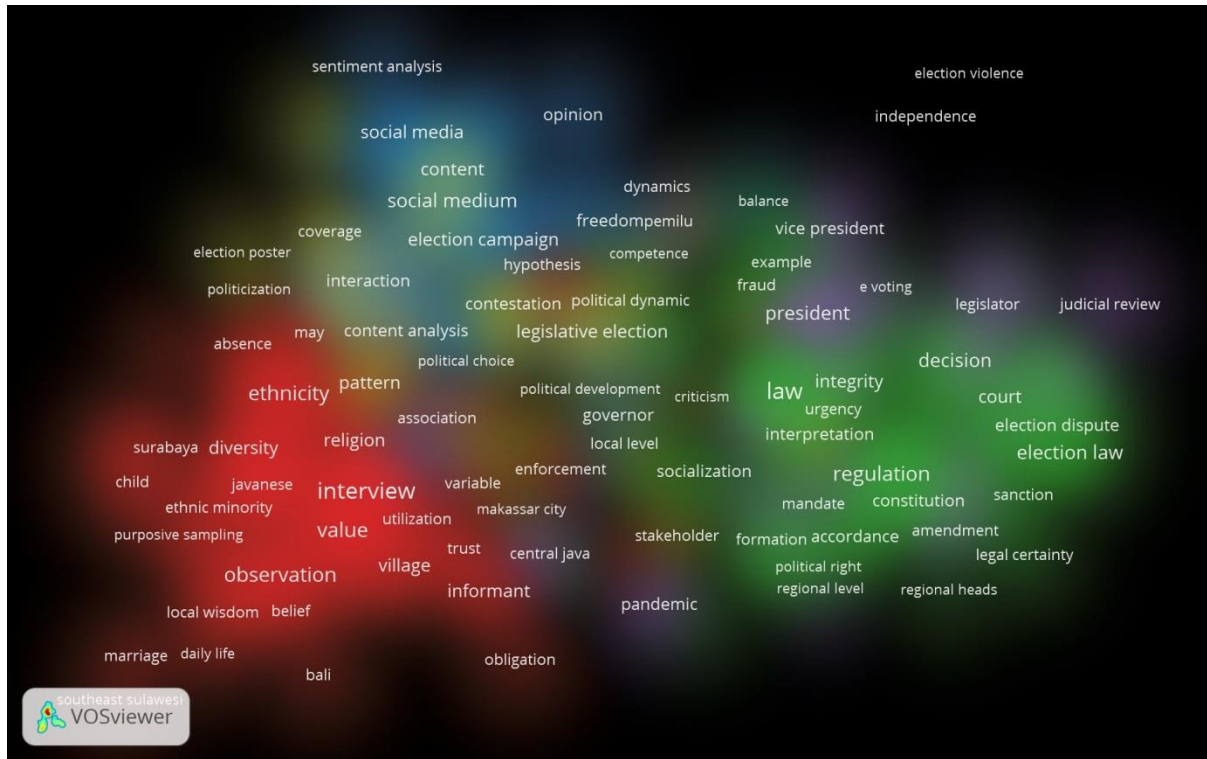


Fig 2. Density Analysis by VosViewer (Source: Researcher 2024)

The density visualization maps a rich tapestry of themes and concepts pivotal to understanding the political milieu, highlighting key areas such as "law," "regulation," and "election law," which form the backbone of electoral integrity and governance. The prominence of "social media," "sentiment analysis," and "content" underscores the modern challenges of information dissemination and its impact on public opinion, while terms like "ethnicity," "diversity," and "religion" signal the multifaceted nature of electoral demographics. Nodes connecting "interview," "observation," and "informant" point towards a methodological commitment to empirical research, and the proximity to "ethnic minority" suggests a focus on nuanced societal segments. Moreover, interlinked concepts of "judicial review," "election dispute," and "fraud" speak to contentious aspects of electoral processes. This analytical constellation, when deciphered, can shed light on the complexities of conducting free and fair elections in a diverse society and the instrumental role of both legislation and public discourse in shaping the electoral landscape, particularly relevant to the upcoming 2024 General Elections in Medan.

Additionally, the author selected several relevant prior studies as units of analysis:

Chen, J. (2022), highlights the representation of Indonesian Chinese in the 'pribumi' discourse during the post-Reformation local elections, revealing identity and political dynamics in modern Indonesia. This article provides an in-depth analysis of how the ethnic Chinese navigate and are contested within a frequently polarized and volatile political context.

Khairunnas, K., Agustino, L., & Sumadinata, W. S. (2018), examines the voting behavior of young ethnic Chinese in the 2018 Palembang Mayoral Election, offering perspectives on their political choices influenced by various social and economic factors. This research is crucial for understanding the dynamics of youth political participation in a multiethnic context in Indonesia.

Shasha, H., & Darmoko, D. (2022), explores the political participation of the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia and Malaysia, highlighting differences and similarities in their political approaches in two countries with different socio-political backgrounds. This article provides a comparative understanding of how overseas Chinese communities interact with political systems and pursue active political participation.

Soderborg, S., & Muhtadi, B. (2023), discusses feelings of disillusionment and polarization in Indonesia, analyzing their impact on socio-political stability and national cohesion. This study is highly relevant for identifying factors that influence social and political fractures in Indonesia, which can affect the outcomes of general elections and identity politics.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative methodology with a field study approach to investigate the competition between PSMTI and INTI in positioning their political stances in North Sumatra (Czarniawska, 2022; Weyant, 2022; Young & Diem, 2023). The focus of this research is directed towards understanding the inter-organizational competition in the context of their hegemony in the Chinese community of North Sumatra, emphasizing how the processes of selecting and positioning legislative candidates occur without generating conflict but within a framework of harmony. This case study emphasizes exploration rather than merely explanation, necessitating an interactive process intensely engaged with research subjects from the local Chinese community, figures from PSMTI and INTI, legislative candidates, and academics with expertise in Chinese politics and the democratic process in Indonesia.

Primary data were obtained through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and focused group discussions (FGD), ensuring the reliability and depth of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Secondary data sources include official archives, documents, and relevant literature that support findings from the primary data. The research was conducted in the city of Medan throughout 2023, gathering data in natural settings and through conditions consistent with the social context of the local Chinese community.

In data analysis, the Miles & Huberman methodology was applied, encompassing data condensation, data display, and the drawing or verification of conclusions. Data condensation was performed through selection, abstraction, and transformation of the collected data. This was followed by an organized data display to allow for grounded conclusion drawing, and a verification process that ensures the validity and applicability of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 2016). These analytical activities were conducted in tandem with data collection to ensure the integration and coherence of research results.

FINDINGS

Manifesto and Political Alignments of the Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia

The manifesto and political orientations of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have evolved, reflecting the socio-political dynamics of the country. As a minority group, the ethnic Chinese exhibit a diversity of attitudes and responses to government policies over time, tracing a trajectory from the colonial era to the reform period (Tanasaldy, 2022). Ideally, the ethnic Chinese are not monolithic but heterogeneous, with stereotypes often connoted with economic dominance and passive political attitudes.

Facing the 2024 elections, this community is divided between supporters of multiculturalism, who advocate for cultural diversity and the preservation of minority cultural identities, and those who favor assimilation, which promotes full integration into the socio-political structure of Indonesia (Akun, 2023; Tirtosudarmo, 2022). Criticism of multiculturalism considers this approach as potentially threatening to national unity, while Indonesian nation-builders recognize the need for the inclusion of all ethnic groups, including the Chinese, in the national narrative.

This debate is also reflected in the 2024 elections, where PSMTI and INTI, as the two main platforms for the ethnic Chinese in Medan, play strategic roles in shaping and expressing the political identity of the ethnic Chinese. Their political competition involves not only contesting legislative positions but also broader concepts such as integration and assimilation. The 2024 elections serve as a crucial arena for the ethnic Chinese in Medan to assert themselves more prominently in the Indonesian political landscape, while striving to overcome internal dilemmas regarding nationalism and national identity. Additionally, there are several key elements in the political dynamics of the ethnic Chinese, as follows:

Table. 1 Key Elements in the Political Dynamics of the Ethnic Chinese Towards the 2024 Elections in Indonesia

No.	Key Point	Description
1	Changes in Political Attitude	Highlights the evolution of political behavior among the ethnic Chinese from the colonial period to the reform era and its impact on the ethnic Chinese political elite.
2	Ethnic Chinese Diversity	Acknowledges the diversity within the ethnic Chinese community, challenging stereotypes and showing variations in political orientations within the group.
3	Multiculturalism vs Assimilation	Discusses the differences between supporting multiculturalism and assimilation within the ethnic Chinese community.
4	Criticism of Multiculturalism	Addresses criticisms that multiculturalism may threaten national unity and discusses its consequences for the concept of nationhood in Indonesia.
5	Ideological Struggle: PSMTI vs INTI	Demonstrates how PSMTI and INTI represent ideological conflicts within the Chinese community, focusing on integration vs assimilation.

Changes in the political behavior of the ethnic Chinese throughout the history of Indonesia have marked significant transitions in the power map and social influence. From the colonial era to the reform period, the Chinese political elite have navigated various government regimes, with each power shift having a significant impact on their role and position in society. This evolution reflects their adaptation and response to the changing political environment, often influencing strategic decisions and the political direction of this community (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020).

In the inherent diversity of the Chinese community, there is a rejection of the stereotype of homogeneity often attributed to them. Just as the Indonesian archipelago is diverse, so too is the Chinese community, displaying a broad spectrum of political opinions and attitudes. This diversity underscores the importance of understanding the ethnic Chinese as multi-faceted actors in national political dynamics, with each individual and group bringing their unique perspectives (Kurniawan et al., 2023; Prasetya & Tondok, 2023; (Lubis et al., 2024).

The choice between multiculturalism and assimilation continues to emerge in the discourse of the ethnic Chinese, depicting two distinct paths that this community might pursue in their efforts to integrate into the broader Indonesian society. Supporters of multiculturalism emphasize the importance of recognizing and protecting cultural diversity, while proponents of assimilation advocate for total unification with the majority culture. Both approaches aim towards the same end: greater acceptance and fuller participation in the Indonesian nation.

Criticism of multiculturalism often highlights the potential of this approach to create divisions within society and pose risks to national unity. In the Indonesian context, this debate is particularly relevant given the challenges of ongoing nation-building, a process involving many ethnic groups and requiring a balance between diversity and unity (Fauzan et al., 2023). Multiculturalism, with its recognition and support of cultural pluralism, can serve as a crucial tool in maintaining social harmony and the structural integrity of the state (Indainanto et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2023).

The ideological struggle between PSMTI and INTI reflects the broader internal dynamics of the Chinese community, with each organization adhering to different philosophies regarding socio-political integration. PSMTI leans towards integration while INTI focuses on assimilation, and both approaches are tested in the practical political context, especially as the 2024 elections approach. How each organization navigates the elections will impact not only the position of the ethnic Chinese within society but also the democratic process in Indonesia.

PSMTI: Integration and Preservation of Tradition

On September 28, 1998, a group of Indonesian Chinese elites took a significant step by establishing the first Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) exclusively composed of Chinese Indonesians, named the Paguyuban Marga Sosial Tionghoa Indonesia (PSMTI) or "Yinni Baijixing Xiehui" in Mandarin. This NGO was founded by Tedy Jusuf, a former one-star general from the Republic of Indonesia Police, who became its

first chairman. According to Susetyo (2002), the choice of a name that included the word "marga" (clan) felt ironic, considering the trend among many Indonesian Chinese to Indonesianize or even creatively adapt their Chinese names to embrace a more local identity.

From the outset, PSMTI focused on the maintenance and promotion of Chinese culture and customs, unlike INTI, which sought to integrate Chinese descendants into the broader Indonesian national context. Under the leadership of Teddy Jusuf, the organization committed to encouraging young Chinese to explore and preserve their ethnic identity. Moreover, PSMTI members were strictly prohibited from engaging in political activities or joining organizations affiliated with political parties, in accordance with the organization's constitution.

However, there was a shift in orientation within PSMTI where, as stated by Yen-Ling (2011), the PSMTI chairman, Eddy Jusuf, began to encourage members to be active in the political realm, not just confined to business or socio-cultural activities. This shift reflects an adaptation to the changing socio-political realities in Indonesia, where ethnic Chinese identity is increasingly gaining a place to be expressed openly. Marzali (2011) noted that since 2004, there has been an increase in Mandarin-language publications in Jakarta, perceived as a cultural mission to reinforce Chinese identity through a process of "resinicization."

PSMTI also took the initiative to establish the Indonesian Chinese Culture Museum at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, demonstrating an ongoing effort to promote and preserve Chinese cultural heritage in Indonesia. This affirms PSMTI's position as an entity that not only aims to preserve tradition but also, progressively, assumes a more dynamic role in the broader political context ahead of the 2024 General Elections in Medan. This transformation marks the evolution of an organization from initially being apolitical to an active entity advocating for the political interests and rights of ethnic Chinese in the public arena.

INTI: National Political Vision and Assimilation

On February 5, 1999, a group of ethnic Chinese elites, previously associated with PSMTI, decided to establish the Indonesian Chinese Association (INTI) in Jakarta, in the presence of Notary James Herman Rahardjo. The constitution they created stipulates that the Indonesian Chinese Association was formed by Indonesian citizens (WNI) with a special concern for resolving the "Chinese problem," viewed as a legacy of colonialism and a burden in the history of the Indonesian nation.

INTI was founded with a spirit of inclusivity and nationalism, adhering to the principles outlined in the Preamble of the 1945 Indonesian Constitution, namely freedom, equality, pluralism, inclusiveness, and democracy. This organization does not affiliate with any political party and focuses on the fields of education and national campaigning, actively striving to place their representatives in legislative bodies as part of their commitment to practical politics. This demonstrates INTI's orientation, which differs from PSMTI, as INTI is more open in terms of membership, allowing Indonesian citizens of both Chinese and non-Chinese ethnicity, in line with their inclusive vision.

According to Marta (2018), INTI's founders recognized the importance of forming an organization that was not only advanced and modern but also had an international image and was oriented towards Indonesian nationalism. INTI views the resolution of the "Chinese problem" as an essential condition for achieving harmonious, respectful, and trusting Indonesian nationhood. INTI argues that efforts to resolve the Chinese problem must be part of the broader national problem-solving efforts faced by Indonesia, with the full participation of all ethnic Chinese Indonesian citizens as an absolute requirement (Setiawan et al., 2021).

Since its initial declaration on April 10, 1999, which later became recognized as its founding day, INTI has successfully established 12 regional management teams at the provincial level and 38 branch management teams at the district/city level by February 2007. With a maturing organizational structure, INTI aims to play an active role in the nation-building dynamics, especially ahead of the 2024 General Elections in Medan, emphasizing the importance of integration and assimilation in the local political context.

The Dichotomy of "Society" and "Nation"

Indonesia's history records how the ethnic Chinese have continuously grappled with questions of identity, which is central to their placement in the social, economic, and political contexts of Indonesia. According to Ibrahim (undated), Chinese identity is typically explained through the dichotomy between totok and peranakan; totok signifies pure birth and originality, whereas peranakan indicates a mixture with local identities. However, Hidayadi and Nugrahani (2020) argue that this binary approach has become less relevant over time, particularly with the forced assimilation during the New Order era that blurred the lines between these two categories.

The New Order regime in Indonesia encouraged total assimilation of the ethnic Chinese, effectively diluting the differences between totok and peranakan. This shift eliminated the possibility of new generations born in China, fading traditional identity boundaries and facilitating new thoughts on nationalism that are no longer fixated on geographical origins. In the evolving context of Indonesian democracy, the ethnic Chinese have moved towards a more integrated identity, reducing the importance of sub-identities and enhancing the dominance of a more inclusive ethnic identity.

Contemporary discourse suggests that the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia are increasingly seeking ways to redefine and strengthen their identity. According to Dawis (2009), media such as films set in China play a significant role in building solidarity and togetherness, allowing the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to connect with their cultural heritage through imaginations of Hong Kong or Taiwan. This indicates ongoing efforts to maintain and celebrate their Chinese heritage, albeit in a context different from that of their ancestors.

Informants, who are also ethnic Chinese leaders in Medan, conveyed that the religious practices of the ethnic Chinese also show unique forms of adaptation; while many have converted to new religions, they still practice traditional religious rituals. This indicates a form of adaptation that allows them to integrate with the surrounding society while maintaining essential elements of their cultural identity.

In the business context, informants emphasize that socio-cultural values rooted in Confucianism, such as familial responsibility and resource utilization, continue to influence how the ethnic Chinese conduct their businesses. This indicates that, despite being far from their ancestral lands, a strong kinship orientation and familism remain central pillars for the ethnic Chinese, strengthening their identity within a broader national context.

These considerations are crucial in understanding how the ethnic Chinese in Medan approach the 2024 elections, where they might use their capacity to influence and articulate a more harmonious and integrated identity, contributing to the formation of an inclusive Indonesian nationhood. As the election approaches, these identity dynamics will play a critical role in determining how the ethnic Chinese in Medan participate in and influence local and national politics.

Resinification Through the Eyes of the Chinese Association Elites

In the context of the 2024 elections in Medan, the polarization of support between PSMTI and INTI for ethnic Chinese legislative candidates and support for one of the pairs reflects larger geopolitical dynamics, particularly with the rise of China as a global economic power. The phenomenon of "resinification," associated with this rise, marks an increase in China's influence in various aspects of life in Medan, ranging from education to politics. This rise not only increases the number of schools offering instruction in Mandarin but also attracts the interest of Medan's residents, both Chinese and non-Chinese, in viewing China as a viable educational destination. Key points regarding the global influence of the ethnic Chinese in the context of the Medan elections include:

Table 2. Integration and Global Influence in the Political Identity of Ethnic Chinese in Medan

No.	Key Aspect	Brief Description
1	Political Support Polarization	Strategic and ideological differences between PSMTI and INTI in supporting ethnic Chinese legislative candidates.
2	Resinification and China's Rise	Economic and cultural influence of China on the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, including education and interest in learning Mandarin.

3	Perceptions of China	Complexity of the ethnic Chinese perceptions of China, encompassing business, education, and pride in ancestry.
4	Implications of One Belt One Road	Influence of the BRI initiative on the Chinese diaspora, utilizing their network for infrastructure and economic projects.
5	Importance of Chinese Investment	Impact of Chinese investment in local projects in Medan and the involvement of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in economic diplomacy.
6	PSMTI's Role in Diplomacy	PSMTI activities in promoting cultural and business relations between Indonesia and China.
7	Identity and Political Intervention	Awareness and political participation of the ethnic Chinese in Medan, and their efforts to build an inclusive Indonesian national identity.

Hoon and Kuntjara (2019) describe "Mandarin fever" as a symbol of cultural globalization triggered by China's increasing dominance. In this context, resinification affects the ethnic identity of the Chinese in Medan, often creating a blurring between "Huaren" (ethnic Chinese citizens) and "Huaqiao" (overseas Chinese), with many individuals experiencing newfound pride in their ancestral land (Seda, 2016).

The hypothesis in this study is that China's "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) and "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) positions the Chinese diaspora as a strategic tool in global geopolitics, where they serve as social and economic bridges in international projects (Wei, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). In the context of global democratization and broader globalization currents, the political engagement of ethnic Chinese in the Medan elections opens up opportunities to understand how China's rise affects their perceptions of national identity and connection to their ancestral land.

Interviews with legislative candidates from PSMTI and INTI indicate that while China's rise is recognized as a significant phenomenon, its impact on the ethnic Chinese identity in Medan is limited. Statements from informants emphasize that there is no specific directive from the association to politically support China's agenda, indicating that existing business relations with China are prioritized.

PSMTI, through participation in international forums like the "10th Symposium of Chinese Clans in South East Asia & China" in Penang, shows an initiative to maintain and develop strong social and cultural networks with the Chinese across Southeast Asia. In this forum, the PSMTI chairman underscored the importance of cross-country collaboration in social, cultural, and economic areas, proving that despite China's rise, the main focus remains on developing multilateral relationships (Okezone, 2023).

Through these interactions, PSMTI and INTI not only strengthen the cultural identity of ethnic Chinese but also support broader social and economic integration with Indonesia and other countries. This underscores the fact that despite China's economic rise, the Chinese community in Medan prioritizes the development of Indonesian national identity and active participation in the nation-building process.

This narrative indicates that resinification has a significant yet limited influence, depending on the local socio-economic and political context, as well as broader global dynamics. These dynamics demonstrate how the Chinese community in Medan navigates their identity between local traditions, Indonesian nationalism, and the global influence of China.

DISCUSSIONS

In the local political context of Medan City, the social and political transformation of the ethnic Chinese, represented by the Indonesian Chinese Social Clans Association (PSMTI) and the Indonesian Chinese Association (INTI), has evolved from merely preserving traditions to active participation in the parliament. Initially focused on cultural and social activities, these organizations have taken on increasingly strategic and political roles as the 2024 elections approach.

The presence of PSMTI and INTI in Medan's political arena reflects not only a desire to influence policies related to the interests of the ethnic Chinese but also represents a response to broader social inclusion dynamics (Aripudin et al., 2022; Suryani & Azmy, 2020). Over recent decades, the integration of ethnic Chinese into Medan society has undergone a dynamic process encompassing cultural, economic, and now political adaptations.

Interestingly, the influence wielded by PSMTI and INTI in Medan's local politics is inseparable from the concept of clientelism, which refers to the provision of services and benefits by politicians or political parties to individuals or groups in exchange for political support (Okthariza, 2020; Sayari, 2014). These organizations are often viewed as bridges connecting the Chinese community with local government, providing direct access to larger political and economic resources (Rabe & Kostka, 2023).

The activities of PSMTI and INTI also reflect a shift in strategy in facing local political contests. They are not merely placing candidates in elections but are actively organizing the community, educating members about their political rights, and garnering support through various social and educational activities that highlight Chinese identity.

On a broader level, the resinicification occurring among the ethnic Chinese in Medan—triggered by China's economic rise—has given a new impetus to PSMTI and INTI to further strengthen the Chinese identity. This is evidenced by the growing interest in learning the Mandarin language and Chinese culture, simultaneously strengthening communal solidarity and togetherness.

However, active engagement in politics also presents challenges. Both organizations must navigate the stigma and prejudices still attached to ethnic Chinese in Indonesian politics, often depicted as an exclusive and isolated group from the wider society. This requires a more inclusive and open approach to politics to win the hearts and minds of the broader public.

As the 2024 elections approach, the dynamics of power between PSMTI and INTI and other groups in Medan will become increasingly interesting to observe. How they integrate local issues with national and international agendas, particularly regarding China's influence, will determine their position and influence in a broader local political configuration.

Ultimately, the 2024 elections will be a critical test for both organizations, not only in terms of how far they can influence the election outcomes but also in proving their capacity as key players promoting social integration and harmony amidst the ethnic and cultural diversity in Medan. Through political participation, PSMTI and INTI have a significant opportunity to shape the political future of the ethnic Chinese in Medan, reflecting significant changes from tradition to parliament.

The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth analysis of how PSMTI and INTI, two traditional organizations that have transformed into political entities, affect the political dynamics of the ethnic Chinese in the context of the 2024 elections in Medan City. Specifically, this study dissects how practices of clientelism and political strategies of these organizations adapt from socio-cultural functions to effective political influence tools. Thus, the study not only explores the transformation of both organizations' roles in local politics but also assesses their contributions to the political representation of the ethnic Chinese, a phenomenon that has not been extensively studied in Indonesian political literature, particularly in the context of ethnic minorities and new power dynamics in regional politics.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed how PSMTI and INTI strategically use their influence to advocate and enhance the political representation of the ethnic Chinese in Medan ahead of the 2024 elections. The transformation of these organizations from traditional roles to political participation demonstrates their adaptation and response to the changing local political dynamics. A significant conclusion from this study is that both organizations have successfully leveraged practices of clientelism to maintain and expand the political influence of the ethnic Chinese, although this also carries the risk of deepening ethnic and political polarization within Medan society.

From these findings, it is recommended that political stakeholders in Medan, including the city government and democratic institutions, consider adopting more inclusive and transparent approaches in managing ethnic and political relations. PSMTI and INTI need to diversify their strategies not only to enhance political capacity but also to promote broader social integration. This could include public education on multiculturalism, inter-ethnic dialogue, and initiatives that strengthen social equality and justice. This is crucial to ensure that the

identity politics they promote not only benefit the Chinese community but also advance broader social harmony and unity in Medan.

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