China Benteng: A Refutation of Ethnic Chinese Exclusivity in Indonesia (A Critical Discourse Analysis of YouTube Content 'The Story')

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ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT

This study investigates the representation of the Chinese ethnic minority, particularly the Benteng Chinese community in Tangerang, as portrayed in the documentary film China Benteng: From Time to Time, aired on the YouTube channel The Story. Employing Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the research analyzes three interrelated dimensions: text structure, social cognition, and social context. The findings reveal that the documentary challenges entrenched stereotypes about the Chinese-Indonesian community, particularly assumptions of economic uniformity and cultural isolation, by emphasizing socioeconomic diversity and cultural assimilation. At the macrostructural level, the film highlights the simplicity of the Benteng Chinese lifestyle and their long-standing integration with local communities. Through its superstructure and micro-level elements, the documentary employs visual and verbal narratives to underscore the active participation of the Benteng Chinese in broader Indonesian social life. The social context dimension illustrates an effort to counter dominant narratives and empower marginalized voices. Meanwhile, the producer's social cognition appears deliberately neutral, allowing the community to articulate their own narratives authentically. This study contributes to the growing body of research on media representation and ethnic discourse by providing a nuanced analysis of how documentary filmmaking can act as a counter-discursive tool. It enriches the understanding of ethnic minority portrayals in Indonesian media, and underscores the documentary genre's potential to facilitate intercultural dialogue, challenge dominant ideologies, and expand the representational space for historically marginalized groups.

1. Introduction

The diversity of ethnic groups and cultures in Indonesia is both a historical reality and a socio-cultural fact (Dwintari, 2018). Various academic studies have reinforced the understanding that

Indonesia is a multicultural nation, marked by the presence of more than 300 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture, customs, and language. This diversity not only serves as a unique social identity but also forms a vital foundation for shaping the nation's character and the dynamics of social life in Indonesia (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). By the mid-1980s, at least 14 major ethnic groups in Indonesia had populations exceeding one million people each. This fact highlights the vast demographic diversity within the social structure of the Indonesian nation and underscores the significant role that ethnic identity plays in the cultural dynamics and governance of the country (Sunarto, 2004). Theoretically, Watson defines a multicultural society as one in which multiple cultures develop and coexistA (Watson, 2000). Meanwhile, according to Suryadinata, a multicultural society can be understood as a social structure composed of various forms of life, cultural identities, and diverse value orientations. This diversity reflects differences in ways of life, belief systems, worldviews, and social practices upheld by each group within the society, all of which collectively shape the complex dynamics of communal life (Suryadinata et al., 2003). Implicitly, "multicultural" refers to similarities in language, history, religious beliefs, geographic origin, race, nationality, and ethnicity (Susanto, 2017).

Ethnicity is understood as a form of social identification that refers to a community group possessing distinct cultural differences compared to other groups (Rumahuru, 2018). These differences may include elements such as language, customs, belief systems, values, and everyday practices passed down through generations. This ethnic identity is not only cultural in nature, but also often closely tied to a sense of belonging, group solidarity, and the formation of symbolic boundaries between 'us' and 'them' in social interactions (Siregar et al., 2023). According Sibarani (2013) ethnicity is often understood as a shared identity based on language, physical characteristics, a sense of kinship, family ties, geographic region, or cultural background. It refers to the traits possessed by a particular group of people, especially those related to sociological or anthropological characteristics (Mateos, 2014).

The Chinese ethnic group, also known as the Tionghoa, refers to individuals who are of Chinese ancestry or descent. Although many of them may have been born, raised, and have lived for generations in Indonesia, they trace their roots back to the regions of China (Ramli, 2019). Their presence in the archipelago has lasted for centuries, shaping a unique community that blends Chinese cultural heritage with local cultural influences (Yunariono, 2019). Although historically having immigration roots, many of them have become an integral part of Indonesian society, with a strong sense of citizenship and social attachment to the homeland (Sriliza et al., 2025).

The Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia has various distinctive characteristics that have long served as markers of their cultural identity, including language, customs, cuisine, as well as religious and traditional celebrations such as Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh (Rasyid et al., 2021).

However, along with the changing times and the intense process of acculturation with local culture, many of those distinctive characteristics have begun to fade or undergo transformation (Yudhawirawan et al., 2024). Social assimilation, political pressure, and the desire to fully integrate into Indonesian society have contributed to the weakening of cultural expressions that were once strongly preserved. Nowadays, one of the identities still commonly visually associated with the Chinese ethnic group is physical features such as narrow eyes and relatively fair skin, although such stereotypes do not fully represent the biological and cultural diversity within the Chinese community itself (Prawitasari, 2010).

Exclusive stereotypes about the Chinese ethnic group often involve perceptions of high economic status and fair skin tone (Chen et al., 2018). This stereotype creates the image that members of the Chinese ethnic group tend to be economically well-established and have lighter skin compared to other ethnic groups (Rahmah et al., 2023). The established stereotype relates to the perception that the Chinese ethnic group tends to have greater economic success compared to other ethnic groups (Siregar, 2018). This is based on the long history of business success among certain Chinese individuals or ethnic groups. For example, in Indonesian history, many Chinese entrepreneurs have achieved success in trade and industry (Rahayu, 2022). However, the fact is that not all individuals of Chinese ethnicity have a high economic status (Puspitasari, 2016). Such stereotypes can generalize the entire Chinese ethnic group with little fair representation of the socio-economic diversity among them.

In Indonesia, there is a Chinese ethnic group that has unique characteristics different from other Chinese ethnic groups (Sofinadya & Warsono, 2023). This ethnic group resides along the banks of the Cisadane River in Tangerang and is commonly known as the Benteng Chinese (Sanjaya et al., 2022). The Chinese community in Benteng has its own unique characteristics compared to the Chinese ethnic groups in other regions (Sukma et al., 2023). In terms of physical appearance, the Benteng Chinese seem to share similarities with the indigenous people. Furthermore, the Benteng Chinese culture appears to have blended extensively with the local culture, such as their fondness for gambang kromong music and their limited proficiency in Mandarin (Habiburrohman, 2022). Research Muhammad et al., (2023) it also reveals that the economic condition of the Benteng Chinese falls within the lower-middle class. Thus, the existence of the Benteng Chinese demonstrates that not all Chinese ethnic groups fit the existing stereotypes and helps to challenge the exclusive stereotypes associated with the Chinese community.

The Benteng Chinese community in Tangerang today represents the sixth or seventh generation since their initial arrival in Indonesia (Arif, 2014). Their unique profile and characteristics make them an antistereotype of the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia in general. For example, their economic status is on average still below the standard. As observed in reality, the common

livelihoods pursued by the Benteng Chinese community are not much different from those of the local population. Although some have achieved relative success as traders, the majority of Benteng Chinese still live modestly, and many of them even live below the poverty line (Sugianta, 2012)

The term "China Benteng" originates from the word "Benteng," which is a name derived from the existence of a Dutch fortress in the city of Tangerang, located by the Cisedane River (Armandari et al., 2019). The Dutch fort was built as a security post to prevent attacks from the Sultanate of Banten. Related to the presence of the Sultanate of Banten, the fort served as the foremost defense for the Dutch on the island of Java (Ayubi, 2016).

Media, as a communication channel, plays an important role in representing and shaping the public's perspective of an ethnic group (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017). YouTube is a popular social media platform that offers a variety of content, including topics related to the Chinese ethnic group. The documentary film China Benteng by the account The Story is one example of content discussing the Chinese community (Hyunanda et al., 2021). This documentary film tells the story of the origins of the Benteng Chinese community, which has existed since 1407 along the banks of the Cisedane River. The community later divided into two groups: the northern area, now known as Teluk Naga, and the southern area, currently called Pasar Lama Tangerang. The name "Benteng Chinese" comes from their settlement located within the VOC fortress area. The film also portrays the cultural assimilation of the Benteng Chinese ethnic group, which occurred alongside the phenomenon of intermarriage with neighboring ethnic groups. The ethnicities that assimilated with the Benteng Chinese include the Sundanese and Betawi peoples.

In the information era filled with social media and digital technology, the representation of ethnicity in the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of certain ethnic groups. Media portrayals of the Chinese ethnic group can reinforce exclusive stereotypes, but media also has the potential to challenge and disprove these stereotypes (Yang, 2011). The narrative construction of the media greatly influences how the Chinese ethnic group is represented by the media (Gao et al., 2024). The concepts of media and ethnicity are also relevant for understanding the representation of the Chinese ethnic group in the China Benteng documentary film. A deeper understanding of how media shapes ethnic representation can be gained through the application of Teun A. Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis model to examine the media construction of the Chinese ethnicity in the China Benteng documentary content on The Story YouTube channel.

2. Method

This study employs the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method using Teun A. van Dijk's model, which emphasizes the analysis of text structure, social context, as well as power relations and ideology within discourse. This approach is specifically applied to documentary films as the subject

of study, aiming to examine how social representations, ethnic identities, and ideological constructions are formed, reproduced, and disseminated through both visual and verbal narratives. Consequently, this model enables the researcher to thoroughly explore the cognitive, social, and linguistic dimensions underlying the presentation of information in mass media.

Data Collection

The researcher will conduct observation and data collection by carefully watching and meticulously recording every significant element in the documentary film China Benteng: Dari Waktu ke Waktu, which is published on the YouTube channel of The Story. This observation activity focuses on identifying the narrative, visuals, symbols, and socio-cultural context presented in the film, in order to capture and analyze how the representation of the Chinese ethnic group, particularly the China Benteng community, is constructed and positioned within the framework of media discourse. The data obtained will serve as the basis for understanding the discourse structure and the underlying ideology in the documentary.

Text Analysis

Macro Structure: Identifying the major themes or topics in the documentary film, such as how the Chinese community in Benteng is portrayed as part of the broader Indonesian society, rather than as an economically exclusive ethnic group. Superstructure: Analyzing the plot or narrative in the documentary film, and how this plot shapes the viewers' perspective on the Benteng Chinese community. This narrative reveals the social interactions between the Benteng Chinese community and the local society, as well as the efforts to bridge the gap between the two groups. Micro Structure: Conducting an in-depth analysis of the smallest elements of the text, such as conversations, visual symbolism, and verbal or non-verbal representations in films that shape public perception of the Chinese ethnic group.

Social Context Analysis

Meneliti To examine how this film is constructed within the social context of Indonesia, with a focus on two main aspects: (a) Power: Analyzing how the film challenges the stereotype that Chinese ethnicity generally holds a high economic status, by highlighting the simpler life of the Benteng Chinese community. (b) Access: Assessing the extent to which media access and power (in this case, documentary films) are used to influence public perception of certain ethnic groups, particularly in the social and economic context of the Benteng Chinese community

Social Cognition

This study aims to identify the level of social awareness possessed by filmmakers in representing the Chinese ethnic group, particularly the Benteng Chinese community, in the documentaries analyzed. The effort involves a deep understanding of how filmmakers position the Benteng Chinese community within the broader social structure, as well as how they consciously construct

narratives intended to challenge and dismantle the stereotypes historically associated with the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia. Additionally, the researcher will consider the social, cultural, and ideological backgrounds of the producers as part of the social cognition analysis using Van Dijk's approach, to examine the extent to which their personal experiences, social perspectives, and power positions influence the discourse construction within the films.

Analysis Technique

Qualitative Observation: In-depth observation of the documentary film and note-taking related to the representation of the Benteng Chinese community. Critical Discourse Analysis: Analyzing film texts using Teun A. van Dijk's framework, which includes three main elements: text structure (macro, superstructure, micro), social context (power and access), and social cognition.

3. Result and Discussion

There are three main findings derived from this study. First, in terms of the textual aspect, which includes macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure, the analysis reveals how the narrative and language choices in the documentary reflect specific meanings that shape the representation of the Benteng Chinese community. Second, in the aspect of social context, the research reveals that the community portrayed in the documentary continues to preserve their ethnic traditions and cultural heritage, which are distinctive characteristics of the Benteng Chinese. This indicates that the social representation in the documentary remains rooted in the lived reality of the community, often highlighting their local cultural values and traditional uniqueness explicitly. Third, in the aspect of social cognition, it was found that the filmmakers or content creators express both implicit and explicit critiques of the social conditions of the Benteng Chinese community, which is perceived as occupying a different position compared to the broader Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia, particularly in terms of social and economic exclusivity. This critique reflects the filmmakers' ideological awareness in addressing social inequality and the marginal position of the Benteng Chinese within the dominant construction of Chinese ethnic identity in Indonesia.

All findings of this study were analyzed and aligned with Teun A. Van Dijk's framework of critical discourse analysis, which consists of three main dimensions: textual structure, social context, and social cognition. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of how representation, power relations, and ideology are interwoven within the discourse construction of the documentary films under examination.

Refuting the Exclusivity of Chinese Ethnicity Based on Textual Structure

The texts in the documentary film are texts that contain building elements which, when related to the formulation of the problem, can provide the discourse that: (1) The Benteng Chinese ethnic

group is part of the indigenous society, (2) Not all of the Benteng Chinese ethnic group are economically exclusive.

Macrostructure**,** he macro structure being studied is the theme/topic, which forms the foundation of the story being presented. The texts referring to the theme/topic of the story are sourced from the documentary narrator. In this research, the researcher found a major theme raised in the YouTube content The Story, in the edition Documentary Film-China Benteng From Time to Time. This edition takes the theme of: (a) The simplicity of the Benteng Chinese ethnic group in their daily activities has already assimilated with the local culture**.** (b) The acknowledgment of non-exclusivity in the economic status of the Chinese Benteng ethnic community in this documentary also provides insight while simultaneously challenging the long-held stereotype that "Chinese = Wealthy" often associated with the Chinese-Indonesian community Superstructure. (c) The superstructure is a text unit that forms the plot of a story, creating a unified meaning. In this research, the researcher classifies the storyline into several levels. The YouTube content The Story, in its Documentary Film edition, The Benteng Chinese Community from Time to Time, uses a mixed plot structure in documenting the Benteng Chinese community in Tangerang. Microstructure**,** the microstructure is the smallest part of the text structure, depicted in detail. For further clarification, it will be explained in a table in the appendix of this research.

Social Cognition of Chinese Benteng Documentary Film Producers from Time to Time

In the framework of Van Dijk's analysis, the importance of social cognition refers to the mental awareness of the writer that shapes the text. This is because every text is essentially produced through awareness, knowledge, prejudice, or specific knowledge of an event. Here, the writer is not considered a neutral individual, but rather one who possesses a variety of values, experiences, and ideological influences derived from their life (Eriyanto, 2011).

This documentary film is produced by Chuck Suryosumpeno, who previously had a career in the High Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Indonesia. The personal social cognition connection between the producer and the Chinese Benteng ethnicity remains unknown due to the limited data available about the producer. However, through the description of this documentary film, it is conveyed that this documentary was selected as the Best Documentary Film at the Ciputra Film Festival held in Surabaya in 2022, which is a production of Souvana Pictures. In other words, the producer distanced himself from a direct social cognition connection with the content of this documentary. The producer entrusted the understanding of the role and position of the Chinese Benteng community to the community itself. This understanding of the role and position of the Chinese Benteng community can be gathered from several statements within the documentary. Nonetheless, should there be enough time and continuity for research on this theme, the author

plans to interview the producer directly to uncover the true social cognition behind the making of this documentary.

Context

The third dimension of Van Dijk's analysis is the social context, which refers to how communication discourse is produced and constructed within society. The key point is to show how meaning is collectively experienced, social power is produced through discourse practices, and legitimacy is established. According to Van Dijk, there are two important points: the practice of power and access (Eriyanto, 2011).

The social context presented in this documentary film is closely related to the existence of the Benteng Chinese community from time to time. In connection with Eriyanto's statement above, the social context in this documentary film includes:

The Context of Power**,** In terms of power, which is often used to associate the Chinese ethnicity with control over the economic sector in Indonesia, this notion is actually refuted by the Benteng Chinese community through several statements from figures in this documentary film. The Benteng Chinese community is portrayed as a society just like the indigenous people in general. Not all Benteng Chinese people are business professionals; some are even farmers, and economically, they belong to the lower middle class. Despite this, the Benteng Chinese people do not feel that this is a significant obstacle because they are content with the circumstances they currently have.

Context of Access**,** The availability and control of access in this documentary film demonstrate that the Benteng Chinese community is powerless or lacks significant power over access control. This community feels that their access to daily life is sufficiently met by the ethnicity present in the Tangerang area in general. The reluctance to move and disperse from the Tangerang area, as indicated by the text, suggests that broad access is not seen as necessary by the Benteng Chinese community. This is, of course, very different from the general Chinese ethnic community in Indonesia, where many vital business and economic sectors are dominated or led by individuals of Chinese descent.

4. Conclusion

This study, using Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, reveals that the representation of the Benteng Chinese ethnic group in the documentary "China Benteng: From Time to Time" plays a significant role in dismantling the stereotype of exclusivity that has long been associated with the Chinese ethnic group in Indonesia. The analysis of the textual structure dimension (macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure) uncovers how narrative elements and visual symbols are strategically employed to emphasize the simplicity of daily life and the local

cultural attachment of the Benteng Chinese community. At the level of social context, the documentary successfully illustrates how their power and social access differ greatly from the common image of the Chinese as an economically elite group. Meanwhile, the social cognition dimension reveals that the documentary's producer demonstrates ideological awareness in framing the Benteng Chinese as an integral part of an inclusive Indonesian society, while simultaneously serving as an antithesis to prevailing stereotypes. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on ethnic representation in the media by extending the application of Van Dijk's model to the context of local digital documentaries. It demonstrates that media not only reproduces dominant ideologies but can also serve as a tool of resistance against the hegemony of ethnic stereotypes. Furthermore, this research adds a new dimension to the understanding of ethnic media framing by positioning marginalized communities as active subjects of representation.

This study also has limitations in exploring the social cognition of the producer due to the lack of biographical data and the absence of direct interviews with the documentary filmmaker. Moreover, the analysis is limited to a single documentary, which does not yet provide a broader representation of media portrayals of the Benteng Chinese ethnic group. Suggestions for Future Research, analyze more than one platform or medium (such as television, TikTok, and online news) to compare the representations of Chinese ethnicity across various media contexts. Examine public reception of the documentary film to assess the extent to which the conveyed messages influence changes in societal stereotypes.

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