

From Formal Recognition to Substantive Recognition: Citizenship Challenges of Confucianism in Post–New Order Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the gap between formal recognition and substantive recognition of Confucianism in post–New Order Indonesia. Although the state has officially re-recognized Confucianism as a recognized religion since the Reformasi era, its adherents continue to face various challenges related to administrative services, social acceptance, and citizenship equality. This study employs a qualitative approach through a literature review of academic publications, legal documents, state regulations, population data, and previous studies on Confucianism, the politics of recognition, religious freedom, and citizenship in Indonesia. Using Charles Taylor’s politics of recognition perspective, this study identifies four major findings. First, the position of Confucianism within Indonesia’s legal system has undergone historical dynamics characterized by recognition, marginalization, and re-recognition. Second, the formal recognition granted by the state has not fully produced substantive recognition in public services and civil administration practices. Third, various forms of social racism and historical stigma against the Chinese-Confucian community persist despite the abolition of discriminatory state policies. Fourth, the Confucian community has developed various resilience strategies through institutional adaptation, education, social participation, and identity negotiation to maintain its presence within Indonesia’s public sphere. This study demonstrates that legal recognition does not always correspond directly to the realization of citizenship equality. Therefore, broader efforts are necessary to strengthen substantive recognition through policy reform, inclusive public services, and greater social acceptance of minority religious groups. As an original contribution, this study offers an interpretation of the Confucian community’s experience as an example of how recognition operates as a gradual, multilayered, and continuously negotiated process within Indonesia’s multicultural society.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kesenjangan antara pengakuan formal dan pengakuan substantif terhadap agama Konghucu di Indonesia pasca-Orde Baru. Meskipun negara telah mengakui kembali agama Konghucu sebagai agama resmi sejak era Reformasi, berbagai persoalan yang berkaitan dengan pelayanan administratif, penerimaan sosial, dan kesetaraan kewargaan masih dihadapi oleh para penganutnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka terhadap literatur akademik, dokumen hukum, regulasi negara, data kependudukan, dan hasil-hasil penelitian terdahulu yang membahas agama Konghucu, politik pengakuan, kebebasan beragama, serta kewargaan di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan perspektif politik pengakuan Charles Taylor, penelitian ini menunjukkan empat temuan utama. Pertama, posisi agama Konghucu dalam sistem hukum Indonesia mengalami dinamika historis yang ditandai oleh pengakuan, marginalisasi, dan rekognisi kembali. Kedua, pengakuan formal yang diberikan negara belum sepenuhnya menghasilkan pengakuan substantif dalam praktik pelayanan publik dan administrasi kependudukan. Ketiga, berbagai bentuk rasisme sosial dan stigma historis terhadap komunitas Tionghoa-Konghucu masih bertahan meskipun kebijakan diskriminatif negara telah dihapuskan. Keempat, komunitas Konghucu mengembangkan berbagai strategi ketahanan melalui adaptasi kelembagaan, pendidikan, partisipasi sosial, dan negosiasi identitas untuk mempertahankan eksistensinya dalam ruang publik Indonesia. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pengakuan hukum tidak selalu berbanding lurus dengan terwujudnya kesetaraan kewargaan. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan upaya yang lebih luas untuk memperkuat pengakuan substantif melalui reformasi kebijakan, pelayanan publik yang inklusif, serta peningkatan penerimaan sosial terhadap kelompok agama minoritas. Secara orisinal, penelitian ini menawarkan pembacaan mengenai pengalaman komunitas Konghucu sebagai contoh bagaimana proses pengakuan berlangsung secara bertahap, berlapis, dan terus dinegosiasikan dalam konteks masyarakat multikultural Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recognition of religious identity constitutes a fundamental aspect of democratic states that uphold the principles of religious freedom and citizenship equality. In multicultural societies, state recognition of religious groups extends beyond administrative legality and encompasses access to citizenship rights, legal protection, social participation, and acceptance within public life (Kymlicka, 2003, 2020). Numerous studies have shown that minority religious groups in various countries often experience a gap between legal recognition and their everyday social experiences (Fraser, 2000; Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994). Consequently, formal recognition granted by the state does not always produce substantive recognition that guarantees equality and justice for minority groups (Butt, 2020; Long, 2019).

In the Indonesian context, this issue remains important because the state recognizes religious diversity as part of the national identity. However, the experiences of minority religious groups indicate that the relationship among the state, religion, and citizenship does not always operate on equal terms. Confucianism represents one case that deserves examination. According to population data published by the Ministry of Home Affairs (2025), Indonesia had 78,339 Confucian adherents, representing approximately 0.03% of the national population. Earlier, the 2010 Population Census conducted by Statistics Indonesia recorded approximately 117,000 Confucian adherents distributed across various regions of the country (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2012). Although the number remains relatively small, the Confucian community holds significant historical and social importance in the development of religious pluralism in Indonesia (Suprajitno, 2019).

Studies on Confucianism in Indonesia demonstrate that the trajectory of this community cannot be separated from the dynamics of identity politics, the relationship between ethnic Chinese communities and the state, and changes in national religious policies. Several studies explain that Confucianism transformed from an ethical and cultural tradition into an organized religion through various historical processes since the colonial period (Chambert-Loir, 2015). During the New Order era, the state implemented assimilation policies that restricted the expression of Chinese culture and religion, forcing many Confucian adherents to conceal their religious identity or integrate their religious practices into other traditions such as Buddhism and Tridharma (Irwansyah et al., 2025; Suprajitno, 2019). These conditions placed Confucianism in a vulnerable and marginalized position within Indonesia's religious landscape for several decades.

Following the Reformasi period, the state officially re-recognized Confucianism as a religion in 2006. Many scholars regard this policy as a major milestone in Indonesia's democratization process and the expansion of religious freedom (Butt, 2020). However, several studies have also shown that this recognition did not automatically eliminate the challenges faced by the Confucian community. Long (2019) argues that the re-recognition of Confucianism generated complex experiences because it revived collective memories of past discrimination. Other studies indicate that Confucian adherents and followers of indigenous belief systems continue to face obstacles in civil registration services, religious identity registration, and access to equal civil rights (Butt, 2020; Sukirno & Natalis, 2025). At the same time, various forms of anti-Chinese prejudice and sentiment remain embedded within Indonesian society despite the formal abolition of discriminatory policies (Tanasaldy, 2022).

In addition to highlighting discrimination and marginalization, several studies have documented the ability of the Confucian community to maintain its existence through various social and institutional adaptation strategies. Chan (2013) demonstrates how Confucian educational institutions in Semarang survived through different forms of adaptation to changing national political conditions. Lakonawa et al. (2023) also show how Confucian organizations actively participated in social and community activities during the COVID-19 pandemic as a contribution to broader public life. These findings indicate that the Confucian community functions not merely as an object of state policy but also as a social actor that actively constructs its own space within Indonesian society.

Nevertheless, most previous studies have examined Confucianism through separate themes such as the history of discrimination, ethnic Chinese identity, religious syncretism, or community adaptation strategies (Chan, 2013; Long, 2019; Suprajitno, 2019; Tanasaldy, 2022). Research that specifically investigates the relationship between formal state recognition and substantive recognition of the Confucian community remains limited. Yet the central challenge faced by the Confucian community lies not merely in its legal status as a recognized religion but also in the extent to which such recognition translates into citizenship equality, access to public services, and social acceptance in everyday life.

To explain this issue, this study employs Charles Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition framework. Taylor argues that recognition constitutes a fundamental human need because individual and collective identities are formed through social relationships with others. In multicultural societies, the failure to provide equal recognition can generate marginalization, subordination, and social injustice. Therefore, recognition must extend beyond formal legal status and be reflected in social respect, institutional equality, and equal access to citizenship rights.

This study aims to analyze the gap between formal recognition and substantive recognition of Confucianism in post–New Order Indonesia. More specifically, it examines how state recognition of Confucianism manifests in administrative practices, social relations, and the citizenship experiences of its adherents. This article argues that formal recognition granted by the state has not fully produced substantive recognition because various administrative barriers, social stigmas, and forms of exclusion continue to limit the equality of Confucian citizens. Through the politics of recognition perspective, this study demonstrates that the primary challenge currently facing the Confucian community is no longer obtaining legal status as a legitimate religion, but rather achieving genuinely equal recognition in social and institutional practices.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study consists of various forms of state recognition of Confucianism in post–New Order Indonesia and their implications for citizenship experiences, access to civil rights, and the social position of the Confucian community within Indonesian society. The study focuses on the dynamics of minority religious recognition, citizenship practices, administrative discrimination, and the adaptation strategies developed by the Confucian community following the restoration of state recognition.

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research design. The study adopts this approach because it focuses on analyzing discourses, policies, and academic findings concerning the position of Confucianism within Indonesia's religious and citizenship systems. Through a qualitative approach, the study seeks to understand how the relationship between formal recognition and substantive recognition of Confucianism is constructed, negotiated, and represented in academic sources and policy documents (Creswell, 2014).

The study draws its materials from academic literature and documents relevant to the research topic. Academic sources include scholarly articles retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, and various international journals discussing Confucianism, the politics of recognition, religious freedom, Chinese identity, and citizenship in Indonesia. In addition, the study utilizes official documents, including laws and regulations, court decisions, population data, publications issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Statistics Indonesia, and reports from research institutions concerning the position and development of the Confucian community in Indonesia.

The researcher collected data through a systematic library research process (Samosir et al., 2023; Sidik & Setia, 2024). The researcher identified, selected, reviewed, and analyzed literature and documents relevant to the study's focus. The collected materials were then organized into several major themes, namely the history and development of Confucianism in Indonesia, state recognition policies toward minority religions, the politics of recognition, experiences of discrimination and social exclusion, and adaptation strategies developed by the Confucian community within Indonesia's multicultural society.

The researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis. During the first stage, the researcher conducted a coding process to identify the principal themes emerging from the literature. During the second stage, the researcher categorized these themes into broader patterns that revealed the relationships among formal recognition, substantive recognition, and the citizenship experiences of the Confucian community. During the third stage, the researcher interpreted the findings using Charles Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition framework to explain how state recognition of Confucianism operates within legal, social, and institutional domains.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

State Recognition of Confucianism: Historical and Legal Context

The position of Confucianism within Indonesia's legal system has deep historical roots and cannot be understood merely as a product of recognition policies introduced during the Reformasi era. Since the early twentieth century, the Peranakan Chinese community in the Dutch East Indies developed Confucianism as an organized religious identity through educational institutions, social organizations,

and reform movements led by Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK). Chambert-Loir (2015) explains that this development transformed Confucianism from a Chinese ethical and philosophical tradition into a modern religion with increasingly structured doctrines, rituals, organizations, and communities of adherents. Through this process, Confucianism gradually attained a status comparable to other major religions and gained broader social legitimacy among Chinese Indonesians.

This development continued during the early years of Indonesian independence. Confucian organizations gained opportunities to conduct religious activities openly through institutions such as Gabungan Sam Kauw Indonesia (GSKI) and later the Supreme Council for the Confucian Religion in Indonesia (MATAKIN). According to Coppel (1983), the existence of these organizations demonstrates that Confucianism had already become part of Indonesia's religious life long before the emergence of New Order policies. State recognition of Confucianism acquired a clear legal foundation through Presidential Decree No. 1/PNPS/1965 concerning the Prevention of Religious Abuse and/or Defamation. The official explanation of this regulation listed Confucianism alongside Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism as religions practiced and developed in Indonesia (Hukumonline.com, 2020b). Therefore, both historically and legally, Confucianism had already received state recognition during the Sukarno administration.

Fundamental changes occurred after the consolidation of New Order rule. The government introduced assimilation policies that framed Chinese identity as an issue of national integration. Suryadinata (2003) explains that the state attempted to reduce the visibility of Chinese identity through policies that encouraged assimilation into a more uniform national identity. The government formalized this approach through Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 concerning Chinese Religions, Beliefs, and Customs (Hukumonline.com, 2020a). In its considerations section, the regulation stated that Chinese religions, beliefs, and customs could hinder the assimilation process and therefore required regulation and control by the state.

Although this Presidential Instruction did not explicitly revoke recognition of Confucianism, it restricted the practice of Chinese religious and cultural traditions to family settings and private spaces. Religious celebrations and Chinese customs could no longer take place openly in public. Consequently, many Confucian symbols, rituals, institutions, and religious expressions lost the public space they had previously occupied. Hoon (2008) argues that this policy formed part of a broader political project aimed at constructing a national identity by reducing the visibility of Chinese identity in public life. In this context, Confucianism experienced not only religious restrictions but also identity marginalization closely linked to the position of ethnic Chinese communities within Indonesian society.

This marginalization intensified through bureaucratic practices during the New Order period. Although Presidential Decree No. 1/PNPS/1965 remained legally valid, state administrative practices gradually removed Confucianism from the category of religions receiving equal protection and public services. Lindsey and Pausacker (2005) explain that many Chinese Indonesians encountered administrative barriers related to religious identity and citizenship. For Confucian adherents, these obstacles affected civil registration, religious education, marriage registration, and access to various public services. This situation created a legal paradox because formal recognition remained intact while state implementation produced systematic administrative exclusion.

These conditions demonstrate that legal recognition does not automatically generate recognition in social and bureaucratic practices. From the perspective of the politics of recognition, the state not only grants legal status but also constructs identity categories that receive legitimacy within public life. When institutions fail to provide equal recognition to a particular group, that group experiences *misrecognition* or incomplete recognition. Many Confucian adherents experienced precisely this condition during the New Order period.

Political changes following Reformasi created opportunities for the re-recognition of Confucianism. President Abdurrahman Wahid's administration took an important step by revoking Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 through Presidential Decree No. 6 of 2000 (JDIH BPK, 2000). This policy removed restrictions on Chinese cultural and religious expressions that had persisted for more than three decades. Hoon (2008) notes that the revocation of this regulation marked a significant moment in the revival of Confucian organizations and the restoration of religious activities previously

restricted by the state. The government subsequently restored the Confucian community's access to various civil rights, including religious education, marriage registration, and civil administration services.

Nevertheless, this re-recognition did not completely erase the social and psychological effects of discrimination experienced during the New Order period. Long (2019) argues that the re-recognition of Confucianism generated complex experiences for many adherents. On the one hand, it provided the legal legitimacy they had long sought. On the other hand, it revived collective memories of marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion experienced over several decades. Long describes this phenomenon as *moral disruption*, a situation in which an apparently positive act of recognition simultaneously reawakens awareness of unresolved historical wounds.

This situation demonstrates that recognition cannot be understood solely as a formal legal act. Butt (2020) explains that constitutional recognition of religious and belief communities in Indonesia often encounters implementation challenges at both bureaucratic and social levels. Therefore, state recognition of Confucianism involves more than restoring legal status; it also concerns the ongoing struggle to achieve equality in everyday citizenship practices. Within Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition framework, the experience of the Confucian community demonstrates that meaningful recognition requires not only formal legitimacy from the state but also social acceptance that enables minority groups to practice their religious identity on equal terms within the public sphere.

The history of relations between the Indonesian state and Confucianism reveals a non-linear pattern characterized by recognition during the early independence period, derecognition and marginalization during the New Order era, and re-recognition during the Reformasi period. This trajectory demonstrates that the principal challenge facing the Confucian community extends beyond obtaining legal recognition. The more significant challenge lies in ensuring that recognition becomes substantively realized within social, bureaucratic, and citizenship practices. Consequently, the re-recognition of Confucianism in Indonesia should be understood as an ongoing process rather than an issue resolved once the state granted formal recognition.

Formal Recognition without Substantive Recognition

The re-recognition of Confucianism during the Reformasi era marked an important transformation in the relationship between the state and the Confucian community in Indonesia. Various policies issued during the administrations of Abdurrahman Wahid and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono formally restored Confucianism's status as a state-recognized religion. This recognition established a legal foundation for religious education, marriage registration, civil administration services, and other religious rights that had previously been restricted during the New Order period (Chan, 2013; Hoon, 2008). However, the restoration of legal status did not automatically eliminate the obstacles that Confucian adherents continued to face in everyday life.

Numerous reports indicate that even more than a decade after re-recognition, some Confucian adherents continued to encounter difficulties in obtaining equal administrative services. Reports by BBC Indonesia documented cases in which Confucian citizens experienced obstacles when applying for identity cards, including the refusal to record Confucianism as their religion and the imposition of unofficial fees by bureaucratic officials (Lestari, 2010). At the same time, MATAKIN reported that administrative discrimination also occurred in the establishment of houses of worship and other public services despite clear legal guarantees of religious freedom.

A similar case emerged in Sidoarjo Regency in 2010 when Bingky Irawan, a prominent national Confucian figure, discovered that the religion column on his electronic identity card had been left blank even though his previous civil documents clearly identified him as Confucian. Local officials explained that the civil registration software system did not yet provide Confucianism as an available option within its public service database (Bonasir, 2010). This incident demonstrates that the challenges faced by Confucian adherents do not always take the form of direct rejection. Instead, they often emerge through administrative mechanisms that have not fully adjusted to national regulatory changes. In this

context, bureaucratic barriers function as a subtler form of exclusion while still affecting the fulfillment of minority citizenship rights.

Similar conditions appeared in other regions. The Chairperson of MATAKIN reported that as late as 2012, many civil registration offices still failed to provide Confucianism as an option on administrative forms. As a result, some citizens had to choose another religion or leave the religion column blank on their identity documents (Tambunan, 2012). The Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024) also acknowledged that discriminatory practices against Confucian adherents persisted not only in rural areas but also in urban centers such as Jakarta. These facts suggest that the problem extends beyond local technical issues and reflects the uneven transformation of bureaucratic institutions following re-recognition.

This situation has produced broader social consequences. In Jambi Province, for example, MATAKIN estimated that tens of thousands of Confucian adherents continued to list another religion on their identity cards despite maintaining Confucian beliefs. This condition reflects the legacy of New Order policies that encouraged Confucian adherents to align their administrative identities with religions officially recognized by the state at that time (Marini, 2013). Therefore, the formal recognition granted by the state has not automatically transformed patterns of self-identification that developed through decades of historical discrimination.

These findings demonstrate that the primary challenge facing the Confucian community after Reformasi no longer involves the absence of legal recognition but rather the gap between formal recognition and substantive recognition. Butt (2020) argues that Indonesia's legal system has normatively moved toward a more inclusive recognition of religious and belief diversity. However, policy implementation continues to face obstacles arising from bureaucratic culture, inconsistent interpretations of regulations, and the dominance of majority religious perspectives within public services. Natalis (2025) similarly finds that minority religious and belief communities continue to experience various forms of administrative exclusion despite receiving equal constitutional protection as citizens.

From the perspective of the politics of recognition, this situation demonstrates that recognition cannot be understood solely as a legal act carried out through legislation. Taylor (1994) argues that recognition acquires substantive meaning only when individuals and groups receive equal treatment within social and institutional life. When a community has obtained legal legitimacy but still encounters barriers to fully exercising its civil rights, recognition remains incomplete. In the case of Confucianism, the state has restored the religion's legal status, yet the social and bureaucratic transformations required to achieve citizenship equality continue to develop unevenly.

Therefore, the experience of the Confucian community demonstrates that recognition unfolds as a gradual and multilayered process. Legal recognition provides an essential foundation for restoring civil rights, but it does not automatically generate substantive equality as long as administrative practices and bureaucratic culture continue to preserve legacies of past exclusion. This condition shows that the struggle for recognition does not end with regulatory reform. Rather, it continues through efforts to ensure that all citizens receive equal access to public services, civic identity, and civil rights regardless of their religion or ethnic background.

Social Racism and the Boundaries of Recognition

The legal recognition that the state grants to Confucianism does not automatically eliminate the various forms of social prejudice that have developed through a long historical process. Although the government has repealed discriminatory regulations targeting Chinese Indonesians since the Reformasi era, the experiences of the Confucian community demonstrate that formal recognition continues to encounter social boundaries that shape public acceptance in everyday life. In other words, the state may provide legal recognition, but social acceptance does not necessarily progress at the same pace.

This situation cannot be separated from the long history of the social construction of Chinese identity in Indonesia. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Dutch colonial policies

established a racial segregation system that separated Europeans, Foreign Orientals, and indigenous populations into distinct social categories. Policies such as the *wijkensetelsel* and *passenstelsel* reinforced the perception that Chinese communities constituted a group separate from indigenous society (Chambert-Loir, 2015). Following independence, this social construction did not disappear entirely. Instead, successive political regimes continued to reproduce narratives portraying Chinese Indonesians as a group with divided loyalties, exclusive economic interests, or close connections to foreign powers. As a result, Chinese identity often occupied an ambiguous position within Indonesian nationalism.

During the New Order period, these constructions gained political legitimacy through assimilation policies that restricted Chinese cultural and religious expressions in public spaces. The prohibition of Chinese cultural symbols, restrictions on religious celebrations, and the elimination of various Chinese social institutions affected not only administrative matters but also shaped social perceptions that continue to persist today (Hoon, 2008; Suryadinata, 2003). For more than three decades, society absorbed narratives suggesting that Chinese identity required monitoring, restriction, or adjustment to official definitions of Indonesianness. This social legacy has not been easily erased through regulatory changes introduced after Reformasi.

Within this context, the Confucian community occupies a unique yet vulnerable position. Unlike many other religious minority groups, Confucian adherents often experience a process of double labeling. Society perceives them not only as members of a minority religion but also as part of an ethnic group that has historically faced stigmatization. Long (2019) argues that the revival of Confucianism during the Reformasi era involved more than the restoration of religious rights; it also reopened debates regarding the place of Chinese identity within Indonesian society. In many situations, recognition of Confucianism remains overshadowed by questions concerning the authenticity, loyalty, and social legitimacy of Chinese Indonesians as members of the nation.

Tanasaldy (2022) explains that discrimination against Chinese Indonesians after Reformasi no longer commonly appears in the form of explicit state policies. Instead, prejudice has transformed into social racism that operates through stereotypes, hate speech, symbolic exclusion, and various forms of everyday discrimination. This form of racism often proves more difficult to identify because it does not emerge through formal regulations but through the ways in which society interprets the ethnic and religious identities of minority groups. Consequently, although legal equality exists, the social experiences of minority communities do not always reflect that equality.

A more complex development emerges when ethnic sentiments intersect with religious identity. Tanasaldy (2022) demonstrates that, in certain cases, prejudice against Chinese Indonesians acquires new legitimacy through religious narratives that circulate at the grassroots level. When ethnic identity combines with religious difference, the social boundaries separating majority and minority groups become increasingly rigid. Under such conditions, Confucian adherents occupy a position that is different not only ethnically but also religiously. This condition creates what may be described as *double marginalization*, an experience of exclusion that stems simultaneously from ethnic identity and religious identity.

This phenomenon indicates that the principal challenge facing the Confucian community extends beyond access to legal rights and includes broader questions of social acceptance. From the perspective of the politics of recognition, Taylor (1994) argues that individual and collective identities develop through reciprocal relationships shaped by recognition from others. When society consistently represents a group as different, foreign, or less legitimate than other groups, processes of *misrecognition* continue to operate even after the state has granted formal recognition. Therefore, the experience of the Confucian community demonstrates that legal recognition represents an important step, but it remains insufficient to achieve full equality as long as social prejudice and historical stigma continue to shape everyday interactions.

Consequently, the challenge confronting the Confucian community in the contemporary era no longer centers on obtaining legal recognition from the state, as it did in the past. Instead, it concerns expanding social recognition within everyday life. Achieving such recognition requires a more fundamental transformation in the way society understands religious and ethnic diversity as

legitimate components of Indonesian national identity. Without this transformation, formal recognition will continue to confront social barriers that limit the full realization of citizenship equality for minority groups.

Resilience Strategies and Identity Negotiation within the Confucian Community

The long history of marginalization experienced by the Confucian community has not resulted in the disappearance of its religious identity. Instead, the community has developed various resilience strategies that have enabled it to preserve its religion, institutions, and collective identity amid political and social changes spanning several decades. These strategies have taken forms beyond resistance to discrimination and have materialized through processes of adaptation, negotiation, and adjustment that allow the community to survive under unfavorable conditions. Therefore, the history of Confucianism in Indonesia represents not only a history of marginalization but also a history of community resilience in maintaining its place within a context of limited social and political recognition.

One form of resilience appears in the continuity of Confucian educational institutions and religious organizations that remained active despite facing significant pressures during the New Order era. Chan (2013) demonstrates that Khong Kauw Hwee (KKH) School in Semarang maintained its existence since 1950 through various institutional adaptation strategies. During the assimilation period, school administrators adjusted symbols, curricula, and expressions of identity that authorities considered politically sensitive. The school restricted the use of Chinese symbols while conveying Confucian cultural values and teachings more implicitly through character education and moral development. This strategy enabled the institution to survive without abandoning the values that constituted its core identity. After Reformasi, the school openly reintroduced many symbols and expressions of identity that had previously been suppressed as part of a broader process of identity restoration.

A similar strategy emerged in the trajectory of Confucian organizations that continuously sought state recognition through institutional channels. From the era of Perserikatan K'ung Chiao Hui Indonesia (PKCHI) and Gabungan Perkumpulan Agama Konghucu Se-Indonesia (GAPAKSI) to the establishment of MATAKIN, the Confucian community actively cultivated relationships with the state and sought to demonstrate that Confucianism aligned with Indonesian national values (Chambert-Loir, 2015; Hoon, 2008). Community leaders pursued this goal through reinterpretations of Confucian teachings, the creation of modern institutions, the development of religious education systems, and participation in national forums. These efforts demonstrate that recognition did not emerge passively but rather resulted from a long process of negotiation between the community and the state.

The resilience of the Confucian community also appears in its ability to adapt to social change without abandoning its fundamental identity. Long (2019) explains that the revival of Confucianism during the Reformasi era involved not only the restoration of religious rights but also the emergence of new forms of identity reflection among Confucian adherents. Many communities rebuilt educational spaces, religious activities, and cultural forums that had previously faced restrictions. However, these efforts did not always rely on exclusive assertions of identity. Instead, many Confucian communities adopted a more inclusive approach by emphasizing universal values such as virtue, humanity, education, and social harmony as contributions to Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Another form of resilience appears in the community's capacity to respond to contemporary challenges. Lakonawa et al. (2023) show that Confucian institutions in Indonesia adapted religious practices during the COVID-19 pandemic by utilizing digital media, limiting face-to-face activities, and developing humanitarian and social programs. Through coordination between MATAKIN and local organizations, the Confucian community participated in social assistance distribution, medical supply provision, vaccination campaigns, and psychosocial support initiatives. These

responses demonstrate that Confucian values function not merely as inherited traditions but also as principles translated into social actions that address contemporary societal needs.

Table 1. Forms of Resilience and Strategies for Negotiating Recognition

Form of Resilience	Strategy	Manifestation
Adaptation of Educational Institutions	Adjusting identity expressions without abandoning core Confucian values	Khong Kauw Hwee (KKH) School restricted politically sensitive Chinese symbols while preserving character education and Confucian values during the New Order period.
Institutional Negotiation and State Recognition	Building relationships with the state through religious and educational organizations	PKCHI, GAPAKSI, and MATAKIN developed modern institutions, religious education systems, and participation in national forums to obtain state recognition.
Social Adaptation and Public Engagement	Demonstrating social contributions to strengthen legitimacy and public acceptance	Confucian communities developed educational programs, cultural forums, social assistance initiatives, health services, and humanitarian activities, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Chan (2013), Hoon (2008), Chambert-Loir (2015), Long (2019), and Lakonawa et al. (2023).

This adaptive capacity demonstrates that the Confucian community has survived not only through the preservation of internal identity but also through active participation in broader social life. In many cases, communities gain social recognition not solely through demands directed at the state but also through meaningful contributions to society (Meer & Modood, 2012; Modood, 2007). This strategy enables the community to build broader social legitimacy while reducing stereotypes historically associated with Chinese and Confucian identities. Therefore, the resilience of the Confucian community derives not only from legal protection but also from its internal capacity to adapt, strengthen institutions, and cultivate constructive relationships with the surrounding social environment.

From the perspective of the politics of recognition, these strategies demonstrate that recognition constitutes a dialogical process. Taylor (1994) argues that group identities develop through continuous interactions between recognition granted by others and a group's capacity to define itself. The experience of the Confucian community illustrates that when social recognition remains incomplete, minority groups retain the capacity to create spaces of recognition through education, religious organizations, social participation, and identity negotiation. Consequently, the resilience of the Confucian community reflects not only its ability to survive discrimination but also its ability to continue pursuing more substantive forms of recognition within Indonesian civic and national life.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the principal challenge facing the Confucian community in post-New Order Indonesia no longer lies in the absence of legal recognition but rather in the gap between formal recognition and substantive recognition. The four main findings reveal that the position of Confucianism has undergone a historical trajectory characterized by recognition, marginalization, and re-recognition; that formal recognition has not been fully translated into public administrative practices; that various forms of social racism toward the Chinese-Confucian community continue to persist; and that the Confucian community has developed diverse

resilience and identity negotiation strategies to maintain its presence within Indonesia's public sphere. These findings indicate that recognition constitutes a gradual process that extends beyond changes in legal status alone.

The findings further show that the gap between formal and substantive recognition did not emerge by chance. Instead, it represents the consequence of a historical legacy shaped by the long-standing relationship among the state, Chinese identity, and Confucianism. For more than three decades, New Order assimilation policies restricted the expression of Chinese identity and marginalized Confucianism within Indonesia's national religious system. Although the Reformasi era repealed many discriminatory regulations, legal transformation did not automatically generate social and bureaucratic transformation at the same pace. As a result, administrative practices and social perceptions rooted in the past continue to influence contemporary life.

These conditions demonstrate that legal recognition does not automatically produce citizenship equality. The experience of the Confucian community shows that administrative barriers, social stigma, and various forms of exclusion stem from deeper social structures rather than from regulatory issues alone. In this context, the state has successfully restored the legal status of Confucianism, but the process of restoring social recognition has progressed much more slowly. This finding supports Taylor's (1994) argument that recognition concerns not only the formal status granted by the state but also the social relationships that enable individuals and groups to obtain respect, legitimacy, and equal treatment in everyday life.

The findings reinforce previous studies that explain the historical marginalization of Confucianism in Indonesia. Chambert-Loir (2015) demonstrates that Confucianism developed as an organized religion during the colonial period, while Suprajitno (2019) and Irwansyah et al. (2025) explain that New Order assimilation policies encouraged religious syncretism and the concealment of religious identity among Chinese Indonesians. This study extends those findings by showing that the effects of assimilation policies did not end with the collapse of the New Order but continue to influence administrative practices and social acceptance of the Confucian community today. The findings also support Long's (2019) argument that the re-recognition of Confucianism did not automatically resolve the challenges faced by the community because memories of past discrimination continue to shape its relationship with both the state and society.

Unlike most previous studies that examine the history of discrimination, Chinese identity, religious syncretism, or community adaptation as separate themes (Chan, 2013; Long, 2019; Suprajitno, 2019; Tanasaldy, 2022), this study demonstrates that these phenomena are interconnected through a common issue: the gap between formal recognition and substantive recognition. From the perspective of the politics of recognition, the experience of the Confucian community illustrates that legal recognition does not necessarily generate citizenship equality. The state may provide legitimacy through regulations, but such recognition does not automatically guarantee equal administrative access or inclusive social acceptance. This finding extends Taylor's (1994) framework by demonstrating that recognition operates through multiple layers, including legal recognition, administrative recognition, and social recognition. When any of these layers fails to function effectively, state recognition tends to remain formal and does not produce substantive equality.

At the same time, the re-recognition of Confucianism has generated several important functions, including the restoration of civil rights, expanded access to public services, and broader opportunities for social and religious participation. However, this study also identifies several dysfunctions, including persistent administrative barriers, social prejudice, and forms of exclusion that continue to limit citizenship equality for the Confucian community. Therefore, strengthening substantive recognition requires efforts that extend beyond regulatory reform alone. Such efforts should include bureaucratic reform, stronger oversight of discriminatory practices, multicultural education, interreligious dialogue, and expanded social participation by the Confucian community. In this way, recognition of Confucianism can move beyond legal status and evolve into genuine citizenship equality within social, administrative, and public life.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that state recognition of Confucianism in post–New Order Indonesia has not yet fully produced substantive recognition. Although the state has restored Confucianism’s status as an officially recognized religion, various forms of inequality remain evident in social life and public services. The findings reveal that the position of Confucianism within Indonesia’s religious system has been shaped by historical dynamics characterized by recognition, marginalization, and re-recognition. Nevertheless, formal recognition has not been fully accompanied by administrative equality, social acceptance, or the elimination of historical stigmas attached to the Chinese-Confucian community. Under these circumstances, the Confucian community has demonstrated its ability to maintain its existence through institutional adaptation, educational initiatives, social participation, and identity negotiation within Indonesia’s public sphere.

This study contributes to the scholarship on minority religions, the politics of recognition, and citizenship in Indonesia. Unlike most previous studies that examine Confucianism through separate themes such as the history of discrimination, ethnic identity, religious syncretism, or community adaptation strategies, this study demonstrates that these phenomena are interconnected through the issue of the gap between formal recognition and substantive recognition. By employing Charles Taylor’s politics of recognition framework, this study shows that recognition extends beyond the granting of legal status by the state and also encompasses administrative, social, and cultural dimensions that shape the extent to which minority groups achieve citizenship equality in everyday life. These findings expand the understanding of recognition as a gradual, multilayered, and continuously negotiated process within multicultural societies.

This study has several limitations because it relies on a library research approach based primarily on the analysis of literature and documentary sources. Consequently, the study does not directly capture the lived experiences of Confucian adherents across different regions of Indonesia. Future research should therefore employ field-based approaches such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, or case studies of specific Confucian communities to provide a more detailed understanding of how recognition, discrimination, and identity negotiation operate in everyday life. In addition, comparative studies involving Confucian communities and other minority religious groups would enrich scholarly understanding of the dynamics of recognition and citizenship equality within Indonesia’s pluralistic society.

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