**(To the reviewer Olivera: because an authors is required to submit only one response letter. So I combine my two responses to two reviewers into this document. For my responses to your comments, please scroll down to the page 14. Thanks!)**

**Responses to Reviewer Prof. Martin**

**Assessment of “Politics of othering: a discourse analysis of how Chinese netizens represent India in the face of COVID-19” by Le Cao**

**Reviewer: Martin Kreidl**

I read this paper with profound interest as it describes and analyzes a fascinating /and mostly unknown/ phenomenon within Chinese nationalism. It shows how it is constructed through double-layered “politics of othering”. It is not surprising that the “other” can be the US or UK, or the “west”. What was entirely unknown to me was the other layer, the contrast between China and an “uncivilized other” (which is India in this case).

**1. Regarding the form of the article**

While I would prefer to concentrate on the argument and empirical evidence presented in the paper, I have to begin with its form, which made it difficult to follow arguments in the paper in their complexity. I had to re-read the paper several times before I felt that I was ready to write an assessment. This effort notwithstanding, I still suspect that my review may suffer from misunderstanding.

(1) Reviewer’s comments: The argument is dense (which is not a bad thing per se), but its structure often unnecessarily complicates reading. E.g. terms are not defined when used for the first time (but much later; e.g. “material processes” are used 4 times on page 1; definition through an example appears only on page 3).

Author’s responses: Thanks for this valuable suggestion. Terms should be defined when used for the first time. So in the revised version, I add definitions for most terms’/jargons’ when they first appear (mainly using the form of footnotes). Besides, to make readers easier to grasp the definitions of six process types in Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (the key concepts used in the article), in the section of methodology, I use a table (following the suggestion of another reviewer, Olivera) to explain them, which is as follows (please note that I highlight what I add in the revised version in blue).

(A detailed explanation of these process types is shown in the table below).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Process types | Definitions | Examples |
| Material processes | “The basic meaning of material processes is that some entity does something, undertakes some action (Eggins 2005, p215[[1]](#footnote-1)).” | “paint the wall”, “make a cake, ” “went to Prague.” |
| Relational processes | “The central meaning of (relational processes) is that something is” (Halliday, 1985, p. 112[[2]](#footnote-2)). It also describes the state of having. | “Tom is a good student,” “He is very skinny,” “He has a son.” |
| Mental processes | Mental processes represent processes of feeling, sensing and thinking. It has three subtypes:  a) emotive mental processes: the reactive processes of feeling something.  b) perceptive mental processes: the process of sensing something.  c) cognitive mental processes: the process in which social actors use their cognitive ability to treat objects or events. | a) Emotive: anger, surprise, despise, regret, fear, enjoy, frighten and please.  b) Perceptive: hear, see, smell.  c) Cognitive: think, consider, believe, wonder. |
| Verbal processes | Verbal processes refer to processes of “saying” and semiotic processes which are not necessarily verbal. | “Tell me where you are,” “She asked me a lot of questions,” “Marie changed her story,” “Jesus has forgiven them.” |
| Behavioral  processes. | Behavioral processes “are typically processes of physiological and psychological behaviour (Eggins 2005, p233).” | laughing, breathing, coughing, tasting. |
| Existential processes | Existential processes represent that something happens or exists. | “There is a picture,” “There will be a continual risk.” |

(2) Reviewer’s comments: Some terms are not defined (labelled) even though they appear to be important. For instance, when highlighting the two main flaws of existing research, one of them is described as too much emphasis on “the process of “instilling” while overlooking that of othering” (p.3). The trouble is, that the contrast between instilling and othering is rather implicit in the paper. After re-reading the paper, I guess I know where “instilling” is described; an explicit label added (and strongly rhetorically instilled) to the description of “instilling” would smooth the paper a lot.

Author’s responses: It is a very useful comment. I had failed to recognize that my contrast between “instilling” and othering was rather implicit until Prof. Martin pointed it out. In the revised version, I have tried to make the contrast more explicit, as is shown below (I highlight what I add or delete in blue (similarly hereinafter)):

… In other words, existing research has emphasized how the CCP leverages a variety of cultural forms to instill nationalist identity in Chinese (a process which can be labelled as “the politics of instilling”);~~, whereas~~ however, the question of how the process of othering—which can be labelled as “the politics of othering”—plays out, remains less researched. On the one hand, ~~while~~ it is utterly necessary to reveal the role of power in nationalist identity-making;~~,~~ on the other, it is ~~definitely~~ equally imperative to understand ~~micro-level~~ cultural processes of how nationalist identity is inscribed in repetitious routine practices of hate or disparaging speech or bodily acts, as inspired by Butler’s (1990) notion of the performative construction of identity (gender identity, or nationalist identity, among others). Put simply, the extant scholarship stresses the ~~process~~ politics of “instilling” while neglecting the ~~process~~ politics of othering.

(3) Reviewer’s comments: Some sentences are simply too long and unnecessarily complicated. Often a sentence extends over 8 or 9 lines of text. Simplicity would be often appreciated.

Author’s response: I completely agree with this suggestion. In the revised version, I split all long sentences I can find into shorter sentences and/or simplify grammatical structures of some sentences. Please refer to the document “A comparison between the old and revised versions” where I highlight all the separation in blue.

(4) Reviewer’s comment: Sometimes the use of adjectives is confusing. For instance: reading about “micro-level discursive practices” made me search for some “macro-level discursive practices” in the text. I found none. Is the use of such adjectives justified?

Author’s response: Indeed, the use of adjective “micro-level” here is misleading. I have replaced the misleading adjective with a more accurate one, which is as follows:

(in the last paragraph of the literature review section)

In sum, there are two flaws in the extant research: a) focusing on the ~~process~~ politics of “instilling” while overlooking that of othering, and b) neglecting the role of non-Western countries in constructing some people’s nationalistic identity ~~when Chinese people reposition themselves within a new world order~~. To address these flaws, this study delves into ~~micro-level~~ ~~discursive~~ linguistic practices of othering India—the most populous non-Western country (except China itself)—in an attempt to contribute to extant scholarship.

**2. Contents-wise**

Reviewer’s comment: Contents-wise, I would add an explanation of how discourse is used in the text. Can (under what conditions?) **one web post** (with one presumed author) represent a discourse? Assuming that the web post has one author, is it legitimate to speak of “netizens” (plural) in the title? (Plural forms are common in the paper, including statements such as “Chinese people increasingly reposition themselves in relation” (p.1).)

Author’s general responses: I think that the above comment involves three issues and I will respond to them one by one.

(1) Author’s responses: The first issue concerns a clarification of how discourse is employed in this article. In the preliminary version of my clarification, I devoted the following paragraphs to explain the way discourse was used in this article. However, finally I decided to delete the majority of the clarification and I will offer the reason for the deletion later. Please note that the blue part is what I added, and the underlined part is my personal notes in order to make myself clearer.

…

There are many subsections of discourse analysis, including discursive formations (e.g., Foucault, 1972[[3]](#footnote-3)), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992[[4]](#footnote-4)), narrative analysis (Labov, 1972[[5]](#footnote-5)), genre theory (Bakhtin, 1981[[6]](#footnote-6)), speech act theory (Goffman, 1959[[7]](#footnote-7)), intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1981; Kristeva, 1980[[8]](#footnote-8)), and multi-modal analysis (Kress & van Leeuween, 1996). This study follows Fairclough’s understanding of discourse which defines discourse as “the use of language seen as a form of social practice (1995; p7).[[9]](#footnote-9)” That is to say, Fairclough’s (1992) notion of discourse emphasizes the dialectical relationship between discourse and society. Discourse is constituted by and simultaneously constitutive of societal structures, institutions, relations, identities, systems of knowledge, and ideologies. In other words, while society shapes our use of language, “how we talk about the world (also) influences the society we create, the knowledge we celebrate and despise, and the institutions we build. (Machin and Mayr 2012, p.21).[[10]](#footnote-10)” For example, compare two different wordings to describe the same event, that is, “The American bombers killed the civilians during the raid” and “The civilians were killed during a bombing raid.” The former is an active construction, whereas the latter is a passive construction through which the agent who did the killing and should be responsible for it is left out (Fairclough 1992, p.182). When many similar linguistic techniques (e.g. nominalization[[11]](#footnote-11), metaphors, deagentialization[[12]](#footnote-12)) are leveraged throughout a newspaper article, the perpetrator of the war crime is probably concealed and the hegemonic international order obscured.

To operationalize an analysis, Fairclough (1992) develops a three-dimensional framework consisting of (1) the micro level of textual practice where analysts examine linguistic features in texts, such as transitivity and modality; (2) the meso level of discursive practice where analysts delve into the processes of textual production and how it influences textual interpretation; and (3) the macro level of social practice where analysts investigate the sociocultural context within which texts are embedded. Due to space constraints and the research goal (to investigate how the politics of othering play out through language use), this study will focus on micro-level textual practices of the chosen material [As the new title suggests (Politics of othering: a linguistic analysis of how a high-upvote answer in China’s Zhihu represents India in the face of COVID-19), in the revised version, this paper is centered around linguistic/ textual dimension (rather than discourse or discursive practices). So the preceding introduction and explanation (including the explanation on how the study employs the term “discourse”) have become redundant and unnecessary. Due to the same reason, the two succeeding sentences also seem to be redundant and unnecessary since there is no need for me to explain the relationship between discourse and Halliday’s systemtic functional linguistics.]. As Wodak argues “[w]hether analysts with a critical approach prefer to focus on microlinguistic features, macrolinguistic features, textual, discursive or contextual features, whether their whether their angle is primarily philosophical, sociological or historical-in most studies there is reference to Hallidayan systemic functional grammar (Wodak 2001: 8[[13]](#footnote-13)).” Indeed, linguistic analysis of texts within Fairclough’s three-dimensional model heavily relies on Halliday’s (1975) systemic functional linguistics (SFL). SFL views language as “a system of choices,” “each choice contributes something to the meaning of what is said,” and through unraveling the choices we can investigate the way “the resources of the language have been used to construct the meaning (Thompson 2014, p.35)[[14]](#footnote-14).” In SFL, the most crucial point of entry for unpacking the choices is transitivity. [🡸the preceding sentences briefly introduce the relationship between transitivity theory and linguistics (to be specific, Halliday’s SFL), as the revised version claims it is a linguistics-based research. In addition, in the two last sentences of this paragraph I add further explanation as to why I choose transitivity theory as the theoretical and analytical framework.] This study bases its linguistic analysis of the chosen text on Halliday’s transitivity theory. Halliday (2002: 119) defines transitivity as “the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the processes of the external world, and of the internal world of his own consciousness, together with the participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances.” In other words, the transitivity system interprets how people encode their experience in language through processes (expressed via verb phrases), participants in these processes and circumstances in which these processes occur. Halliday (1967) classifies processes into six types according to whether they represent physical actions and happenings (Material processes, e.g. “*paint* the wall”), states of being or having (Relational processes, e.g. “Tom *is* a good student”), affection, perception and cognition (Mental processes, e.g. “*consider* this plan”), sayings (Verbal processes, e.g. “*asked* a question”), physiological and psychological behaviors (Behavioral processes, e.g. breathing) or states of existing (Existential processes, e.g. “there *is* a picture”). People make choices from a set of options (e.g. selecting different process types and ways of representing participants) to encode their experience, but each choice is far from neutral but influenced by ideological orientations. For instance, comparing the material clause “companies move capital around the globe” with the relational one “capital is mobile (around the globe),” we can easily find the latter process type removes the agent—international companies, the major driving force behind globalization (Richardson 2007: 56). Likewise, the headline of a piece of news refers to the perpetrator of a crime as “a Muslim man” when there are other possibilities to characterize him (e.g. “a father of two young daughters”) which can frame the story differently (Machin and Mayr 2012: 77-8). Analyzing transitivity choices “is one of the most effective ways of exploring the ideological assumptions that inform and are construed by the texts. (Thompson 2008, p.17)[[15]](#footnote-15).” It is for this reason that this study will adopt the theory as an analytical framework for revealing how, in the chosen text, the politics of othering play out through language use.

Author’s explanation: I completely agree with Prof. Martin’s comment “Contents-wise, I would add an explanation of how discourse is used in the text,” as there are many subsections of discourse analysis with different theories and methodologies. A lack of clarification certainly confuses readers. Then, at the preliminary version of my clarification, I tried to add the above blue sentences, but finally I decided to remove most of them due to two reasons. First, the added part was too long (774 words); even if I could shorten and simplify my expression, the added part would be still long. Furthermore, it is not only long, but its line of reasoning appeared to be rather complicated. To be specific, I first defined the concept “discourse” utilized by this study according to critical discourse analysis (CDA), then I illustrated CDA’s dialectical view of the relationship between language use and society (without the illustration, my adoption of CDA‘s understanding of discourse would appear to be arbitrary), next I presented the three-dimensional model (the presentation enables me to pave the way for narrowing down my focus to only concentrate on textual practices and linguistic features of the sampled text), finally I briefly described the relationship between CDA’s textual analysis and Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (without the description, it would look very abrupt to directly say that I would adopt transitivity theory as the analytical framework). In other words, although the above steps look complicated, it seems that none step should be omitted, if the whole article is defined itself as a discourse analysis. Second, more importantly, the true focus of the article is indeed a linguistic (as opposed to “discursive”) analysis of how the politics of othering play out; if I directly and explicitly claim that the article is a linguistic analysis (as shown through the revised title and throughout the revised paper), then most of the added blue sentences can be removed. As you have seen, the use of the terms “discourse” and “discursive analysis” in the empirical parts is quite easy to mislead and confuse readers, making them wonder where the claimed discourse analysis is. Thus “rebranding” the paper as a linguistic analysis is much more advisable. So I decide to delete most of the above added blue sentences.

At the same time, “rebranding” this paper as a linguistic analysis does not mean that my above elaboration on CDA (including its dialectical view of discourse, its three-dimensional model, the relationship between CDA and SFL) will be useless. In my dissertation, I may develop this journal paper into a dissertation chapter; also, I will follow Fairclough’s three-dimensional model to integrate the the present analysis of micro-level textual practices and the future analysis of macro-level social practices (which hopefully employs some sociological theory to underpin the analysis of the social practices).

(2) Author’s response: Now I am going to respond to the question “Can (under what conditions?) one web post (with one presumed author) represent a discourse? ”

Although I rebrand this paper as a linguistic analysis (rather than a discursive analysis), the problem regarding the representativeness and generalizability of this study remains unresolved. My solution is shown in the next paragraph, and the blue part is what I add or delete to solve the problem of the study’s generalizability. Simply put, I solve the problem following three steps. First, I emphasize the possible ideological influence of the chosen text (since it might be read by many readers). But this is a quite weak explanation (so weak that I wonder whether I should delete this explanation). Second, I explain why I adopt this single-text approach, explicitly admit the limited generalizability of such approach, and point out the value of the study. Third, in the conclusion section of this paper, I talk about this study‘s methodological limitation and its research value again.

.... (in the section of methodology)

When using the keyword “*xinguan*” (the most common shorthand for COVID-19) and its variants (*xinxing feiyan, xinxing guanzhuang bindu*) to search for textual material via ~~the~~ Zhihu’s internal search engine, I found that among all search results, the post titled “why now more and more people worry about India being infected by COVID-19? (*weishenme xianzai yuelaiyueduode ren haipa yindu ganran xinguan*?)” had received the 8th most pageviews (more than 21.7 million, until 18 February 2021). Interestingly, within the 10 most-viewed posts, India is the 3th most-discussed foreign country in terms of pageviews (excluding five posts concerning China), following the UK and the U.S., which indicates Zhihu users’ ~~(or more broadly, Chinese netizens’)~~ intense interest in India and further justifies this study’s necessity.

Within the aforementioned post, the answer which had received the most upvotes (until 18 February 2021) captured my attention. ~~Within this post, I chose the answer which had received the most upvotes.~~ The 3629-word answer which was published on 7 April 2020 mainly described India’s socioeconomic conditions for curbing the epidemic, its federal government’s performance and its people’s behaviors in the face of covid-19. Due to Zhihu’s layout, the answer was placed at the top of the whole post (following the question). In other words, it was impossible for readers to read other answers without scrolling down the top answer, and thus its nationalistic stance towards India was possible to influence a certain percent of the post’s about 21 million readers. I thus chose the answer as the textual material for investigation. The decision to select a single-text approach is motivated mainly by the intention to undertake a more detailed and in-depth analysis; such analysis might be less likely to achieve if multiple texts were investigated, as Fairclough suggests “the amount of material that can be analysed depends on the level of detail (Fairclough 2003: 6)[[16]](#footnote-16).” Although the single-text approach inevitably limits the generalizability of this study’s findings, the study serves as a stepping stone for future exploration of the almost un-researched topic. ~~this study will unpack discursive strategies for constructing India as an Other underlying the sampled text description.~~

(in the conclusion section I add the following words)

Admittedly, the study’s sample size (one single text) is too small to allow generalization of its research results beyond the text examined; yet its exploration of the phenomenon “Orientalism within the ‘Orient’” may inform future researches which will sample a wider range of texts involving othering practices and hierarchical national identification within the Oriental world, ...

(3) Author’s response: now I will respond to the following comment “Assuming that the web post has one author, is it legitimate to speak of “netizens” (plural) in the title? (Plural forms are common in the paper, including statements such as “Chinese people increasingly reposition themselves in relation” (p.1).)”

The comment on the wrong use of a plural form “netizens” in the old-version’s title is definitely correct, so I rewrite the title in the new version. As for the comment “Plural forms are common in the paper, including statements such as “Chinese people increasingly reposition themselves in relation” (p.1).),” it is also correct. To address this problem, I add a lot of sentences as below (marked in blue) and the reason for such adding will be offered later.

After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has curbed the spread of COVID-19 since April 2020, researchers have observed a surge of nationalism in China (Zhao 2020; Yang and Chen 2020), designating~~ed~~ it as “biopolitical nationalism” (Kloet et al. 2020) or “the politics of blaming” (Jaworsky and Qiaoan 2020). Within the extant scholarship, in Chinese nationalist representations, antagonists negatively portrayed as the Other are completely Western countries (particularly the U.S.). Indeed, in Zhihu, the largest Chinese question-and-answer platform, when using the keyword “*xinguan*” (the most common shorthand for COVID-19) and its variants, I found that within the ten most viewed posts in search results, the UK and the U.S. were the two most-discussed foreign countries. Interestingly, the third most-discussed country was India (the related post receiving over 21.7 million pageviews), the country almost overlooked by researchers when elaborating on Chinese nationalism. In this post, among the ten answers with the most upvotes, three answers took a neutral stance towards India[[17]](#footnote-17) and one showed no clear inclination[[18]](#footnote-18). The remaining six answers connoted varying degrees of hostility, hatred (such as accusing India of leveraging China’s COVID-19 outbreak to stigmatize China or of its attempt to replace China as a global manufacturing hub) or sarcasm (such as calling India “a (perfect) petri dish” for COVID variants or “a huge poisonous pit (*da dukeng*).” Such negative perception seems not to be rare in Zhihu. I utilized the keyword “*Yindu* (India)” to carry out another search; judging by even a cursory glance at post headlines within search results, I could find a clear sense of negativity towards India. For example, among search results, there were 21 posts which respectively had received more than 1 000 comments (until April 13, 2021); among the 21 posts, five post headlines (namely questions *per se*) were about Sino-Indian wars/border conflicts (real or imagined)[[19]](#footnote-19), three about how severe Indian rape problem was[[20]](#footnote-20) and one how horrible its caste system was[[21]](#footnote-21). It seemingly reveals an interesting ~~trend~~ phenomenon in which ~~more and more~~ a certain number of Chinese netizens tends to negatively represent India ~~non-Western countries~~ as the imagined Other against which ~~Chinese~~ a nationalist identity ~~are~~ is constructed.~~,~~ Clearly, ~~and~~ the ~~trend~~ phenomenon cannot be ~~grounded~~ situated in the anti-hegemonism (or anti-imperialism) framework conventionally deployed to examine Chinese nationalism. In other words, ~~as China is becoming a new global power,~~ some Chinese ~~people~~ ~~increasingly~~ seem to reposition themselves in relation to both the West (as an oppressive Other) and India (as an uncivilized Other, perhaps also including other non-Western countries, under circumstances in which China is becoming a new global power). The dual-layered nature ~~underlying China’s nationalism~~ has mostly not been captured by existing researches and thus this study aims to address this lacuna.

Author’s explanation: by adding the above blue sentences, I try to point out that representing India negatively or disparagingly is not rare in the Zhihu, (whose users mainly being well-educated, the point I mention in the methodological section). By doing so, I can situate this study within a relatively wider social context which seems to be hostile towards India (to avoid giving the impression that the negativity and prejudice conveyed by the chosen text is very rare). Such addition might also help me legitimize the meaning of this study, that is, using the text under study as an example of a possibly common phenomenon. This seems to be a more advisable strategy for me (compared with the solution which merely changes plural to singular forms). Additionally, I also rephrase some expressions to avoid over-generalization and make my point safer, for example, replacing “Chinese people” with “some Chinese” along with the use of the hedging device “seem to,” replacing “more and more Chinese people” with “a certain number of Chinese people,” replacing “trend” with “phenomenon” (as I did not make a diachronic comparison).

Author’s explanation: To address the same problem of inappropriately using plural forms in the second and the third paragraphs in the literature review section, I make the following changes (marked in blue).

… Put differently, ~~with respect to the construction of nationalist identity,~~ for some Chinese, the Otherness ~~is~~ may be dual as ~~Chinese people’s~~ their nationalist self-identity is constructed in relation to both Western and non-Western countries, vacillating between these two camps ~~according to their needs for identity building~~. ... Therefore, to answer the question how ~~today’s Chinese~~ certain netizens represent non-Western countries as the Other is equally necessary.

In sum, there are two flaws in the extant research: a) focusing on the ~~process~~ politics of “instilling” while overlooking that of othering, and b) neglecting the role of non-Western countries in constructing some people’s nationalistic identity ~~when Chinese people reposition themselves within a new world order~~. To address these flaws, this study delves into ~~micro-level~~ ~~discursive~~ linguistic practices of othering India—the most populous non-Western country (except China itself)—in an attempt to contribute to extant scholarship.

**3. Regarding “Method”**

(1) Reviewer’s comment: The paper repeatedly makes the claim that it uses discourse analysis. But the analysis itself begins with references to the **frequency of occurrence** of selected “transitivity processes”. Is frequency such an important element of discourse analysis that it should take primacy? This emphasis suggests that much more than discourse analysis is involved. If not, purify the text/argument to avoid misplaced inferences.

Author’s explanation: Regarding the comment “But the analysis itself begins with references to the **frequency of occurrence** of selected “transitivity processes,”” I assume that the sentence which is mentioned in the comment (“begins with references to the **frequency of occurrence**”) is “In the text, the process type most frequently attributed to India-related entities is material process, followed by relational process.” In the old version, by using this sentence, I tried to explain to readers why I chose to focus on these two transitivity process types (it is because they appear most frequently). After this sentence, I started my analysis of transitivity features in the use of Relational and Material processes. Thus, the analysis of transitivity features, instead of the frequency of occurrence, was the central focus of the first paragraph of the empirical section.

As introduced in the methodological section, in Halliday’s transitivity theory, there are six process types and due to space constraint, some analysts employing transitivity theory choose not to focus on all six types. For example, in the paper “The ideology of patient information leaflets: a diachronic study” (*Discourse & Communication*. 3(1):27-56.), MC Manus (2009) chose to concentrate on elaborating Material, Relational, Mental and Verbal processes. Similarly, in the paper “A Comparative Study of Discourse and Ideological Representations of Protesters in International Online News during 2014 Occupy Central” (*Journal of Communication in Society*, 25 (2), 82-98), Li and Ye (2016) analyzed how *China Daily* represented protesters from the perspectives of Material, Mental and Relational processes, which were more frequently attributed to protesters, and then examined how *the New York Times* and *The Washington Post* represented protesters from the perspectives of Material and Verbal Processes which “were employed in most cases (p.93).” My old version follows such practice and selectively focused on Material and Relational. So in the first sentence of the empirical analysis section, I claimed to focus on Material and Relational processes (as they appear most frequently in the text under study). This is the reason for I mentioning the frequency of occurrence.

However, most importantly, my expression indeed conveys misplaced inferences, as Prof. Martin points out. So I rephrase my meaning which is as follows.

Due to space constraint, this section will be devoted to investigating transitivity features in the use of Material processes attributed to India-related entities since throughout the text being analyzed, this process type is the one most frequently attributed to these entities. ...

(2) Reviewer’s comment: Relative emphasis on explaining the method and employing the method should shift toward more empirical analysis and more empirical material.

Author’s responses: I address this flaw from the following two directions.

First, in the old version, empirical examples concerning the use of Material processes mainly took the form of verb phrases. Without the complete sentences and contexts, it is quite difficult for readers to understand my intentions of giving these examples. It might contribute to readers‘ impression that there is not enough empirical material. So in the revised version (mainly in the first and second empirical parts), I give complete sentences within which these Material process verb phrases are embedded in order to help readers to have a contextualized understanding of these empirical examples (please refer to corresponding sections in the document “A comparison between the old and revised versions” in which I highlight these changes in blue). Furthermore, I also add analyses of empirical examples to deepen the understanding concerning them (if such analyses are absent in the old version). For instance, after presenting Material process examples concerning cow urine, I add the following analysis: *Clearly, when it comes to activities involving cow urine, activities which are considered nonsensical by “modern” medicine, the text “bountifully” attributes transactive Material processes to Indians, which constructs them as effectual and “decisive” social actors who act upon the physical world in a ridiculous manner.* Another example is that when giving and analyzing the example concerning Indian Prime Minister Modi’s “toilet revolution,” I add the perspective of Fairclough’s “interdiscursive practice” to enrich my analysis.

Second, in the first empirical part of the revised version (namely the section “Transitivity features underlying the representation of the Indian government and Indians: negative expressions and nontransactive structures”), I add a new paragraph (namely the third paragraph) to elaborate on two instances of Material processes which position China as the Actor and juxtapose China and India, in attempt to expound representational differences between China and India. In addition, in the second empirical part (namely the section “Cow urine, rats and the Ganges: constructing a bizarre India”), I alter my old analysis of the clause “[s]uch good cow urine, must let people all over the world taste.” Addding a new paragraph and altering old analysis involve about about 750 words. The addition and alteration is as follows.

(the added paragraph which analyzes two instances juxtaposing China and India)

In addition, throughout the text being investigated, there are two instances of Material processes which place China as Actors, and, coincidently, both instances juxtapose China and India, which contributes to negatively construing India. The first instance is as follows, “over the years China has accumulated a huge amount of foreign exchange (reserves), has earned (*zanxia le*) $3.1 trillion familial wealth (*jiadi*). But India is different, the Indian government owes $1.4 trillion foreign debts, it is a half of its total GDP, its annual interest on foreign debt is about $112 billion, which is equivalent to 26% of the central government’s revenue.” Clearly, the text consecutively leverages Relational processes (e.g. “is different,” “owes $1.4 trillion …,” and “is about $112 billion”) to numerically depict India’s fiscal situation; the attribution of Relational processes is understandable as Relational processes are the foremost process type employed to represent the states of being or having. However, when describing China’s fiscal status, the text attributes to it two Material processes (“accumulated a huge amount of foreign exchange” and “earned $3.1 trillion familial wealth”) instead of Relational processes (e.g. “China has a huge amount of foreign exchange reserves” and “China has $3.1 trillion familial wealth”). Compared with Relational processes, Material processes enable the text not only to introduce China’s financial status, but also, more importantly, to additionally evaluate China, projecting it as an effectual, diligent and highly motivated actor. Also notable is the employment of the terms “*zanxia*”(close to a colloquial version of “earn”) and “*jiadi*” (a colloquialism for familial wealth); they together enable an informal genre and personify China, which helps endow China with the above traits (diligent and motivated). By comparison, the text deploys a formal fiscal management genre for India (exemplified by the use of several jargons), which contributes to portraying it as an inanimate and lifeless object for “statistic gaze.” The second sentence is “within the two-month, life-saving golden time (*huangjin qiumin qi*, probably referring to February and March) which China had strived to buy/gain (*qiang chu*), the Indian government did not do anything, (which is) Buddhism-Style (*foxi*, which means “passive”) anti-epidemic.” Instead of directly and simply phrasing the time as “within February and March” or “over the past two months,” the text uses three qualifiers/epithets (“two-month,” “life-saving,” “golden”) and one clause (“which China had strived to buy”) to modify the period. The complex modification seemingly subtly transforms the relationship between two temporally successive events (china’s and India’s anti-epidemic activities) into a “purpose-based” relationship between these events; that is, it gives the impression that China’s anti-epidemic activities were for India who squandered the effort. Meanwhile, a negated Material process (“did not do anything”) is again attributed to India, whereas a Material process of positive value (“buy/gain … time”) is attributed to China, which constructs China’s diligence and selflessness. Based on the elaboration on these two instances referring to China, we can find that all three Material processes attributed to China are transactive[[22]](#footnote-22) (“accumulated…foreign exchange,” “earned…familial wealth” and “buy/gain…time”) and positively connoted, which projects it as an effectual agent able to bring concrete and positive changes. We also find that in both instances, juxtaposed with China, India serves as a foil, accentuating its incompetency and impuissance.

(the old analysis of the clause “[s]uch good cow urine, must let people all over the world taste” is altered as below, in the third paragraph of the section “Cow urine, rats and the Ganges: constructing a bizarre India.”)

... Similarly, the immediately succeeding clause is “[s]uch good cow urine, must let people all over the world taste” which is highlighted in bold by the text. It is worth noting that the use of deontic modality[[23]](#footnote-23) (“must”) places the Sayer[[24]](#footnote-24) of this verbal activity in a relatively powerful position, whereas the use of a causative construction (“let ... taste”) represents “people all over the world” as powerless or compliant. An unequal power relationship is thus subtly asserted. Furthermore, the text only provides a projected clause (which describes what is said, namely“such good cow urine, must let people all over the world taste”) but remove the projecting clause (which describes who engages in what verbal acts, e.g. “Tom says,” “Marie suggests” and “John commands”), thus concealing the genuine Sayer and the Verbal process verb. As a result, such removal requires extra work on the part of readers to recognize that the verbal activity is just added by the text itself instead of Indians. Clearly, the fabrication of a verbal activity, along with the use of deontic modality and causative construction, effectively construct Indians’ offensiveness.

(3) Reviewer’s comment: What is the **role of** **a-priori categories** (created by the analyst) in discourse analysis? Shouldn’t these emerge from the analysis? This question might be based on my lack of understanding of current trends in discourse analysis, but I have always perceived discourse analysis as a strategy that helps is uncover hidden structures in interactions. (to explain: A frontend of this investigation states: “To better reveal underlying transitivity patterns, I categorize India-related entities into two groups.”)

Author’s response: In my response to the comment “how discourse is used in the text,” I have explained how the study understands the notion “discourse” (by claiming to follow Fairclough’s conception), then illustrated his CDA’s dialectical view of the relationship between language use and society, next presented his three-dimensional model and narrowed down my focus to elaborate the first level, namely linguistic features/textual practices of the sampled text. That is to say, this study merely focuses on the micro-level linguistic practices to reveal its textual features, and thus does not involve the third level, namely social practices which may involve the role of a-priori categories or other sociological theories. Simply put, rebranding this article as a linguistic-based inquiry lessens the necessity of addressing the issue of the role of a-priori categories.

(4) Reviewer’s comment: Each segment of analysis has, in my view, different level of quality. While the first and second parts show only glimpses of the original text (very short quotations, typically consisting of a few words), the final part presents longer segments of text and more elaborate analysis. I find this much more convincing. The first (and to some extent also the second part) are mostly catalogues of examples (numbered items) with much shorter comments/analyses.

Author’s response:

(1) In the first empirical part (namely the section “Transitivity features underlying the representation of the Indian government and Indians: negative expressions and nontransactive structures”), revision proceeds following three steps.

First, I assume that the impression that this section looks like “mostly catalogues of examples (numbered items)” may be attributable to the old version’s first paragraph and the succeeding table (both concerning the analysis of Relational processes). So in the revised version I delete all sentences concerning the analysis of Relational processes in the first paragraph and in the following table. The deletion is reasonable due to the following reasons: a) in the old version, the first section is already too long; b) as I introduce above, in the revised version I have added the analysis of two instances juxtaposing China and India (about 560 words); c) in the revised version, I have given complete (or almost) sentences containing Material processes instead of merely giving Material process verbs/verb phrases. These new added words necessitate a deletion of some part which seems not to be so necessary, so I choose to leave out the analysis of Relational processes in the first paragraph and the following table in the old version.

Second, I assume that the impression of “only glimpses of the original text (very short quotations, typically consisting of a few words)” and of “catalogues of examples” is also attributable to the fact that in the old version, my empirical examples concerning the use of Material processes mainly took the form of verb phrases. So, as introduced above, I replace these short Material process verb phrases with complete sentences within which these Material process examples are embedded to contextualize these examples; also, in a few cases, I add or improve analysis of these examples.

Third, as introduced above, I add a new 560-word paragraph to elaborate on two instances of Material processes which position China as the Actor and juxtapose China and India in order to expond representational differences between China and India.

After the above revision, the first section mainly consists of two parts. The first part is devoted to revealing the fact that negated Material processes of positive value (and Material processes of explicitly or implicitly negative value) are frequently attributed to Indian-government-related entities. I then elaborate on how such attribution is linguistically enabled by presenting a lot of examples along with analysis. The second part is devoted to revealing a linguistic feature beneath the text‘s Material processes attributed to Indian people; that is, the frequent attribution of non-transative Material processes. It is an indicator of powerless representation. I then also explicate how such attribution is linguistically enacted by giving examples along with analysis.

There is a point which may be worth mentioning. Compared with sociology/politics-oriented approaches, linguistics-based analysis tends to pay more attention to “how people say it” than “what people say about it” (or “how people talk about the world” than “what people talk about the world”), although, absolutely, these are some overlapping between these two dimensions. So in the first section, I pay more attention to analyzing the text’s linguistic devices to express its negative points about India than to depicting its negative points about India *per se*. Similarly, in the second section, instead of focusing on Indians’ original utterances *per se*, I unpack the text’s linguistic tools (such as recontextualization, transitivity manipulation) to alter Indians’ original meanings or to add extra meanings which Indians have not intended.

(2) Regarding the second empirical part (namely the section “Cow urine, rats and the Ganges: constructing a bizarre India”), in the first three paragraphs, I use more than 1050 words to analyze four sentences in a quite detailed manner. As introduced above, I reveal how the text leverages linguistic devices to change the original meanings of Indians' utterances or add some meanings which Indians have not intended. I focus on how these changes and additions are linguistically enabled. In the final paragraph of the section, I reveal another linguistic feature underlying the text's description of Indian's bizarre activities, that is, generously attributing many transactive (as opposed to non-transative) Material processes to Indians. Different from what I do in the first three paragraphs in which I conduct a detailed linguistic analysis of four sentences, in the final paragraph my major purpose is to derive a commonality from seven examples (to be specific, 14 Material process verb phrases and their corresponding complete sentences). Thus there is less need for me to undertake a detailed analysis on a particular example but focus on deriving and analyzing the commonality shared by these examples (with 175 words used to present these examples and about 330 words used to analyze them and (based on the analysis) to reveal overall features underlying the attribution of Material processes to Indians). I think this way seems to be suitable for deriving a hidden commonality.

**4. Regarding Conclusions**

(1) Reviewer’s comment: this part is brief and does little more than to repeat what has been said before: India is portrayed as weak, even bizarre, to which end even a contrast with the US can be used (and in such context, the US may be described as a progressive country).

Author’s response: I agree with this comment and in the revised version, I have deleted the first paragraph which repeatedly introduces the major points of the paper.

(2) Reviewer’s comment: This summary may be read as a drastic oversimplification of a subtle empirical argument, but it is what the paper finds. Do we need such a complex theoretical and empirical toolbox to arrive at such conclusions? Wouldn’t a literate non-sociologist easily come to the same conclusions?

Author’s response: this comment seems to be related to the following comment since both comments suggest me to explain the meaning of this paper from the perspective of its possible theoretical or empirical contribution(s). So please refer to my responses to the following comment.

(3) Reviewer’s comment: What is the theoretical relevance of the paper? Does it contribute something more than just a description of a less known phenomenon? Perhaps the moving away from binaries (which are a common analytical tool in cultural sociology) to a triad (West-China-India) can a more broadly applicable analytical strategy?

Author’s responses: in the revised version, I have deleted the old version’s conclusion section. In the new version, I try to present two possible contributions of this study (which are encapsulated in the second sentence of the first paragraph and the first sentence of the second paragraph respectively). The new conclusion is as follows (the whole conclusion is marked in blue).

The contribution of this study is two-fold. Perhaps its primary contribution may be to illustrate the usefulness of linguistic analysis in examining nationalist-Orientalist discourses. Language use is not neutral but instead “all language use is ideological (Fairclough 2001: 233).” While what people say about an object is constituted by and constitutive of ideologies, how they say it is also inherently ideological. The analysis of language use thus opens up an effective avenue of inquiry into how ideologies are produced. Informed by this notion, the study, instead of delving into what the chosen text says about India, shifts its attention to scrutinizing how the text says India; that is, the study explicates how a process of othering India is linguistically enabled and enacted in the chosen text. The study demonstrates that micro-level language processes and linguistic practices (e.g. from transitivity manipulation to referential strategies) are crucial for the operation of macro-level ideologies such as nationalism and Orientalism, which have conventionally been examined from sociopolitical perspectives. Given the analytical utility of such linguistic-analysis-based approach, the study calls for more similar researches, as they can work in conjunction with sociopolitical approaches to help gain a more nuanced picture of the practical manifestation of ideological operation.

Disrupting Orientalists’ homogeneous and monolithic understanding of the “Orient” from a largely underutilized lens, might be the study’s second contribution. As we know, Orientalism always rests its production of knowledge about the “Orient” upon a dichotomy between the “Occident” (the West) and the “Orient” (the East), by juxtaposition projecting the “Orient” as inferior, irrational, exotic and primitive (McLeod 2000: 40-1). While some critics lay bare the social constructedness of Orientalism, others delve into the heterogeneity of the “Orient.” That is, the latter critics have “critiqued Orientalists of reducing a vast and differentiated area to the Orient (Sharp 2009: 27)” and their entry points for criticism largely involve the “heterogeneity of countries, cultures, customs, peoples, religions and histories (Teo 2013: 2).” Yet heterogeneous national identification within the “Orient” has very rarely been treated as an entry point and received little scholarly attention; that is, the way an Oriental nation’s people relationally position/imagine themselves and hierarchically look at other Oriental nations contributes to heterogeneity within the “Orient.” The present study, which might be seen a preliminary effort to fill the gap, has dissected a case of “othering practices by an Oriental” by unpacking an Oriental text producer’s linguistic practices of othering another Oriental nation. In other words, through a hitherto underutilized entry point focusing on the issue of hierarchical national identification, the study to some degree problematizes Orientalism’s totalizing and essentializing logic and the notion of the “Orient” *per se*. Admittedly, the study’s sample size (one single text) is too small to allow generalization of its research results beyond the text examined; yet its exploration of the phenomenon “Orientalism within the ‘Orient’” may inform future researches which will sample a wider range of texts involving othering practices and hierarchical national identification within the Oriental world, which contributes to laying bare the heterogeneity of the “Orient” and thus dismantling the dichotomy of the “Orient” and the “Occident.”

Author’s explanation: with respect to the suggestion “Perhaps the moving away from binaries (which are a common analytical tool in cultural sociology) to a triad (West-China-India) can a more broadly applicable analytical strategy?” please allow me explain why I finally decide not to adopt this suggestion.

In the first empirical section “Transitivity features underlying the representation of the Indian government and Indians: negative expressions and nontransactive structures,” I use a 560-word paragraph to analyze two instances in which the chosen text juxtaposes China and India to negatively construe the latter. The second empirical section “Cow urine, rats and the Ganges: constructing a bizarre India” does not directly/explicitly refer to China nor the West (but the Chinese text producer as an implicit gazer who gazes at Indians’ “bizarreness”). The third empirical section “Two American Images: Using America to represent India” is devoted to analyzing representational differences between India and the U.S., and it indeed implicitly involves or briefly mentions China (for details please see below). Taken together, three empirical sections explicitly convey the following information: China is much better than India (in a paragraph of the first empirical section), the West (the U.S.) is much better than India (in the third empirical section).

In the third empirical section there are a couple of instances which seem to suggest the relationship between China and the West (the U.S.), but does it convey or suggest the information that the West is superior to China (for constructing a West-China-India triad)? Please let me show these instances as below:

“*Here citing an Indian American’s story helps the text to freely appropriate America-related elements (which can be labelled as “America-based legitimacy,” e.g. emphasis on Gawande’s expertise and authority obtained in or endowed by America) to validate the text’s disparaging view towards India. Put differently, through citation, with this America-based legitimacy, the text puts itself in a legitimate position to interrogate Indian religious-hygienic practices and to gaze at Indians as an eccentric and bizarre object, albeit essentially within a borrowed West-centered power relation framework*.”

“*Apart from Gawande cited as an indirect narrator, throughout the text, unwittingly or otherwise, the remaining two quoted non-Indian speakers are also from the U.S. instead of China*.”

“*These linguistic practices accentuate their expertise and authoritativeness while foregrounding India’s bizarreness, the Indian government’s incompetency and Indians’ impuissance. However, the legitimacy of such juxtaposition and disparagement is derived from Western rather than Chinese supremacy*.”

As shown, the above instances suggest that the text producer chooses to borrow America-based legitimacy rather than China’s. But it does not necessarily mean that the text’s borrowing action is based on his perception that the West (the U.S.) is superior to China. Or I at most can say that such perception is conveyed implicitly, but I fear whether it is too implicit to enable me to make the point that the text suggests a West-China-India triad.

Likewise, in the same empirical section, there are three more sentences implicitly suggesting the text producer’s understanding of the relationship between China and the West.

*For example, “At present, the number of infected people in the U.S. is close to 300,000, the world’s major developed countries have all fallen. The US looks simply awful” and “Indians have already personally attested to its efficacies (referring to cow urine’s medicinal efficacies). If the UK and the US really can’t combat the virus, they should try it. I remember the US has a lot of cattle” which seems to ridicule the U.S.. In addition, there is a sentence alluding to American hegemony “[d]ue to American propaganda’s power, this flu virus was later named the Spanish flu.” Thus, as a whole, America is negatively presented.*

Through the above extract, I can say that the text conveys a negative attitude towards the West (mainly the U.S.) but I cannot safely say that the text suggest a confrontational relationship between the West and China. Based on all the above information and extracts, I fear that the chosen text does not clearly talk about the relationship between China and the West (or the U.S.), which would mitigate the validatity and viability of the West-China-India triad.

Given the above concern, I thus assume that the West-China-India triad model is not so viable. This is the reason why in the new conclusion, I introduce the point of “hierarchical national identification within the Orient” which seems to be a more broadly applicable conceptual tool.

**Reviewer: Olivera Tesnohlidkova**

**Manuscript: “Politics of othering: a discourse analysis of how Chinese netizens represent India in the face of COVID-19” by Le Cao**

I truly enjoyed Le Cao’s manuscript on how the Chinese netizens represent India as a non-Western Other as an important factor for understanding the construction of Chinese nationalist identity. The author has identified an important gap in existing research which aims toward explaining the Chinese nationalist identity—a lack of understanding the Chinese practise of othering non-Western countries—and provided an enticing discourse analysis that fills this gap. Apart from some grammatical mistakes and one methodological issue, I found this manuscript very well thought out, clear, and the analysed sentences engaging. I believe this article would be a great contribution to the field and to any relevant journal. Therefore, the author should understand my comments more as suggestions for further improvement, rather than criticism.

1. Reviewer’s comments: The only substantial flaw of this manuscript concerns the sampling of this study. Why did the author choose to focus only on one answer (i.e. text)? The author considers the analysed text as representative (page 11) of how the Chinese netizens depict India “as the feeble, backward and eccentric Other” (page 1). It appears that this text was chosen because it received the most upvotes (page 3). However, the number of upvotes can at best represent an overall agreement with the opinion or information presented in a post on social media, but it is not a guarantor that the sampled text is representative of the discursive practices on a national level. I understand that including more texts would require rewriting the entire article, so instead, I encourage the author to elaborate on the issue of representativeness and to comment on the methodological limitations of the study. Also, it would be useful if the author would specify when the analysed text was posted on Zhihu.

Author’s responses:

(1) As for the time when the chosen text was created, in the revised version, in the third paragraph of the methodology section, I insert the following information (marked in blue) to specify the date; that is, “The 3629-word answer which was published on April 7 2020 mainly described India’s socioeconomic conditions for curbing the epidemic, its federal government’s performance and its people’s behaviors in the face of covid-19.”

(2) Thanks for this very valuable comment on the issue of representativeness from both reviewers, Olivera and Prof. Martin. I have to admit that I failed to consider the issue of representativeness and generalization enough in the prior version. As both reviewers point out the same flaw, please allow me to copy my responses to Prof. Martin here.

(the following is my response to Prof. Martin about the methodological limitation of this study)

Now I am going to respond to the question “Can (under what conditions?) one web post (with one presumed author) represent a discourse?”

Although I rebrand this paper as a linguistic analysis (rather than a discursive analysis), the problem regarding the representativeness and generalizability of this study remains unresolved. My solution is shown in the next paragraph, and the blue part is what I add or delete to solve the problem of the study’s generalizability. Simply put, I solve the problem following three steps. First, I emphasize the possible ideological influence of the chosen text (since it might be read by many readers). But this is a quite weak explanation (so weak that I wonder whether I should delete this explanation). Second, I explain why I adopt this single-text approach, explicitly admit the limited generalizability of such approach, and point out the value of the study. Third, in the conclusion section of this paper, I talk about this study’s methodological limitation and its research value again.

.... (in the section of methodology)

When using the keyword “*xinguan*” (the most common shorthand for COVID-19) and its variants (*xinxing feiyan, xinxing guanzhuang bindu*) to search for textual material via ~~the~~ Zhihu’s internal search engine, I found that among all search results, the post titled “why now more and more people worry about India being infected by COVID-19? (*weishenme xianzai yuelaiyueduode ren haipa yindu ganran xinguan*?)” had received the 8th most pageviews (more than 21.7 million, until 18 February 2021). Interestingly, within the 10 most-viewed posts, India is the 3th most-discussed foreign country in terms of pageviews (excluding five posts concerning China), following the UK and the U.S., which indicates Zhihu users’ ~~(or more broadly, Chinese netizens’)~~ intense interest in India and further justifies this study’s necessity.

Within the aforementioned post, the answer which had received the most upvotes (until 18 February 2021) captured my attention. ~~Within this post, I chose the answer which had received the most upvotes.~~ The 3629-word answer which was published on 7 April 2020 mainly described India’s socioeconomic conditions for curbing the epidemic, its federal government’s performance and its people’s behaviors in the face of covid-19. Due to Zhihu’s layout, the answer was placed at the top of the whole post (following the question). In other words, it was impossible for readers to read other answers without scrolling down the top answer, and thus its nationalistic stance towards India was possible to influence a certain percent of the post’s about 21 million readers. I thus chose the answer as the textual material for investigation. The decision to select a single-text approach is motivated mainly by the intention to undertake a more detailed and in-depth analysis; such analysis might be less likely to achieve if multiple texts were investigated, as Fairclough suggests “the amount of material that can be analysed depends on the level of detail (Fairclough 2003: 6)[[25]](#footnote-25).” Although the single-text approach inevitably limits the generalizability of this study’s findings, the study serves as a stepping stone for future exploration of the almost un-researched topic. ~~this study will unpack discursive strategies for constructing India as an Other underlying the sampled text description.~~

(in the conclusion section I add the following words)

Admittedly, the study’s sample size (one single text) is too small to allow generalization of its research results beyond the text examined; yet its exploration of the phenomenon “Orientalism within the ‘Orient’” may inform future researches which will sample a wider range of texts involving othering practices and hierarchical national identification within the Oriental world, …

2. Reviewer’s comments: The analysis of the sentence concerning Indian Prime Minister Modi is unclear. What part of the analysed sentence is “stingy” in giving a positive portrayal; why is the verb “initiated” considered to have a “casual and half-hearted connotation” (page 5) and a form of ridiculing the Prime Minister (page 9)?

Author’s response: I believe that your puzzle is completely because of my failure to explain it clearly. So I revise the old expression as below (marked in blue).

… The second instance is the sentence “[I]n 2014, Indian Prime Minister Modi launched ‘Clean India Movement,’ initiated (*gaoqi le*) ‘toilet revolution,’ in attempt to tackle Indian open-air defecation problem.” On the one hand, Material process items “launched” and “tackle” also connotes strong resolution and powerfulness. ~~carrying casual and half-hearted connotation.~~ On the other, in Chinese, the term “g*aoqi le*” carries casual and half-hearted connotation; inserting the term into a description of a government action—which is in fact an interdiscursive practice (Fairclough 2003) of hybridizing colloquial and official/political genres—mitigates the connoted resolution and powerfulness.~~when telling Modi’s activity,~~ Equally notable is the fact the term not only describes Modi’s action but subtly evaluates ~~Modi’s~~ his attitude towards the “revolution,” the attitude which is essentially inaccessible to the text producer but covertly added. This addition is thus not only an instance of interdiscursive practice but also an example of recontextualization[[26]](#footnote-26) (Van Leeuwen 2008).

3. Reviewer’s comments: I believe this manuscript would benefit from some more reflection on how exactly does this practice of Othering and negatively portraying non-Western countries impact the construction of Chinese nationalist identity.

Author’s response: thanks for this valuable comment. I add the following sentences (marked in blue, having 102 words) in the second paragraph of the literature review section.

…

However, over the past decade it seems that the world has witnessed China’s assertive and aggressive behaviors across other non-Western countries, exemplified by its “debt-trap diplomacy” (Brautigam 2019), “grabbing land” in Latin America (Puyana et al. 2015) and the suspicion of “recolonizing Africa” (Kinyondo 2019); meanwhile, as China “proceed[s] in its global hegemonic ascendancy” (Danner and Martín 2019: 186), an inflated sense of national superiority appears to have sparked the creation of online texts which hybridize nationalist and orientalist representations of non-Western countries (as shown by the aforementioned negativity-laden India-related posts). Put differently, for some Chinese, the Otherness may be dual as their nationalist self-identity is constructed in relation to both Western and non-Western countries, vacillating between these two camps. Unfortunately, such dual Otherness has gone unnoticed by researchers and the practice of othering non-Western countries cannot be anchored in the anti-hegemonism framework. But unpacking these Othering practices is pivotal in understanding text producers’ construction of nationalist identity, because, as mentioned above, a sense of what the Self is can only be constructed against the difference of an Other (Sarup 1992, p.98[[27]](#footnote-27)). Othering practices influence identity-making in a mutually constitutive way; that is, when an individual engages in othering practices to negatively define and construct another nation, his/her own national(ist) identity is also implicitly defined by differentiating and distancing from the Other (or simply put, defining who he/she is by who he/she is not). Therefore, to answer the question how certain netizens represent non-Western countries as the Other is equally necessary.

4. Reviewer’s comments: It would be useful to present the Halliday’s six types of process within a table to which the reader could easily return for the sake of following the analysis .

Author’s response: This is a very useful suggestion. In the old version, I did not adequately consider the issue of giving definitions from the perspective of readers, and thus in the revised version, I add a table which is as follows (marked in blue).

(A detailed explanation of these process types is shown in the table below).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Process types | Definitions | Examples |
| Material processes | “The basic meaning of material processes is that some entity does something, undertakes some action (Eggins 2005, p215[[28]](#footnote-28)).” | “paint the wall”, “make a cake, ” “went to Prague.” |
| Relational processes | “The central meaning of (relational processes) is that something is” (Halliday, 1985, p. 112[[29]](#footnote-29)). It also describes the state of having. | “Tom is a good student,” “He is very skinny,” “He has a son.” |
| Mental processes | Mental processes represent processes of feeling, sensing and thinking. It has three subtypes:  a) emotive mental processes: the reactive processes of feeling something.  b) perceptive mental processes: the process of sensing something.  c) cognitive mental processes: the process in which social actors use their cognitive ability to treat objects or events. | a) Emotive: anger, surprise, despise, regret, fear, enjoy, frighten and please.  b) Perceptive: hear, see, smell.  c) Cognitive: think, consider, believe, wonder. |
| Verbal processes | Verbal processes refer to processes of “saying” and semiotic processes which are not necessarily verbal. | “Tell me where you are,” “She asked me a lot of questions,” “Marie changed her story,” “Jesus has forgiven them.” |
| Behavioral  processes. | Behavioral processes “are typically processes of physiological and psychological behaviour (Eggins 2005, p233).” | laughing, breathing, coughing, tasting. |
| Existential processes | Existential processes represent that something happens or exists. | “There is a picture,” “There will be a continual risk.” |

5. Reviewer’s comments: It might be also useful to briefly elaborate on why transitivity theory serves the purpose of “unraveling the intertwining between language and ideologies” better than some other approach (e.g. objective hermeneutics).

Author’s responses: Thanks for this useful suggestion. In the old version, the rationale for choosing Halliday’s transitivity theory was only implicitly offered by the following sentences (in the section of methodology); that is, “People make choices from a set of options (e.g. selecting different process types and ways of representing participants) to encode their experience, but each choice is far from neutral but influenced by ideological orientations.” Then I used two examples to exemplify this argument (a comparison between a Material clause “companies move capital around the globe” and a Relational “capital is mobile (around the globe),” and the reference to the perpetrator of a crime as “a Muslim man” in a piece of news’ headline). Finally, I claimed that I would use the transitivity theory as the theoretical/analytical framework. After re-reading the above reasoning line, I agree with your comment, feeling that I did not explicitly point out the connection between transitivity theory and my attempt to unveil ideological stances. So in the revised version, after giving the above two examples, I thus add the following sentences (marked in blue). Indeed, analyzing transitivity choices “is one of the most effective ways of exploring the ideological assumptions that inform and are construed by the texts. (Thompson 2008, p.17)[[30]](#footnote-30).” It is for this reason that this study will adopt the theory as an analytical framework for revealing how, in the chosen text, the politics of othering play out through language use.

In the added sentence show, transitivity theory (or Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics *per se*) is only “one of the most effective ways of exploring the ideological assumptions that inform and are construed by the text.” It implies that there are several (perhaps more than “several”) suitable theoretical frameworks to investigate the chosen text (such as objective hermeneutics you mentioned, content analysis, genre analysis or narrative analysis) and transitivity theory is just one of them.

Furthermore, in the revised version, I have rebranded the study as a linguistic inquiry (suggested in the new title and in the claimed research aim) to reveal the relationship between language use and nationalism behind the sampled text; my claimed focus on linguistic practices and ideologically-charged language use, already suggests the suitability of a linguistics-oriented approach. By contrast, hermeneutics, content analysis mainly focus on what people said, rather than how people said it—an issue of “language use.” To highlight the connection between transitivity theory and linguistics approach, I add the following sentence in the fourth sentence in the methodology section (marked in blue), “The study bases its linguistic analysis of the chosen text on Halliday’s transitivity theory. In Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (SFL), he views language as “a system of choices,” “each choice contributes something to the meaning of what is said (Thompson 2014, p.35)[[31]](#footnote-31).” In SFL, the most crucial point of entry for unpacking the choices may be transitivity.”

Therefore, in the revised version, I have explicitly rebranded this study as a linguistics-based inquiry, have clarified the relationship between transitivity theory and linguistics, have acknowledged that there exist multiple “effective ways of …” Given the above explicit and implicit clarification, I think that perhaps there might be no need to explain the reason for I choosing it further in the revised version (but, as I said above, I totally believe that your comment on the issue in the old version is absolutely correct).

6. Reviewer’s comments: Has the author perceived any differences in the discourse about India before Covid-19 pandemic?

Author’s response: in the revised version, I add a few new information which might help me indirectly answer this question, which is as follows (marked in blue).

… Indeed, in Zhihu, the largest Chinese question-and-answer platform, when using the keyword “*xinguan*” (the most common shorthand for COVID-19) and its variants, I found that within the ten most viewed posts in search results, the UK and the U.S. were the two most-discussed foreign countries. Interestingly, the third most-discussed country was India (the related post receiving over 21.7 million pageviews), the country almost overlooked by researchers when elaborating on Chinese nationalism. In this post, among the ten answers with the most upvotes, three answers took a neutral stance towards India[[32]](#footnote-32) and one showed no clear inclination[[33]](#footnote-33). The remaining six answers connoted varying degrees of hostility, hatred (such as accusing India of leveraging China’s COVID-19 outbreak to stigmatize China or of its attempt to replace China as a global manufacturing hub) or sarcasm (such as calling India “a (perfect) petri dish” for COVID variants or “a huge poisonous pit (*da dukeng*).” Such negative perception seems not to be rare in Zhihu. I utilized the keyword “*Yindu* (India)” to carry out another search; judging by even a cursory glance at post headlines within search results, I could find a clear sense of negativity towards India. For example, among search results, there were 21 posts which respectively had received more than 1 000 comments (until April 13, 2021); among the 21 posts, five post headlines (namely questions *per se*) were about Sino-Indian wars/border conflicts (real or imagined)[[34]](#footnote-34), three about how severe Indian rape problem was[[35]](#footnote-35) and one how horrible its caste system was[[36]](#footnote-36).

Author’s explanation: As shown above, it implies that some Chinese netizens’ negative perceptions of India are quite “systemic” and perhaps “long-lasting” (involving real or imagined border conflicts, rape scandals and the caste system). It means the depreciatory discussion on India in the face of COVID-19 is embedded into such systemic and long-lasting negative perceptions of India. Due to its single-text approach (which only revolves around one event, namely the COVID-19 pandemic), my study only can serve as a stepping stone for further exploration, particularly quantitative researches which make comparisons of perception of India before and after the COVID-19.

7. Reviewer’s comments: In the conclusion, the author should reiterate/elaborate a bit more on the importance of this study. Why is it important, what are the potential sociological and wider implications of the presented findings?

Author’s explanation: Thanks for this valuable comment! I totally agree with it. So in the revised version, I have deleted the old version’s conclusion section. In the new version, I try to present two possible contributions of this study (which are encapsulated in the second sentence of the first paragraph and the first sentence of the second paragraph respectively). The new conclusion is as follows (the whole conclusion is marked in blue).

The contribution of this study is two-fold. Perhaps its primary contribution may be to illustrate the usefulness of linguistic analysis in examining nationalist-Orientalist discourses. Language use is not neutral but instead “all language use is ideological (Fairclough 2001: 233).” While what people say about an object is constituted by and constitutive of ideologies, how they say it is also inherently ideological. The analysis of language use thus opens up an effective avenue of inquiry into how ideologies are produced. Informed by this notion, the study, instead of delving into what the chosen text says about India, shifts its attention to scrutinizing how the text says India; that is, the study explicates how a process of othering India is linguistically enabled and enacted in the chosen text. The study demonstrates that micro-level language processes and linguistic practices (e.g. from transitivity manipulation to referential strategies) are crucial for the operation of macro-level ideologies such as nationalism and Orientalism, which have conventionally been examined from sociopolitical perspectives. Given the analytical utility of such linguistic-analysis-based approach, the study calls for more similar researches, as they can work in conjunction with sociopolitical approaches to help gain a more nuanced picture of the practical manifestation of ideological operation.

Disrupting Orientalists’ homogeneous and monolithic understanding of the “Orient” from a largely underutilized lens, might be the study’s second contribution. As we know, Orientalism always rests its production of knowledge about the “Orient” upon a dichotomy between the “Occident” (the West) and the “Orient” (the East), by juxtaposition projecting the “Orient” as inferior, irrational, exotic and primitive (McLeod 2000: 40-1). While some critics lay bare the social constructedness of Orientalism, others delve into the heterogeneity of the “Orient.” That is, the latter critics have “critiqued Orientalists of reducing a vast and differentiated area to the Orient (Sharp 2009: 27)” and their entry points for criticism largely involve the “heterogeneity of countries, cultures, customs, peoples, religions and histories (Teo 2013: 2).” Yet heterogeneous national identification within the “Orient” has very rarely been treated as an entry point and received little scholarly attention; that is, the way an Oriental nation’s people relationally position/imagine themselves and hierarchically look at other Oriental nations contributes to heterogeneity within the “Orient.” The present study, which might be seen a preliminary effort to fill the gap, has dissected a case of “othering practices by an Oriental” by unpacking an Oriental text producer’s linguistic practices of othering another Oriental nation. In other words, through a hitherto underutilized entry point focusing on the issue of hierarchical national identification, the study to some degree problematizes Orientalism’s totalizing and essentializing logic and the notion of the “Orient” *per se*. Admittedly, the study’s sample size (one single text) is too small to allow generalization of its research results beyond the text examined; yet its exploration of the phenomenon “Orientalism within the ‘Orient’” may inform future researches which will sample a wider range of texts involving othering practices and hierarchical national identification within the Oriental world, which contributes to laying bare the heterogeneity of the “Orient” and thus dismantling the dichotomy of the “Orient” and the “Occident.”

1. Eggins, Suzanne. (2005). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, Continuum. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Halliday, M.A.K. An Introduction to Functional Grammar (London: Edward Arnold, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Foucault, Michel. (1972). *The Archeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1969) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Fairclough Norman (1992) Discourse and Social Change. Cambridge: Polity [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Labov, William. (1972). The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax. In W. Labov (Ed.), *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (pp. 354-396). University of Philadelphia Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bakhtin, Mikhail. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (C. Emerson & M. Holoquist, Trans.). Austin: Texas University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Goffman, Ervin. (1959). *The presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kristeva, Julia. (1980). *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Lterature and Art*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Fairclough, Norman (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Longman. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Machin, David and Andrea Mayr. 2012. *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. London: Sage [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It means “the conversion of a clause into a nominal or noun (Fairclough 1992, p. 27).” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. It means representation of an action as an event that “happens” without the involvement of human agency. For example, to phrase the aforementioned news as “there was a killing,” which will obfuscate the agent. See Van Leeuwen, Theo. 2008. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Wodak, Ruth. 2001. What is CDA about - a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments. In *Methods of critical discourse*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 1–13. London: Sage. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Thompson, Geoff. (2014). *Introducing Functional Grammar*. New York: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thompson, Geoff. 2008. From process to pattern: Methodological considerations in analysing transitivity in text. In New developments in the study of ideational meaning: From language to multimodality, ed. Eija Ventola and Carys Jones, 17–33. London: Equinox. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Fairclough, Norman. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. New York: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. They include an answer which deployed statistics to pessimistically predict India's anti-epidemic capacity, a diamond trader’s answer which somewhat praised Indian reactions based on her personal experience in India, and an answer which analyzed a geographic impossibility for imagined Indian refugees to enter Chinese territory. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. It is the answer created by the author EL Facil. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See the following posts, https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/159410594, https://www.zhihu.com/question/421319290/answer/1812313401, https://www.zhihu.com/question/405655953/answer/1327122154. https://www.zhihu.com/question/403226559/answer/1394234538, https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/28699531. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See the following posts, https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/338018140, https://www.zhihu.com/question/62421968/answer/819870267, https://www.zhihu.com/question/20682565/answer/419199897. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. https://www.zhihu.com/question/62421968/answer/819870267. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. It means China’s action has a Goal (“The Goal is that participant at whom the process is directed, to whom the action is extended (Eggins 2005: 216)).” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Modality can broadly be categorized into two main types, deontic and epistemic modality; the former is concerned with laying obligation and giving permission, whereas the latter is concerned with expressing possibility and prediction. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The participant responsible for the verbal process. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Fairclough, Norman. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. New York: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. According to Van Leeuwen’s (2008), “recontextualization” means transforming elements of a given social practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Sarup, Madan (1992), *Jacques Lacan*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Eggins, Suzanne. (2005). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, Continuum. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Halliday, M.A.K. An Introduction to Functional Grammar (London: Edward Arnold, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Thompson, Geoff. 2008. From process to pattern: Methodological considerations in analysing transitivity in text. In New developments in the study of ideational meaning: From language to multimodality, ed. Eija Ventola and Carys Jones, 17–33. London: Equinox. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Thompson, Geoff. (2014). *Introducing Functional Grammar*. New York: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. They include an answer which deployed statistics to pessimistically predict India's anti-epidemic capacity, a diamond trader’s answer which somewhat praised Indian reactions based on her personal experience in India, and an answer which analyzed a geographic impossibility for imagined Indian refugees to enter Chinese territory. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. It is the answer created by the author EL Facil. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See the following posts, https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/159410594, https://www.zhihu.com/question/421319290/answer/1812313401, https://www.zhihu.com/question/405655953/answer/1327122154. https://www.zhihu.com/question/403226559/answer/1394234538, https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/28699531. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See the following posts, https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/338018140, https://www.zhihu.com/question/62421968/answer/819870267, https://www.zhihu.com/question/20682565/answer/419199897. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. https://www.zhihu.com/question/62421968/answer/819870267. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)