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Ineffectual People, Incompetent Government: A Chinese Discursive Representation of India during COVID-19

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, pandemic-driven nationalism surged in China, exemplified by widespread mockery and disparagement of India's handling of the crisis in Chinese cyberspace. Adopting a linguistically grounded approach, this study scrutinizes how India is discursively constructed as an inferior Other amid COVID-19. It conducts a linguistically informed discourse analysis of a highly viewed text on Zhihu (China's largest online Q&A platform). Drawing mainly on Halliday's transitivity theory, this study unpacks the linguistic features in the chosen text, which, within a discourse of modern medicine, depicts the Indian people as trapped between hopelessly passive and absurdly overactive in the face of the pandemic. The text also casts the Indian government as an impotent foil to the Chinese government, a representation situated within a discourse of strong-state pandemic governance. By interrogating the non-official social media text through a linguistic lens, this study contributes to understanding China's representational politics of Othering the non-West within the intertextual nexus between official and non-official spheres. It also contributes to making sense of the multidimensionality and ambivalence underlying Chinese national identity-making as well as "Orientalism within the 'Orient'" in the Chinese context.

Keywords: nationalism; COVID-19; discourse; Othering; orientalism

Introduction

Researchers have observed a new surge of nationalism in China since the COVID-19 outbreak, described variously as "the politics of blaming" (Jaworsky and Qiaoan 2021) or "pandemic nationalism" (Yeophantong and Shih 2021). Western countries are portrayed as oppressive Others, and, as Zhang (2022, 219) observes, "the geopolitical narratives of the pandemic build on and exacerbate binary oppositions between China and 'the West' in the global imaginary." It is no surprise that when searching on Zhihu, China's largest online Q&A platform, with the keyword "新冠" (*xinguan*) — the widely used Chinese term for new coronavirus, I found that among the ten most-viewed posts in the search results (until June 18, 2021), the USA and the UK were the two most-discussed foreign countries. Hostility suffused these discussions about their anti-epidemic performance. Interestingly, the third most-discussed foreign country was India, and negative comments, disdain, mockery, and sarcasm also pervaded the discussion of its anti-epidemic performance. Similar nationalist sentiments permeated discussions not only about India but also about other non-Western countries (for example, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, etc.), albeit to a lesser degree. Such nationalist sentiments were reflected not only in

unofficial online discussions but also on official social media platforms. For example, as Buckley (2021) noted, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission posted an image on Weibo, a popular Chinese microblogging site, juxtaposing the launch of China's new carrier rocket with burning pyres cremating COVID-19 victims in India. The image was captioned "China lighting a fire versus India lighting a fire," accompanied by a hashtag noting India's 400,000 daily COVID-19 cases. While Buckley analyzed this incident as an example of "wolf warrior diplomacy," a term referring to China's confrontational diplomatic style (Buckley 2021), it also vividly exemplifies the politics of Othering and self-definition. The Othering of India as primitive (for example, open-air cremation pyres) and hopeless is interwoven with China's self-definition as technologically advanced and powerful. This compelling example inspired me to explore how Chinese text producers Othered the non-Western world and constructed Chinese national identity during the pandemic, as well as the sociopolitical contexts and power dynamics in which the practices of Othering and identity-making were embedded. Indeed, since the CCP claimed in mid-March 2020 that it had curbed the spread of COVID-19 domestically (Xinhuanet 2020b), China has sought to propagate itself as a global model for combating the pandemic (Yang and Chen 2021). In a process of "outward comparisons with the world" (de Kloet, Lin, and Hu 2021, 367), the pandemic has been leveraged for manufacturing feelings of nationalist pride and superiority, which reshapes the social imaginary of other countries relative to China and Chinese self-imagination (Wang and Tao 2021).

Drawing on a linguistically grounded approach inspired by Lams (2017), whose work demonstrates the analytical utility of fine-grained linguistic analysis in unpacking China's Othering politics, this study interrogates the discursive representation of India as an inferior Other during COVID-19. The study chooses India because it is the most-discussed non-Western country on Zhihu during the pandemic (excluding China), and the world's second most populous country (only after China). In the handling of COVID-19, a sense of nationalist superiority among some Chinese stems from China's claimed institutional advantage created by its authoritarian system (Chang 2021; Yang and Chen 2021), which allegedly makes democracies seem pale in comparison. That India is the world's largest democracy is another consideration in choosing this focus. This study examines the text of the most-viewed post (over 21.7 million page views until June 18, 2021) of all Zhihu's posts that discussed the epidemic in India. Following a linguistically grounded approach, the study draws on Halliday's (1985) transitivity theory and van Leeuwen's (2008) analytical tool of referential strategies to conduct discourse analysis of the chosen text. The study finds that through attributing transitive and intransitive material processes and using referential strategies, the chosen text, within a discourse of modern medicine, depicts the Indian people as trapped between being desperately passive in the face of the pandemic and "absurdly" overactive with their religious-hygienic practices. As for the Indian government, by manipulating transitivity and mixing genres, the text intertextually constructs it as incompetent within a discourse of strong-state pandemic governance, with the Chinese government being used as an implicit (and occasionally explicit) standard of competence. By focusing on the post from Zhihu — a non-official social media platform — and adopting a linguistic-discursive perspective, this study contributes to understanding China's politics of Othering non-Western countries within the intertextual entanglement of non-official and official discursive arenas. It also contributes to making sense of the multidimensionality, fluidity, and ambivalence inherent in national identity-making in China's authoritarian context. In addition, the chosen text is also a case of "Orientalism within the 'Orient.'" That is, the study examines how a highly viewed text from an Oriental nation represents another Oriental nation as a medically non-modern and politically impotent Other, as opposed to a modern and potent China. Analyzing the reproduction of the Occident/Orient binary in Orientalism helps understand "nesting Orientalism" (Bakić-Hayden 1995) in the Chinese context, where "the designation of 'Other' has been appropriated and manipulated by those who have themselves been designated as such in orientalist discourse" (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 992).

Literature Review

Nationalism is a perennial topic in Chinese studies, and the question of nationalist identity formation in the authoritarian regime has drawn much research interest. One crucial aspect of such identity-making has received particular attention, namely the construction of the Other (more specifically, of the countries towards which nationalist sentiments are directed). Identity is inherently relational and defined in opposition to an Other, "a threatening heterogeneity against which the identity is formed" (Panizza 2005, 17). It is impossible to understand the formation of self-identity without understanding the construction of the Other (Lebow 2008), or "constitutive outside" (Laulau and Mouffe 1985). Many studies have explicitly or implicitly investigated the politics of Othering the West. For instance, Zhang (2022) unpacks how online COVID-19 narratives are geopoliticized to reproduce a dichotomous framework of the global order "characterized by Western hegemony and Chinese victimhood" (2022, 241). Wang (2020) details the evolutionary trajectory of the dictum "the backward will be beaten" — a key lesson that the CCP derives from China's Century of Humiliation brought about by Western imperialist powers, elucidating how this mnemonic practice has influenced Chinese nationalist self-imagination and worldview. Concentrating on the discourse about the 1937 Nanjing Massacre perpetrated by Japan, Schneider (2018) explicates how netizens, state agencies, and commercial actors engage in remembering the national trauma and creating an imagined national community. In these works, the discourse of national humiliation is seen as "an enduring narrative of modern Chinese history and identity" (Callahan 2006, 187), and Othering practices are predominantly placed within a counter-hegemonic framework "highlighting antagonistic portrayals of foreign villains and victimized Chinese" (Lams 2021, 73–74), with the West being projected as an oppressive Other. Meanwhile, expressions of victimization and the remembrance of trauma are only parts of the politics of Othering. Some scholarly attention has been paid to the construction of a dichotomy between a superior Chinese national Self and inferior Western Others, revealing the multiplicity and complexity of national identity-making. For example, De Kloet, Lin and Chow (2020) reveal that, on Chinese social media, dichotomies are constructed between China's "effective" measures in combating COVID-19 and the perceived "weak and sloppy measures" adopted by European nations, as well as between a portrayal of China as "sav[ing] the world" and of the USA being unable to "save itself" (2020, 836).

While the Othering of the West has attracted much attention, there are only limited studies addressing the issue of Chinese national identity-making through the Othering of the non-West. These limited studies can be exemplified by the following investigations. For instance, Chen (2020) examines the 2018 Spring Festival Gala sketch "Shared Joy," noting that it constructs African Others to reinforce a relationship of domination, which portrays China's economic and cultural superiority and Africa's admiration for, gratitude to, and dependence on China. In an examination of travel writings and vlogs, Yang (2024) devotes a chapter (103–141) to unraveling how Chinese actors essentialize Nepal as an exoticized "Shangri-La" destination for spiritual fulfillment. That discourse perpetuates Orientalist narratives and reinforces asymmetrical power relations, positioning Nepal as a primitive Other and China as a rising modern nation. Shen (2012) similarly illustrates how Chinese netizens portray Latin America as a failed Other, marred by economic mismanagement and corruption attributed to a US-influenced free market system, which reinforces China's self-image as a superior sociopolitical system providing a uniquely viable path to modernity.

Despite receiving limited attention, the issue of Chinese national identity-making through the Othering of non-Western societies and nations has become increasingly significant over the last decade. The past decade has witnessed the rapid growth of China's geopolitical, economic, military, and diplomatic presence, as well as its influence throughout the non-West. This growing presence has been variously described by scholars and commentators as an increasingly asymmetric power relationship and unequal cooperation with Africa (Kinyondo 2019), an expanded maritime power projection network in the South China Sea (Liu 2022), strategic maneuvers reshaping Asia's geopolitical landscape and intensifying regional tensions (Singh 2024), an uneven partnership structure deepening Latin America's economic dependency (Dever and Dever 2021), and an

emerging security alignment strengthening leverage over Pacific island nations (Olsen 2022), for example. Given that the CCP often strategically instrumentalizes and mobilizes nationalism to promote foreign policies and diplomatic agendas (Reilly 2012; Weiss 2013), an investigation of how Chinese national identities are constructed vis-à-vis the non-West and are susceptible to political mobilization is of importance. As Stroup (2023, 501) suggests for the study of Chinese nationalism, "exploring the content of national identity helps to increase explanatory leverage about when, why, and how successfully the nation may be instrumentalized." Only by understanding how dominant national identities vis-à-vis the non-West are constructed is it possible to disrupt and deconstruct them. Recognizing the critical importance of investigating Chinese Othering of the non-West, my study seeks to enrich the limited research on this issue. This enrichment is based on critically identifying and responding to the weaknesses of the extant research, providing a deeper examination of the relationship between the Othering of the non-West and Chinese national identity construction.

While existing studies have offered valuable insights into the issue, they face two notable limitations. The first limitation concerns a simplistic understanding of the triangular nexus between China, the non-West, and the West, which has not effectively captured the multidimensionality, fluidity, and ambivalence underlying Chinese national identity negotiation. In existing research on the Othering of non-Western countries, scholars find that traces of Western influence are sometimes implicitly or explicitly present, and in these cases, the Othering practices are embedded in a triangular relationship among China, the non-West, and the West. For example, Galafa (2019) focuses on the popular film *Wolf Warrior II*, arguing that the film constructs a savior complex role for China reminiscent of Western colonial narratives. It stereotypes Africa as a chaotic, lawless, and hopeless continent in desperate need of an external savior, shifting the role of the savior from the West to China. Through the lens of "popular geopolitics" and dissecting several controversial incidents, such as a detergent advertisement, Castillo (2021) reveals how the racialized and gendered representations of Africans (for example, "as China's 'damsel in distress'") (429) are woven into the "everyday geopolitical imaginaries" (421), with Chineseness replacing the hegemonic position of whiteness. Nyíri (2006) discusses the role of Chinese migrants in Africa, illustrating how their commercial and infrastructural engagements are perceived as a continuation of a civilizing mission, echoing historical narratives of Western colonialism, with Africans depicted as passive beneficiaries of civilization brought by China. These studies help unveil how Chinese people navigate their self-identity amidst these global interrelations involving China, the non-West, and the West. However, the triangular relationship in which these studies are situated is predominantly a relationship wherein China is portrayed as the ascending superpower, with the non-West in a subordinate/dependent position and the West as the declining/superseded hegemon. These positionings are only parts of the whole story. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue, identity — in my case, national identity — is fluid, unfixed, and unstable, subject to change with the discourse it is embedded in. The existing research based on the unidimensional and static understanding of the triangular relationship among China, the non-West, and the West does not well unveil the multidimensionality, fluidity, and ambivalence underlying Chinese national identity-making. My study aims to fill this research gap by dissecting the construction of different Chinese national Selves within a dynamic triangular nexus between China, the non-West, and the West in distinct discourses. It contributes to a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of Chinese national self-imagination through the Othering of the non-West in the context of broader interrelationships.

The second limitation concerns the fact that the role of language in Othering the non-West is largely underexplored in existing research. In essence, the vast majority of existing studies exploring the Othering of the non-West (for example, Chen 2020; Galafa 2019; Shen 2012) share a common focus. That is, they dissect: a) what is said about the non-West (analyzing what kind of Other is constructed, or, put differently, the content of different Othering representations); and b) why it is said (providing social contextual explanations for such Othering representations). These studies draw mainly on cultural studies, political science, sociology, and psychology theories to underpin

their examinations (for example, poststructuralist theory (Olczak 2023), framing theory (Marsh 2016), and concepts like cultural appropriation (Chen 2020)). In a non-rigorous sense, I view these studies as adopting a "sociocultural theory-based approach." However, these studies leave a third dimension of "how it is said" underexamined. That is to say, the question of how language, as a vehicle for "what is said," influences the construction of the Other has not been given enough attention. Language includes both verbal language (for example, language used in online texts) and visual language (for example, language embodied in visual products such as films and advertisements). As Bakhtin (1981, 294) puts it, "language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions." Fundamentally, linguistic choices are never ideologically neutral but are embedded in a web of social practices that reflect and reproduce power structures and cultural norms (Fairclough 1992). Language and ideology (in the case of my study, nationalism) are mutually constitutive (Fairclough 2001a, 64–90), and "all language use is ideological" (Fairclough 2001b, 233). While what people say about a thing is constituted by and constitutive of ideologies, how they say it is also intrinsically ideological (Fairclough 1992). The analysis of language use thus offers an effective avenue for exploring how ideologies are (re) produced. It helps dissect the concrete operation of abstract Othering logics and nationalist ideologies in actual language materials, bringing macro inquiries more "down to earth." I label it as a linguistic theory-based approach.

Although the vast majority of existing studies overlook this approach, a few have illuminated its potential. A prominent example is Lams' (2017) work. Lams (2017) comparatively investigates China's official media narratives produced during two diplomatic standoffs, one triggered by a 2001 US-China plane collision and the other by the 2010 arrest of a Chinese trawler captain by Japan. Adopting a linguistically grounded approach and drawing on tools from language pragmatics and positioning theory, she conducts a linguistic analysis of the Othering of the USA as well as Japan — a country, depending on context, classified variably as either Western or non-Western due to its complex international position and cultural identity, among other factors (Gonzalez-Pujol 2025, 6). Her work represents the first inquiry demonstrating the great utility of a linguistically grounded approach in examining China's Othering of a non-Western country.

Inspired by Lams, my study builds on her approach and, specifically, employs analytical tools such as transitivity and referential strategies to conduct a linguistic analysis of the chosen text. While Lams' work insightfully applies the linguistically grounded approach to probe China's discursive construction of foreign Others through official media outlets (for example, *Renminribao* and *China Daily*), the dynamics of such Othering practices within non-official media, particularly non-official social media platforms, remain largely unexamined. My study extends the approach to examine a non-official social media post from Zhihu. I explore how non-official discourses interact intertextually with official discourses by appropriating, reframing, or hybridizing dominant narratives, and how official ideologies are reproduced and woven into the fabric of the non-official discursive landscape. By addressing this underexplored site of Othering practices, I seek to complement existing research and offer new insights into China's Othering of the non-West within the entangled intertextual discursive network between official and non-official spheres. Furthermore, similarly to Lams, I combine micro-linguistic examination and macro-social explication by situating the analysis of the text within a broader sociopolitical context (for example, the CCP's sensitivity to its legitimacy pressure) to conduct a contextualized analysis of the text. This combination enables me to decipher how Othering practices and self-glorification are linguistically enacted in the chosen text and to unpack how the Self-Other nexus and the production of the text are shaped in China's authoritarian context. In sum, the combination helps situate my analysis within "a close relationship between what is said, how it is said, and why it is so said" (Marchetti 2014, 339), which allows me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Othering of the non-West in China.

In addition, the imagining of the non-Western world, driven by the desire to establish a superior national identity and based on the contrast between a strong "Us" and a weak "Them," to some degree reproduces the process of constructing the Orient in Orientalism. Orientalism is a

representation system for constructing Otherness based on an Occident/Orient binary and justifying the Orient as inferior and needing correction by the Occident (Said 1978). In doing so, the Occident "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 1978, 3). Building upon Said's theory of Orientalism, scholars like Bakić-Hayden (1995) introduced the concept of "nesting Orientalism" to explore how Orientalist discourses were replicated within Eastern (for example, Balkan) societies. In the Chinese context, scholars have also investigated China's Orientalist representations of other Oriental nations, as exemplified by Galafa's (2019) aforementioned analysis of *Wolf Warrior II*'s portrayal of Africa. This blockbuster film, which depicts the story of a retired soldier saving compatriots from local rioters and arms dealers in an unspecified war-ravaged African country, has sparked broader scholarly discussions beyond Galafa's analysis. Among these discussions, Liu (2018) reveals how Africa, cast as "feminized, infantilized, and racially subjugated" in need of a savior China, "serves as a foil for China's discourse about its modernity" — a narrative that fuels fantasies of China's rise and the displacement of Western dominance. Relatedly, Shi and Liu (2019, 335–337) argue that the film draws upon emotional politics of pride and shame to construct China's identity as "a highly modernized subject" (335) by showcasing the Chinese protagonists' use of advanced technologies (both military and civilian) and their operation of transnational businesses. The film articulates China's rising global power and national pride while perpetuating problematic colonial-style representations of Africa as pre-modern, weak, voiceless, and dependent on China's paternalistic protection from Western dominance (Shi and Liu 2019, 337–340). These two studies share a potential commonality in exploring the cultural practices through which China's modernity is imagined vis-à-vis the non-West (as symbolized and embodied by an unspecified African nation) within the triangular relationship between China, the non-West, and the West. Inspired by their shared focus on Chinese self-imagination with respect to modernity and by the triangular framework, I interrogate Chinese discourse depicting another Oriental nation (India) as being not-modern — more specifically, not medically modern, which is essentially defined by the West. Through this lens, I examine the construction of China's modernity in the domain of medicine within nested Orientalism amid COVID-19. Following their line of inquiry and using a linguistically based perspective, my exploration contributes to deepening the understanding of how nesting Orientalism within the Orient operates in China.

Research Methodology

I focus on a major online public discussion site in China, Zhihu. It is a copycat of the widely known social question-and-answer website Quora, and is the largest online Chinese question-and-answer site. Here, users are encouraged to ask questions about various hot topics, and other users share their answers. Users can then comment upon or upvote answers, expanding a given answer's visibility. As of January 2019, it had over 220 million users (Yang 2019), 80 percent of whom have a bachelor's degree or higher (Zhang 2020). Every day, around 230000 Zhihu posts are re-posted to additional platforms like WeChat and Weibo (Chernavina 2017). Given its popularity and influence, researchers have increasingly treated Zhihu as an influential online public sphere that fosters the formation of public opinion on particular social issues (for example, Peng et al. 2020; Zhang 2020). My study similarly views Zhihu as a key public sphere for discussions on India's handling of the pandemic. When using the keyword "新冠" (*xinguan*), the widely used Chinese term for new coronavirus, to search for posts via Zhihu's internal search engine, I found that among all the search results, the post "Why do more and more people now worry about India being infected by COVID-19?" had received the 8th most pageviews (more than 21.7 million until June 18, 2021), only behind the posts discussing China, the USA, and the UK. In this post, I chose the answer with the most upvotes (45000 upvotes as of June 18, 2021) as the textual material for investigation. The 3629 word answer, published on April 7, 2020, mainly described India's socioeconomic conditions for fighting the epidemic, its federal government's performance, and its people's behaviors in response to COVID-19.

Table 1 (below) illustrates the general popular discourse about how India responded to the pandemic. The table summarizes the main content of the nine most upvoted answers discussing India's pandemic crisis on Zhihu. The specific answer investigated by my study, which received the

Table 1. Summary of the Nine Most Upvoted Answers Discussing India's Pandemic on Zhihu

Anonymized Users And Upvotes[a]	Publication Date	Main Points
User 1 (29K[b])	2021–5–9	Discusses the impact of India's pandemic-induced collapse on neighboring countries; fears that this could lead to the virus spreading to China and an influx of refugees into China, while repeatedly calling virus-stricken India "the shithole (of the earth)."[c]
User 2 (26K)	2020–3–9	*Uses personal experiences and a sarcastic tone to describe how Indian hygiene practices, influenced particularly by religious beliefs, conflict with modern medical concepts (practices such as drinking water directly from the Ganges and not minding flies on their food due to Hindu beliefs).*
User 3 (25K)	2021–4–28	*Argues that India's lack of strong "grassroots implementation capability" — "a capability that only China possesses globally" — and the inability to produce sufficient vaccines are the major reasons for its very dire epidemic situation*; analyzes the relationship between India's economy and its pandemic crisis, and believes that provocations at the China-India border caused significant financial burdens, hindering India's anti-epidemic efforts; *claims that China's success in controlling the pandemic is due to the leadership of the CCP and a powerful "state apparatus."*
User 4 (15K)	2021–4–28	Introduces India's collaboration with the United States to contain China and its border provocations; *argues that India's anti-epidemic policies are constrained by electoral considerations; ridicules Indian people for using cow urine to fight COVID–19; depicts India's chaotic marshalling of medical supplies, compared with China's efficient measures (e.g., using wartime management for this process)*; predicts Modi's use of anti-China nationalism to deflect domestic conflicts.
User 5 (11K)	2021–4–26	*With a satirical tone, it explains why India cannot promptly handle the bodies of COVID–19 victims: the use of traditional cremation materials (e.g., cow dung) and ritual norms, both influenced by Hinduism*, and the "innate profiteering gene" of Indian people that causes funeral merchants to raise prices.
User 6 (10K)	2021–4–25	Claims that India relies on vaccine raw materials from China, without which it cannot handle the pandemic; describes the Indian government's irresponsibility (e.g., "not caring at all how many people die" and rejecting China's offer of aid).
User 7 (9208)	2021–4–29	Asserts that China, as the "decision-maker [*huashiren*] for East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia," should provide aid to India; predicts that the pandemic will lead to India's collapse and a refugee crisis; *claims that as long as the CCP is in place, the exodus of capitalists will not have a significant impact on China, but India, which lacks a "large-scale working-class party" and whose economy is controlled by capitalists, will collapse;* suggests that China prevent the influx of Indian refugees.
User 8 (25K)	2021–5–17	Describes personal experiences during the lockdown in India, giving a positive assessment of India's anti-epidemic efforts.
User 9 (9057)	2021–4–30	Estimates India's overall infection rate; suspects that India has already experienced a severe antibody-dependent enhancement effect; suggests that "even with widespread vaccination, strict anti-epidemic policies should still be implemented."

Notes:
[a]To ensure anonymity and mitigate potential ethical concerns, all usernames in this table have been anonymized.
[b]K = Thousand (e.g., 26K = 26,000 upvotes)
[c]These quoted words come directly from the corresponding answers.
Source: Compiled and analyzed by the author from Zhihu posts.

most upvotes, is omitted from the table. The included answers are responses to various questions, meaning their focus often does not overlap with that of the answer investigated by this study.[1] However, even so, the nationalism and Othering discursive practices manifest in the answer I investigate can be widely observed in the nine answers. First, all these answers exhibit nationalism, except for the last two (placed at the end of the table). Second, as elaborated in the following sections, I find that the Othering of India is based on constructing the non-modernity or anti-modernity of Indian people and the impotence of the Indian government (through the comparison with China's authoritarian strong-state model). The construction of these characteristics of non-modernity/anti-modernity and impotence is commonly present in these answers (though they may manifest in different forms). I have highlighted these manifestations in italics in the table. Only two answers, created by User 1 and User 6, do not seem to exhibit these characteristics. Thus, nationalism and a preoccupation with modernization and authoritarian strong-state governance, which underpin the Othering of India, are commonly present in the broader discursive landscape on Zhihu, the largest online Chinese question-and-answer website primarily populated by a well-educated social group (as mentioned earlier).

My decision to focus on a single text was motivated by the following consideration. My study aims to reveal how linguistic practices work in conjunction to shape the Othering of the non-West. Linguistic practices include a variety of practices, for example, transitivity patterns, referential strategies, stylistic practices, lexical selection, intertextual appropriation, and textual organization, among others. Only an in-depth dissection of a complete text can demonstrate how these diverse linguistic practices work in concert with each other to construct a cohesive narrative and unified representation, in this case shaping readers' particular perception of a non-Western country. Such an in-depth dissection was less likely to be achieved if multiple texts were investigated, just as Fairclough argues in his book *Analysing Discourse*: "the amount of material that can be analyzed depends on the level of detail" (2003, 6). I thus chose to dig deeper into one rather than multiple texts.

On the one hand, focusing on the single text may limit the generalizability of my findings. On the other hand, according to White and Marsh (2006, 36), "the object of qualitative research is not generalizability but transferability." Moreover, in the field of qualitative discourse studies, "the results of a discourse analysis are not generalizable to other situations, other discourses, or other people" (Powers 2001, 64). Accordingly, the goal of my study, as a qualitative discourse study focusing on a single text, was not generalizability, but transferability of research results, which "is commonly substituted for generalizability" in qualitative research (Duff 2008, 51). To facilitate transferability, my study provides a thick description of its research context, design, and process, and details the analysis and findings "so that other researchers can decide for themselves if the interpretations apply to another context with which they are familiar" (Paltridge 2012, 245).

I base the discourse analysis of the chosen text mainly on Halliday's (1985) transitivity theory. He describes transitivity as a meaning-making system by which human beings encode their experiences of the world in language via three components: processes (expressed through verb phrases), the participants in those processes, and the circumstances in which those processes take place. Succinctly put, "transitivity is simply the study of what people are depicted as doing and refers, broadly, to who does what to whom, and how" (Machin and Mayr 2012, 104). Halliday (1985) divides processes into six types: material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential. My study primarily focuses on material processes and sometimes involves relational processes. Table 2 details these two process types (for the remaining four types, see Halliday (1985) and Machin and Mayr (2012, 104–136)). For Halliday, language is a system of choices, and people make choices from a set of options (for example, choosing distinct process types and lexical items) to encode their experiences. However, while people do make choices in language use, such choice-making is not entirely free, autonomous, or rational. It is highly conditioned by the social context and cultural norms in which they are embedded (Halliday 1978). What appears as an individual choice within a linguistic system largely draws unconsciously upon a network of meaning potential shaped by social

Table 2. Transitivity Categories

Process types	Definitions	Examples
Material processes	"The basic meaning of Material processes is that some entity does something, undertakes some action" (Eggins 2005, 215).	"*paint* the wall," "*make* a cake," "*went* to Paris."
Relational processes	They express states of being or having.	"Tom *is* a student," "He *is* skinny," "He *has* a son."

Source: the author's interpretation of Eggins (2005) and Halliday (1985).

and cultural factors (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 19–31; Halliday and Hasan 1989, 3–14). Therefore, linguistic practices based on choices reflect and reproduce social relations and power dynamics, and those choices have ideological implications (Fairclough 1992). Compare, for instance, the material clause "companies *move* capital around the globe" with the relational one "capital *is* mobile [around the globe]." Although language users may not consciously make such a choice, the use of the relational process has the effect of obscuring the agents of action (in this case, the role of multinational companies in the globalization of capital) (Richardson 2007, 56). It also has the effect of presenting the globalization of capital flows as a natural and unavoidable phenomenon, "something that must be responded to and adapted to rather than something that should be questioned" (Machin and Mayr 2012, 85).

Not only does choosing how to represent what people do have ideological implications, but so does choosing how to refer to the people involved. To analyze the latter issue, the critical linguist van Leeuwen proposes "a sociosemantic inventory" for the representation of social actors (namely, participants in transitivity theory) (2008, 23). Within this comprehensive inventory, referential strategies relevant for my analysis will be introduced below. For van Leeuwen, a text can choose to personalize or impersonalize a social actor, leading readers to see the same person very differently. Personalization means the actor is referred to by a noun or pronoun "whose meaning includes the feature 'human'" (van Leeuwen 2008, 46). Personalization can be achieved using different means, for example, by referring to an actor in terms of name (the referential strategy "nomination"), or in terms of what the actor more or less permanently is (the strategy "identification"), or in terms of what the actor does, namely, the actor's role in the context (the strategy "functionalization," for example, teacher and pianist); van Leeuwen further divides identification into three subcategories. The first is classification, and it involves referring to a social actor "in terms of the major categories by means of which a given society or institution differentiates between classes of people" (2008, 42), for example, age, race, gender, and religion. The second is relational identification, which involves reference by means of an actor's personal or familial relations (for example, "wife," "a mother of three") and often functions to "manoeuvre the reader into a position of empathy or sympathy" (Hart 2014, 36). The third is physical identification, which involves reference by means of personal attributes (for example, "tall"). Impersonalization, in opposition to personalization, dilutes human characteristics. For example, texts reduce social actors to "a quality assigned to them by and in the representation" or a thing associated with them (van Leeuwen 2008, 46), for example, abstractly impersonalizing immigrants as "problems" or "burdens" or objectifying young men as "hoodies" (UK slang). Impersonalization can also help obscure agency and avoid attributing causality by, say, referring to a social actor in terms of the instrument the actor uses ("she was killed by an Israeli bulldozer"). As shown above, linguistic choices for referring to social actors help texts foreground or background different facets of identity and shape how readers perceive these actors.

Overall, given that representing what and how social actors do and how they are named is ideologically significant, I chose to combine Halliday's and van Leeuwen's theories, two effective ways of exposing ideologies behind representational practices, to form my analytical framework for unraveling representational politics in the chosen text. This analytical framework combining the

two theories is inspired by Machin and Mayr's (2013, 360–362, 365–368) examination of a television crime report. In their study (2013), they employ this framework to dissect the discursive mechanisms that construct criminals as "evil Others," which subtly foregrounds criminals' mental states while backgrounding the social structures that spur criminal activity. Their study demonstrates the great analytical utility of this framework for probing Othering politics, prompting me to adopt it to interrogate the underlying strategies for Othering India in the chosen text.

When providing a contextualized explication of the discourse of modern medicine and, particularly, the discourse of strong-state pandemic governance, the concept of intertextuality helps us position the text within broader social and cultural contexts. Fairclough (2003, 218) views the intertextuality of a text as "the presence within it of elements of other texts (and, therefore, potentially other voices than the author's own) which may be related to (dialogued with, assumed, rejected, etc.) in various way." He categorizes intertextuality into two types: manifest intertextuality and constitutive intertextuality. Manifest intertextuality refers to the overt presence of elements of other texts within a text, often marked by quotation marks, direct references, or attributions (Fairclough 1992, 104). For example, a news article quoting an economist's speech or an academic article citing previous research. By contrast, there are cases where "a text may 'incorporate' another text without the latter being explicitly cued: one can respond to another text in the way one words one's own text" (Fairclough 1992, 104). This type of intertextuality, which Fairclough labels as constitutive intertextuality, involves the ways texts implicitly draw upon existing genres, discourses, and styles (Fairclough 1992, 124). Furthermore, drawing on elements of existing texts, both explicitly and implicitly, is essentially a form of linguistic practice based on choices. As previously discussed, language choices are socially enabled and constrained, and thus, this characteristic of social embeddedness and conditioning also underlies intertextual choices. Fairclough (1992) emphasizes that intertextuality is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a social practice. Intertextual text production operates within the constraints and possibilities afforded by existing social, cultural, and ideological values. Intertextual practices thus affect and are affected by power relations and ideological processes, which suggests intertextuality as a locus of social struggle and ideological contestation.

Finally, the notions of the discursively constructed nature, relationality, fluidity, and multidimensionality of identity adopted in my study are inspired and underpinned by Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Their theory's anti-foundational stance emphasizes the rejection of any fixed or natural foundations for social phenomena. According to them (1985), society is not based on a fixed structure, predefined meanings, or pre-given identities but, rather, is constantly being reshaped through discourse. Society and its elements are not grounded in any essential or inherent laws but, instead, are contingent and continuously constructed through discursive processes. The meaning or identity of a term/signifier, therefore, is molded in different ways depending on its "relations with other signifiers within a discourse" (Epstein 2008, 7). The meaning or identity of signifiers is (temporarily) fixed through logics of equivalence and difference (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). A logic of equivalence seeks to establish a linkage among signifiers by emphasizing their similarities and suppressing differences, forming a temporarily unified narrative or identity. Conversely, a logic of difference highlights their differences, attempting to destabilize the linkage or differentiate among signifiers. While this logic can be employed to emphasize diversity and resist homogenization, it can also produce exclusion and Othering through the creation of boundaries between identities or groups. The relational nature of meaning-making and identity-making, manifested in the ongoing competition and tension between logics of equivalence and difference, renders any fixation of meaning and identity intrinsically unstable (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Meaning and identity can only be temporarily fixed by hegemonic discourse. Through this temporary fixation, hegemonic discourse defines a legitimate way of understanding social reality (Mathieu and Weinblum 2013, 188), while marginalizing alternative interpretations. However, due to the inherent instability of meaning and identity themselves, any hegemonic discourse is always subject to challenge or disruption from competing discourses (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Cow Urine, Rats, and the Ganges: The Indian People Trapped between Hopelessly Passive and "Absurdly" Overactive

In the first two analytical sections, I reveal that, through the attribution of transitive and intransitive material processes and the use of referential strategies, the examined text portrays the Indian people as either hopelessly passive and at the mercy of the pandemic or "absurdly" overzealous in their religiously informed health practices (for example, drinking cow urine to combat diseases). I then demonstrate that this Othering representation is situated within the discourse of modern medicine, which is produced through intertextual appropriation of a discourse of medical scientism and implicitly constructs a medically modern (in the Western sense) Chinese national Self. In the third analytical section, I turn to the representation of the Indian government. Through the attribution of various negated or negative material processes and the mixing of genres, the text depicts the Indian government as impotent in facing the pandemic. This depiction is accomplished by means of indirect and direct comparison with the Chinese government. I then further dissect how the Othering of the Indian government is positioned within a discourse of strong-state pandemic governance created via intertextual borrowing of the CCP's discourse of authoritarian legitimation. Such discourse contributes to the imagining of a politically powerful China vis-à-vis the impotent India, handicapped by democracy.

This first analytical section mainly investigates transitivity features in material processes attributed to India-related entities, the process type most frequently attributed to them throughout the examined text. A total of 67 material processes are attributed to them, while the other 5 process types combined have only 26 instances. To better reveal underlying transitivity patterns, I categorize India-related entities into two groups: one comprising Indian people and the other referring to India's federal government. Of these 67 material processes, 42 are assigned to Indian people and 25 to the Indian government. This section focuses on the former group. As illustrated in Table 3, the most salient transitivity feature in the representations of the Indian people is the frequent attribution of intransitive material processes to Indian people in scenes excluding cow urine, the Ganges, and rats (19 intransitive processes versus 4 transitive processes). By contrast, scenes involving cow urine, the Ganges, and rats predominantly feature transitive material processes (1 intransitive process versus 18 transitive processes). Intransitive material processes (also termed "non-transactive" by scholars like van Leeuwen (2008, 60)) means there is no object (or Goal, in Halliday's term) towards which or whom Indian actions are directed, and thus their actions are unable to make things happen, have effects on others, or bring about changes in the world (Halliday 1985, 103; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 180–182). The process verbs most frequently attributed to the Indian people, "die" and its variants, serve as an example, appearing seven times. For instance, "3 million people *died* in Uttar Pradesh alone," "many people *died* in India because of the Spanish flu," "about 17 million people *died* from the flu," and "my family *vanished* in the blink of an eye."[2] Other intransitive examples are as follows: "20 percent of Indians […] *live* in an environment where sanitation facilities are extremely lacking," "many poor people *urinate* and *defecate* anywhere," "if staying at home means they will *starve* to death, then Indian people will definitely *go* out," and "hundred million Indian people *walked* back home in groups." They are merely involved in rather basic behaviors ("die," "live," "starve," "urinate," "defecate," "go," and "walk"), with no content, effect, and therefore agency. Occasionally (four times), the text assigns transitive processes to them, but these processes are either negative actions (for example, "beat up medical staff") or self-directed actions, that is, the Goal of the action is the doer of the action themselves rather than someone or something else (for example, "they quarantined themselves in trees"). As van Leeuwen (2008, 60) argues, "the ability to 'transact' requires a certain power, and the greater that power, the greater the range of 'goals' that may be affected by an actor's actions." Clearly, the preponderance of intransitive processes paints Indian people as weak and ineffectual actors.

Table 3. Overview of Material Processes Attributed to Indian People

Scene Categories	Number of Intransitive Material Processes	Number of Transitive Material Processes
Scenes Excluding Cow Urine, the Ganges, and Rats	19	4
Scenes Involving Cow Urine, the Ganges, and Rats	1	18

Source: the author's analysis of the chosen text on Zhihu.

Notably, there are a couple of scenes where the text "generously" assigns transitive material processes to Indian people, but the portrayal remains negative. These scenes involve cow urine, the Ganges, and rats (as categorized in Table 3 as "Scenes Involving Cow Urine, the Ganges, and Rats"). Specifically, the text describes that they "superstitiously believe in" (*mixin*, 迷信) cow urine's medicinal efficacy and in the Ganges' power to "purify all dirty things" (including "viruses"), and briefly mentions their worship of rats. In these descriptions, all material processes attributed to them are transitive (with only one exception, "coming to the Temple of Rats," which is an intransitive process). In the references to cow urine, these processes are as follows. That is, "on March 14, an Indian group *organized an activity* of publicly *drinking cow urine* on a large scale to *combat the COVID-19 virus*," "*drinking cow urine* alone might not be enough; after *drinking cow urine*, they also need to *soak themselves* in cow dung to ensure everything is under control," "Indian people have personally *attested to cow urine's efficacy*," and "[a cow-urine businessperson] would *promote cow-urine beverages* across the world." In the references to the Ganges and rats, the material processes assigned to them are as follows: "for Indian people, […] as long as they *soak themselves* in the Ganges, they can *obtain the gods' care* no matter how dirty this river is," "although plagues erupted several times, Indian people still *built a temple* for the Rat God and have *raised 20,000 rats* in it," and "every day, there are thousands of Indian people coming to the Temple of Rats to reverently *worship rats*. They believe that by *eating the food* eaten by rats, they will *obtain the Rat God's blessing*. This is the Indian attitude towards viruses." According to these descriptions, Indian people are capable of engaging in various actions: actions aimed at fighting the pandemic ("organized an activity," "combat the COVID-19 virus," "attested to […] efficacy"); actions exerting influence on nature ("built a temple" and "raised 20,000 rats"), and actions interacting with God ("worship rats," "obtain the gods' care," and "obtain the Rat God's blessing"). They are also engaged in body actions to achieve specific purposes ("drinking cow urine," "soak themselves," and "eating the food") and business actions ("promote cow-urine beverages"). All these actions are transitive, meaning Indian people make things happen or affect other entities. However, obviously, while given an agentive status and portrayed as effectual, they are represented as acting upon the world in a "ridiculous" manner, a manner antithetical to contemporary hygiene common sense.

There are more instances depicting Indian people as incompatible with or antithetical to modern medical civilization. These extracts, which show how Indian people regard cow urine, can serve as examples: cow urine can "cure all diseases [*bao zhi bai bing*, 包治百病], and naturally, COVID-19 is no exception," "cure even cancer," "not only cure but also prevent COVID-19, making it a truly divine medication," and "purify even such a trivial virus [referring to COVID-19 virus]." In addition, "so many Indian people believe in the effect of cow urine," and they "drink cow urine on a large scale to combat the COVID-19 virus." Indian people are represented as using cow urine as if it were a type of medication to cure diseases, which essentially results in cow urine troubling and profaning the "legitimate" definition of medications established by modern medicine. Cow urine expands, challenges, and disturbs the "conventional" meaning of "medications" and produces a surplus of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). It "(re)activates" the fluidity and sliding of meanings fixed by modern medicine (albeit essentially temporarily) (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The constructed obsession of Indian people with cow urine disrupts the operations of modern medicine,

making it "extremely difficult to spread modern medicine to fight epidemics," as the text states, implying an incompatibility between Indian people and the modern medical world.

In addition to the general populace, the text also represents elites from the same perspective. For example, "India's Minister of Health once openly claimed [*xuancheng*, 宣称] that cow urine can cure [*zhi*, 治] even cancer." It is significant to contrast this extract with the Minister's original utterance, which was spoken in English and directly quoted by *the Times*; that is, "cow urine is used even for the treatment of incurable diseases like cancer") (Soni 2019). Note the text's exploitation of the equivocality and indeterminacy of the Chinese word "*zhi*" (治). In Chinese, the word *zhi* is polysemous, comprising several meanings such as "treat" (*zhiliao*, 治疗) and "cure" (*zhiyu*, 治愈), and its meaning is context-dependent. While the Minister's original utterance used "treat" (embedded in the circumstantial element of purpose "for the *treatment* of incurable diseases like cancer"), the text's version ("cow urine can *zhi* even cancer") utilizes the polysemous word "*zhi*" to mean "cure." Put differently, by taking advantage of the ambiguity of the word "*zhi*" in Chinese, the text substitutes "cure" for the originally used "treat," that is, substituting a description of cow urine's capability to cure for the description of cow urine's usage for treatment. Clearly, the Minister's original utterance is a relational process ("… is used even for") and not modalized, which merely describes that cow urine is applied in medical treatment and does not express certainty about cow urine's curative properties. The text's substitution restructures the original relational clause into a material one ("… cow urine can cure even cancer") that describes a specific action and its outcome. The material clause is further modalized by the modal operator "can" (*neng*, 能), which finally affirms the curative effectiveness of cow urine. In this way, the text constructs the Minister's high certitude about cow urine's curative efficacy, casting him as unscientific and ignorant.

As shown in the analysis above, the text, through various linguistic techniques, presents Indian people involved with cow urine, the Ganges, and rats as incompatible with modern medical civilization, evoking an Orientalist binary of "modern" versus "primitive." Equally important, Indian people are not only incompatible with modern civilization but also a threat to it. By dissecting a (mis)representation of a businessperson's verbal action, I now investigate how this threatening nature is constructed in a passage related to cow urine (the following section will involve its construction in the description of the Ganges). The sentence for dissection is "a cow-urine businessperson claims [*yangyan*, 扬言, a term close to the verb 'claims' but with a threatening connotation] that cow urine would surpass Coca-Cola, and that he would promote cow-urine beverages across the world." It is intriguing to compare the sentence with the businessperson's original words, which were spoken in English and directly quoted by *the Times*: "'We're going to give them [American cola brands] good competition […]' he said. 'We may also think of exporting it'" (Page 2009). First, *the Times* uses "say (said)," a "neutral structuring verb" that "introduce[s] a saying without evaluating it explicitly" (Machin and Mayr 2012, 59). But the text replaces "say" with "*yangyan*," carrying a clearly threatening connotation, an expressive metapropositional verb.[3] Second, note that, in the businessperson's original words, he uses the euphemism "give them good competition." The euphemism nominalizes his action, "compete," as "competition," transforming it from an action into an object to be given to his American competitors. As a result, the action "give" instead of "compete" is foregrounded. Besides, he uses the moderate modifier "good" to modify "competition" (instead of a modifier like "fierce" or "strong"). Such transformation and the modifier "good" work together to dilute his possible aggressiveness. But by comparison, we find that the examined text replaces the euphemism "give them good competition" with the aggressive "surpass," erasing his moderation. Third, in the clause "We may also think of exporting it," the businessperson chooses the mental process "think (of)," connoting uncertainty, and hedges his statement with "may," which indicates low modality (possibility/willingness).[4] By contrast, the text utterly removes his uncertainty and low modality and instead indicates a sense of ambition (by adding the circumstantial element of place "promote […] *across the world*" to dramatically expand the impacted geographical scope). Through these three steps, his moderate words are transformed, or "recontextualized" in van Leeuwen's terminology (2008), into provocative

utterances, and he is represented as threatening (recontextualization includes the techniques of substitution, deletion, addition, and rearrangement, the first three of which are used by the text). Fourth, in essence, the text leverages a genre of business vision statements ("[…] would surpass […] would promote […] across the world") to recontextualize the businessperson's words. Combining this genre, normally used for bright, decent, and valuable things, with the "filthy" signifier "cow urine," depicts him as symbolically tarnishing this "decent" genre and superficially copying and potentially troubling modern business operations. Moreover, note that what he challenges and threatens with cow urine is Coca-Cola — a classic symbol of modern business operations. In sum, the businessperson's threatening nature is constructed within both a modern business framework and a dichotomy of civilized-uncivilized.

In this section, I have found that generous attributions of transitive material processes to Indian people are infrequent (only four instances), with the exception of scenes including cow urine, the Ganges, and rats. Only in these "dirty" scenes does the text "generously" assign transitive processes to them — 18 transitive processes with only one intransitive process. Correspondingly, on the one hand, through the attribution of intransitive processes, the text portrays them as feeble and ineffectual actors who are passively at the mercy of the COVID catastrophe. On the other hand, through the attribution of transitive processes and interdiscursive practices, the text paints them as superficially effectual but religiously fanatic and sometimes threatening actors who affect the world in a medically ineffective and "ridiculous" manner. Put differently, they are represented as caught and torn between two extremes (hopelessly passive or "absurdly" overactive), and a vision of "normal" Indian people is virtually absent throughout the text. Equally significantly, this representation is situated within the discourse of modern medicine, where modernization (or modernity) is seen by the text as the supreme criterion, with Indian people depicted as ignorant of how to face catastrophes or live according to modern medical common sense.

Understanding Representation through Comparison: How to Name Indian and American Actors Differently

By focusing on the text's account of an Indian-American's experience of the Ganges, this section will examine, from the perspective of referential strategies, how differently Indian-related actors and American-related actors are represented to deepen the preceding transitivity analysis. The account is as follows:

> There is a doctor of Indian origin in America called Gawande who once wrote a book taking on the theme of his father's death, titled "Being Mortal" (*zuihaode gaobie*, 最好的告别). As the eldest son of a Hindu, he had to return to India to carry the casket and drink a sip of unboiled Ganges water to fulfill his duty as a son. For a man who grew up in America and graduated in medicine, the psychological pressure Gawande suffered can be imagined. Before returning to India, Gawande injected himself with all the vaccines he could think of, but Doctor *Ge* [referring to Gawande], who was armed to the teeth, was still made sick for months by this sip of Ganges water. From this book, we can appreciate how poisonous the Ganges water is.

In terms of referential strategies (van Leeuwen 2008) introduced earlier, the protagonist is named ("Gawande"), a strategy of "nomination" to personalize him (compared with, say, "an Indian-American"). He is also referred to by means of "relational identification" (specifically, his familial relations), as in "the eldest son of a Hindu" and "a son." This strategy helps humanize him and place his story within a filial piety framework, potentially creating a cultural affinity with readers influenced by Confucianism. In addition, he is referred to by functionalization (his institutional role), for example, "Doctor" and "Doctor *Ge*," which endows him with an authoritative and professional aura. Interestingly, the "*Ge*" (葛) in the name "Doctor *Ge*" is the transliteration of

the first character of his Chinese-translated surname (*Ge Wende*, 葛文德). The combination of "Doctor" and "*Ge*" — namely, *Ge Yisheng* (葛医生) — makes his name sound less "Western" and more "Chinese" and thus imparts professional authoritativeness and cultural closeness simultaneously. In addition, note the transitivity pattern in his story. Gawande's qualities, constructed through transitivity processes, partially coincide with those constructed through the above referential strategies. Put differently, to some extent, these transitivity processes and referential strategies work in tandem with each other. Specifically, this short story ascribes many transitive material processes to Gawande, for example, "*wrote a book,*" "*taking on the theme* of his father's death," "*carry the casket,*" "*fulfill his duty* as a son," "*injected himself* with all the vaccines," and "*drink a sip* of unboiled Ganges water." These transitive processes work together to portray him as capable of harnessing intelligence to engage in intellectual and physical activities and faithfully fulfill family responsibilities.

By contrast, although Indian people are referred to 44 times in the text, the above referential strategies are rarely used in these references, appearing only eight times. These eight instances involve functionalization (like the aforementioned "cow-urine businessperson" and the "Minister of Health," as well as "Health Commissioner," "clan elders," and "high-caste individuals") and nomination (namely, "Modi," who launched a "toilet revolution" (elaborated below), and "Gandhi," who "was also infected by the 1918 flu"). Note that, as shown above, these personalizing strategies are employed almost exclusively to represent elite persons (with transitivity structures portraying them as negative or passive). In representing "ordinary" Indian people, the referential strategies used always de-individualize and, more importantly, impersonalize (with only one exception, see below). For example, as Hart (2014, 34) argues, "*collectivization* can serve to impersonalize social actors" (emphasis original), and the Indian people are collectivised by the text as the "Indian poor," "adult illiterates," and "black households" (*heihu*, 黑户). They are treated as statistics, a referential strategy called "aggregation" (van Leeuwen 2008), for example, "the top 1% of the population," "250 million people," and "100 million migrant workers." And they are impersonally objectified (van Leeuwen 2008), for example, "infected cases." As mentioned above, there is a single exception in the text in which an ordinary Indian person is individualized and personalized, or more specifically, the person is classified, which, as introduced earlier, involves referring to a social actor in terms of social categories, for example, age and gender. The relevant passage describes "A 22-year-old Indian young man later recalled [the 1918 pandemic]: 'The Ganges was full of corpses. My wife was in it too. There wasn't enough wood for cremation. It is the most unforgettable moment of my life. My family vanished in the blink of an eye.'" The speaker is individualized and repeatedly "classified" (as in "22-year-old" and "young man"), which highlights his youth twice. These referential strategies are not for humanizing him nor for creating affinity, but for using this "exemplar" to show the feebleness and hopelessness of the young man, a member of the most energetic group of the nation, to make the exhibition of India's trauma and impotence more sensorially impactful and vivid.

The above investigation reveals that, overall, in the overwhelming majority of cases (36 out of 44), Indian people are not named nor functionalized, they are not individualized but "assimilated" (which includes collectivization and aggregation) (van Leeuwen 2008, 37), they are seldom personalized but usually impersonalized. Such referential strategies, in conjunction with transitivity processes, construct them as massive, indistinguishable, emotionless, voiceless, and ineffectual Others who hopelessly, passively suffer either the misery of catastrophes or the consequences of governmental incompetence (as shown below). The personalizing, functionalizing, and closeness-oriented referential strategies for referring to Gawande, an American actor, are quite rare in representing Indian people, appearing only eight times. Through these linguistic processes, an Orientalist dichotomy between civilized and uncivilized, between a "modern" medical professional and a "primitive" medical know-nothing, is thus constructed. Notably, when casting Indian people as passive and ineffectual, the text portrays the Ganges, perhaps India's most iconic symbol, as threatening by borrowing America-related elements. Specifically, it leverages Gawende's story to covertly disarticulate the signifier "Ganges" from religious discourse, erasing its sacredness and

placing it within the discourse of modern medicine, with the effect of imbuing it with a threatening meaning. With just one sip of its water, the Ganges easily sickened Gawande, a doctor from the most medically advanced country, for months, and invalidated all his vaccines. The Ganges is in opposition to the signifiers "doctor" and "vaccine," fundamental actors and key weapons, respectively, in contemporary medical civilization. In this sense, the Ganges is presented as a dangerous signifier disturbing contemporary medical civilization, which exacerbates the binary opposition between a threatening India and a "modern" world.

In addition to Gawande's story, there are more examples of appropriating American-related elements to comparatively construct India. To illustrate, I provide two examples. The first one is: "Because the Indian government at that time could not conduct detailed statistics, no one knew how many people died. In the 1950s, Kingsley Davis, the famous American demographer, estimated that the number of people who died during the [1918] pandemic in India was about 20 million, according to years of census data from India." Here, the American demographer is presented as being able to provide data that the Indian government could not, which juxtaposes the American expert's competence and professionalism with the Indian government's incompetence and inadequacy. The second example is: "A report by the Infectious Disease Dynamics Group at Johns Hopkins University shows that India will reach its peak of infection on May 5, when 250 million people will be infected." Note that while acknowledging that "epidemiologists from many countries are generally extremely pessimistic about India's future," the text specifically cites the utterance of the American organization to describe India's bleak future, a choice that in itself endows the USA with an authoritative aura, with India being positioned as the object of American medical gaze.

Overall, as elaborated in this section, it is through borrowing American-related elements that the text portrays India as a non-modern/anti-modern Other. This is evidenced by the following: a) the dichotomy between the threatening Ganges and the threatened American doctor (Gawande); b) the implicitly contrastive representation of Indian people, who are ignorant in scientific approaches to facing health disasters compared to the professional American medical doctor; c) the frequent citations of "authoritative" American data to exert a medical gaze upon India; d) the "hubristic" statements made by the aggressive Indian businessperson against Coca-Cola; among other evidence. Thus, in the domain of medicine, the Othering of India is based on leveraging the framework of modernization symbolized by the USA, with the USA projected as the embodiment and symbol of ideal modernization.

When the USA is directly or indirectly juxtaposed with and differentiated from India, the construction of China is also implicit in these juxtapositions and differentiations. Identities are relationally constructed through discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), and "the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions" (Davies and Harré 2007, 262). As Moen-Larsen (2024, 433) points out, "When we speak of others and ourselves in particular ways, we take part in constructing subject positions. […] We position others to make them understandable to us – and in positioning others, we position ourselves." Throughout the text, within the discourse of modern medicine, the text producer utilizes condescending and demeaning tones to cast India as being antithetical to the modern world. The text producer is from China, where it is implied that modern medical common sense is well embraced and modernity is so deeply ingrained in society that the text producer is naturally in a position to condescendingly gaze at Indian people and ridicule India's lack of modernity. This condescending gaze and ridicule, in and of itself, functions to position the Chinese national Self: in the domain of medicine (and perhaps in the domains of economy and science, considering the modernization of medicine as a result of economic development and scientific advancement), as a nation belonging to the American-modeled modern world. However, using the American-modeled and symbolized modernization as the gold standard to Other, India implicitly creates a hierarchical positioning in which China is more modern than India but still inferior to the USA (although China is also placed within the modern world). While such a hierarchical positioning entitles China to demean India, it also reduces China to an inferior imitator of the "desirable" USA, the ideal embodiment of modernization.

It is noteworthy that the text draws upon an existing discourse, namely the discourse of medical scientism, to construct the discourse of modern medicine. The ideology of scientism, or, as Liu (2019, 5) describes it, "the hegemony of the scientific framework," has consistently permeated China's public health governance. This dominant medical science framework implicitly or explicitly defines healing practices that cannot be framed within the paradigm of science as "superstitious," creating a hierarchical, binary framework between the "scientific" and the "superstitious" and marginalizing "non-scientific" forms of knowledge (Liu 2019, 5, 8–9). Against the backdrop of healthcare modernization, the ways different regimes approached traditional Chinese medicine (henceforth "Chinese medicine") — whose epistemological foundation significantly differs from the positivist tenets of modern Western medicine — serve as a telling example. "Having embraced Western modernity," the Nationalist regime (1911-1949) undertook efforts to establish a modern national health system modeled after the West and proposed measures intended to "eradicate the various practices of Chinese medicine completely" (Kadetz and Stanley-Baker 2022, 3). The traditional practices were seen by the regime as "antithetical to principles and practices of modern science and representative of the corrupt and superstitious feudal culture" (Fu 2022, 8). Faced with the pressure of abolition, Chinese medicine physicians and supporters launched a scientization movement that ranged from the reconciliation and adaptation of Chinese medicine to biomedical epistemologies to the employment of specific biomedical knowledge to modernize Chinese medicine practices (Lei 2014). Since the inception of CCP rule, confronted with "the relative scarcity of Western-trained doctors in rural China" (Baum 2020, 7), the regime has assumed a different stance on Chinese medicine and adopted the approach of "Combined Chinese and Western Medicine" (*zhongxi yi jiehe*, 中西医结合), which was formalized as a core principle during the first National Health Conference in 1950 (Liu 2019, 7). During that period, the CCP deemed Chinese medicine "the remnant of deep-rooted feudalism," necessitating its scientization, while deeming Western medicine as "a symbol of imperialism," requiring the purging of Western medicine's ideological elements (Liu 2019, 14–15). This integration of Chinese and Western medicine was "meant to be greater than the sum of its parts" (Kadetz and Stanley-Baker 2022, 4). The effort was primarily a process of selectively scientizing and standardizing elements of Chinese medicine practices, which were compatible with Western biomedicine and amenable to standardization according to a biomedical framework (Kadetz and Stanley-Baker 2022, 4–5; Taylor 2005). The result, which continues to influence Chinese medicine today, is that "Chinese medicine is operating within limits determined by the dominant biomedical paradigm" (Andrews 2014, 6) and no longer aligns with either its traditional roots or its fundamental Chinese nature (11), and hence "loses much of its epistemological authority" (6).

As Baum (2020, 2) argues, "throughout modern Chinese history, […] health and healing have never been […] strictly scientific endeavors." Both the Nationalist regime's attempts at abolition and the CCP regime's enforced "cross-fertilization" embody and construct an ideology and discourse of medical scientism. This discourse fundamentally reflects an authoritarian biopolitics, manifesting in the state-driven monopolization of interpretations over how health and healing should be governed by manufacturing a binary framework of the Othering of traditional medicine and the privileging of biomedicine. Turning to the text under study, it is precisely under the influence of the discourse of medical scientism and through unconscious or conscious appropriation of it that the text places Indian people's religiously-informed health practices within a rigid dichotomous framework of science versus non-science. Those practices are thereby constructed as antithetical to modern medicine, as analyzed above. In sum, the text, inadvertently or deliberately, borrows the discourse of medical scientism and, through blending an Orientalist gaze and narrative, constructs a discourse of modern medicine to pathologize the Indian people. The construction of the discourse of modern medicine is thus, in essence, a form of constitutive intertextual practice.

Transitivity Features behind the Portrayal of the Indian Government

The most conspicuous feature in the portrayal of the Indian government is the highly frequent attribution of negated material processes or material processes with negative connotations to it. Of the 25 material processes attributed to the Indian government, 19 are of this nature, which work to stress its incompetence. For example, the Indian government: "*cannot shut down* its economy for a long time for nationwide anti-epidemic work," "shut down all public transportation and asked its 100 million migrant workers to go home, but *did not provide* any means of going back home," "*cannot provide* adequate quarantine conditions for those needing to be compulsorily quarantined," "*could not conduct* detailed statistics," "*cannot eradicate the open defecation problem*," and "*cannot keep* its people at home for long." Negation is also conveyed through the mood adjunct of intensity, "only" to show counterexpectancy (suggesting its performance is far worse than expected), as in: "from the COVID-19 outbreak to the present, India has *only* tested a total of 18383 samples," and "India so far has *only* used 18000 kits of reagents." In addition, negation is expressed by utilizing metaphors of mood (Halliday 1985), that is, using the interrogative mood to realize the speech function of statements, as in: "Can you expect such an Indian government to make any anti-epidemic miracle?" As shown above, these material processes construct a narrative framework of pandemic governance in which they negatively portray the Indian government's alleged incompetence in various ways.

Its incompetence is also constructed through colloquialization and mixing language styles (a form of interdiscursive hybridity; see Fairclough 2003). For example, "only two days after the first case of COVID-19 infection had appeared, the government announced it had nailed [*gaoding*, 搞定] the virus, then did nothing." The text chooses the material process verb "*gaoding*" to describe the Indian government's activities, a colloquial word roughly close to the meaning of "solved" but with a flippant tone in Chinese. Clearly, the text mixes a colloquial expression with public health management language (for example, "the government announced"). This mixture of colloquial and formal styles helps characterize the government's actions as founded in levity and perfunctory attention to the virus. Moreover, in Chinese, this colloquial word is an abstraction that obscures what the government actually did. Does it mean the government cured "the first case of COVID-19 infection," killed the virus in a medical sense, or contained the spread of COVID-19? The colloquialism makes it impossible to verify whether the government made such an announcement. Thus, leveraging the colloquialism's vagueness and mixing different language styles, the text manages to portray an irresponsible government while circumventing the need to specify exactly how it was irresponsible. Another example is this passage: "In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Modi launched the 'Clean India Movement,' initiating [*gaoqi*, 搞起] a 'toilet revolution,' wanting to address the problem of open defecation in India." Similarly, here, the material process verb "*gaoqi*," a colloquial word close to "initiate" but with half-hearted connotations, is embedded within public health management language. The mixing of colloquial and formal styles undoubtedly diminishes the seriousness the formal discourse would normally signal. More importantly in these two examples, unlike the neutral words "solve" and "initiate," the levity connoted by *gaoding* and the half-heartedness connoted by *gaoqi* both communicate the subjective reactions of the Indian actors involved, reactions that were unknowable to the text producer but were subtly added. According to van Leeuwen (2008), in representing social events, elements like reactions ("participants' subjective reactions to the activities") (2008, 19), evaluations, or legitimations may be added to "what happens" by texts to transform or "recontextualize" social reality. In the above two examples, the addition of reactions is achieved by using the two colloquial words, ostensibly to informalize the text and make it sound more playful and relaxed, but exercising the ideological power of misrepresenting the government's activities and essentially Othering it.

Throughout the text, there are two instances of explicitly comparing India and China to negatively construct the former. The first instance is "over the years, China has accumulated a huge amount of foreign exchange reserves and has earned $3.1 trillion of familial wealth

[*jiadi*, 家底]. But India *is* different. The Indian government *owes* $1.4 trillion in foreign debt, which *is* 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" (italics added). Clearly, the text consecutively assigns to the Indian government relational processes ("is" three times and "owes," as emphasized above) to depict its fiscal situation. Here, assigning 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 assigns to China two Material processes ("China *accumulated* a huge amount" and "*earned* [*zanxia*, 攒下] $3.1 trillion") instead of relational processes (for example, "China *has* a huge amount" and "China *has* $3.1 trillion"). Compared with relational processes, material processes ("accumulated" and "earned" (*zanxia*)) enable the text not only to introduce China's financial status but, more importantly, to additionally evaluate China as competent and diligent. Note the use of colloquialisms again, as in "*zanxia*" (close to the word "earned" but with a strong goal-driven connotation) and "*jiadi*" (meaning "familial wealth," evoking a sense of national community). The colloquialization brings a sense of informality to the presentation of China's fiscal situation, which helps personify it and make it approachable, endowing it with the above qualities (competent and diligent). By comparison, the text leverages a genre of formal fiscal language to describe India's fiscal status (for example, using jargon like "external debt," "its annual interest on external debt," and "GDP"), which contributes to portraying it as an inanimate and lifeless object for "statistical gaze."

The second instance of direct comparison is the sentence: "within the two-month, life-saving golden time [*huangjin qiumin qi*, 黄金救命期, probably referring to February and March, 2020] that China had struggled to buy [*qiang chu*, 抢出], the Indian government did nothing." Instead of directly and simply phrasing the time as "within February and March" or "over the past two months," the text uses three modifiers ("two-month," "life-saving," and "golden") and one clause ("which China had struggled to buy") to modify the two months. This complex modification enables the juxtaposition between China's proactiveness and competence (as in the material process "struggled to buy") with India's passivity and incompetence (as in the negated material process "did nothing"). The complex modification also functions to imply that China's combat against the pandemic was not only for its own benefit but also for the benefit of India, which wasted the opportunity. It subtly transforms the temporally sequential relationship between two events (China's and India's anti-epidemic activities) into a narrative of China's self-sacrifice and altruism. Therefore, as both instances show, the Indian government is described as an incapable and irresponsible foil for the Chinese government through the use of transitivity, genres, and modification.

While there are only two explicit comparisons between the Indian and Chinese governments in the text, there are many instances where the latter is used as an implicit yardstick to assess the former. As analyzed earlier, the text utilizes many negated material processes of the Indian government. It appears that to the text producer, these material processes, if not negated, are the exact actions that a competent government should effectively implement (and that the Indian government lacked the capacity to do so). Put differently, these actions are desirable and "negated material processes of positive value" (Soich 2016, 228). These actions involve: a) "lockdowns" (the emphases on "shutting down its economy for a long time," "shutting down all public transportation," and "keeping its people at home" are different manifestations of a lockdown); b) large-scale testing to detect infections (the advocacy for this action is reflected in the mockery of the Indian government's limited testing capacity — merely 1338 samples per day nationwide, with only 100 testing slots available in the capital, having so far "only tested a total of 18383 samples," and "only used 18000 kits of reagents" in total); and c) "compulsory quarantine" (the text derides India's inability to "provide adequate quarantine conditions"), among others actions/measures. Indeed, such negation inherently implies comparison and affirmation: these actions/measures, which the Indian government is perceived as lacking the capacity to effectively implement, are precisely those that are frequently proclaimed by Chinese mouthpieces as having been competently implemented by the Chinese government. Specifically, mouthpieces commend China's anti-epidemic efforts and

achievements generally from perspectives such as lauding the decisiveness of the CCP's decision to lock down Wuhan as well as its capacity to implement the lockdown effectively (China Central Television 2020a; Liu 2020), applauding the efficiency of completing all-resident nucleic acid testing in many cities (Xinhuanet 2020c), and acclaiming the rapid construction and orderly operation of mandatory quarantine centers (*fangcang*, 方舱) (Chinanews 2020). According to the CCP's mouthpieces, under the leadership of the CCP, the vigorous implementation of these measures (lockdown, mass nucleic acid testing, mandatory centralized quarantine, etc.) was a key factor in China's "victory" over the pandemic (Xinhuanet 2020b). Against this backdrop, China has been portrayed by some domestic official media outlets such as the *Global Times* as an international paragon of controlling the epidemic, claiming that other countries (such as the USA) should "copy China's homework" (*chao zuoye*, 抄作业) (Dubravčíková 2020; Huang 2021, 11), which means "implement[ing] the same measures as China" (Dubravčíková 2020). It is precisely within such a discursive context that whether these measures are adopted and how they are effectively implemented have been widely employed as a critical yardstick for judging other countries' anti-epidemic performance. Thus, unsurprisingly, as observed in the text under study, these measures are intertextually drawn on by the text producer to comparatively gaze at the Indian government, leading to the inferiorization of the Indian government within an intertextual relationship between state media texts and a Zhihu text.

Moreover, the text draws on the underlying political framework that underpins these measures to gaze at India. The implementation of these measures is not carried out in isolation but is deeply embedded within the political framework constructed by the CCP. They are, in essence, operational manifestations of the CCP's forceful mobilization of bureaucratic apparatuses and party machinery, grassroots control systems, and resource-marshalling mechanisms within its authoritarian system, or, put differently, they embody an authoritarian strong-state model. This authoritarian strong-state model is packaged by mouthpieces as "the socialist governance system with Chinese characteristics," and China's pandemic response is claimed to have demonstrated "the systemic advantages of socialism" (Xinhuanet 2020a; Yan 2020), which are interpreted as the fundamental reason for China's "victory" over the pandemic (China Central Television 2020b; Qiushi 2020). These and other COVID-19 narratives, widely crafted by state mouthpieces, constitute a discourse of authoritarian legitimation for consolidating the CCP's rule. Such discourse penetrates and inscribes itself into popular discourse, shaping the collective understanding of COVID-19-related social realities. Against this discursive backdrop of mythologizing and sanctifying the strong-state model, the text under examination employs this model as the fundamental criterion for comparing nations' pandemic responses and essentially characterizes the Indian government as "the weak government of India." Relatedly, it offers resultant mockeries such as "the feeble control over the grassroots," "weak mobilization capacity," and "the lowest-ranking social control capacity worldwide," which, in the text's view, seem to account for the Indian government's inability to effectively implement the aforementioned measures. The characterization of the Indian government's impotence is rooted in the appropriation of the official hegemonic narrative of China's "powerful" handling of COVID-19, leading to a weak-strong binary framework. In this sense, the Othering of the Indian government is situated within a discourse of strong-state pandemic governance, whose production is based on constitutive intertextual practices. It borrows the discourse of authoritarian legitimation constructed by mouthpieces and incorporates the borrowed discourse into a disparaging political imaginary of a foreign nation for the sake of nationalist identity construction. It is worth mentioning that the discourse of authoritarian legitimation already contains certain nationalist elements since it is partially constructed through contrasts in handling the pandemic between China and the West, as exemplified by the claim nudging the USA to "copy China's homework" (Dubravčíková 2020). The "innovation" of the discourse of strong-state pandemic governance lies in its shift of focus: while borrowing from the discourse of authoritarian legitimation, it also shifts the object of comparison from Western nations to a non-Western nation, India. The investigation of the intertextual relationship between the two

discourses has helped reveal how the CCP's self-legitimation discourse is reproduced through recontextualization in popular discourse and gains new ideological weight across different discursive fields.

The discursive practices, official or unofficial, of comparing nations regarding their COVID-19 responses — and, as in one such practice, the construction of a discourse of strong-state pandemic governance — are not accidental. Their emergence should be understood within the political context of the CCP's sensitivity to the pressure on its legitimacy. The CCP's rule is not based on election-based procedural legitimacy but on performance legitimacy, which means its legitimacy "relies on accomplishing concrete goals such as economic growth, social stability, strengthening national power, and 'good governance' (governing competence and accountability)" (Zhu 2011, 123). To showcase its performance, whenever there are common challenges faced by the globe, the CCP's propaganda apparatuses and CCP-indoctrinated individuals engage in discursive practices that contrast the performance of China's authoritarian system with that of democratic nations (both Western and non-Western), just as its mouthpieces and the text under study did during COVID-19. Such contrastive discursive practices function to emphasize that a Chinese-model authoritarian system is more effective, more beneficial to social well-being, and more suited to China. Through these practices, the CCP, to a certain extent, defuses its anxieties about its legitimacy and defines China's national identity on a political level — that is, a powerful and independent nation that does not blindly follow Western-modeled democracy but forges and adheres to a political system truly suited to its national conditions (*guoqing*). In this sense, the text under study is but a microcosm of a discursive struggle to strengthen the CCP's performance legitimacy and its national identity narrative. In the discourse of strong-state pandemic governance, India, the world's largest democracy, is constructed through many implicit and explicit comparisons as an embodiment of weakness and an impotent foil that helps define the capacity and efficacy of China's authoritarian system. Notably, the weakness is assigned not only to India but also to all democracies and the democratic system itself. In this sense, India should be treated as a symbol signifying the condition of being "handicapped-by-democracy" and thus a politically weak Other employed to imagine a politically powerful China.

Note the discursive representation of the USA. Although there are not many direct comparisons between the Chinese and American governments, it is not difficult to find that the text essentially categorizes both the USA and India into the same type of anti-epidemic model, offering similar assessments. For example, when elaborating on the "weak government," the text says, "[…] the determination and capability of the Indian government in handling the epidemic are even worse than those of the United States." This fundamentally groups the Indian government and the U.S. government into the same category, with the former being even worse than the latter. Therefore, it is not surprising that the text producer believes that due to the weakness of the US government, the US anti-epidemic performance has been "simply terrible" (*jianzhi zaogao tou le*, 简直糟糕透了), and they feign sorrow by lamenting that China "is unable to save" either the USA or India.

Clearly, the discursive representation of the USA oscillates between a weak Other within the discourse of strong-state pandemic governance and the symbol of ideal modernization within the discourse of modern medicine. Its different representations serve the text's different objectives: to stigmatize India's non-modernity through the creation of the myth of American-modeled modernization and to justify China's authoritarianism through a satire of democratic systems. In this process, the text constructs different Chinese national Selves within a dynamic triangular relationship between China, India, and the USA. In the domain of medicine (and perhaps also in the domains of economy and science), a modern Chinese Self (modern in the American sense) is imagined vis-à-vis India through constructing its lack of modernity and by implicitly situating China alongside the West within the modern world. In the domain of politics, a politically powerful national Self is defined in opposition to a feeble Other, encumbered by democracy, whether from the non-West like India or the West like the USA. To sum up, by interrogating how the text shapes

different Chinese national Selves within the complex dynamics of a triangular nexus between China, the non-West, and the West, I unveil the multidimensionality, fluidity, and discourse-dependent nature underlying national identity-shaping in the Chinese social context.

Finally, it is necessary to mention a factor that may have influenced the hostility, nationalist sentiments, and Othering politics towards India: geopolitical relations. To better grasp the background against which these two discourses were constructed, it is important to consider recent developments in China-India relations. Over the past few years, tensions between the two countries have escalated, particularly with multiple incidents along their disputed border. For instance, in 2017, the Doklam standoff saw Indian and Chinese troops engage in a prolonged face-off (Kellogg 2017); in 2020, border clashes in the Galwan Valley resulted in heavy casualties on both sides (Kim 2020); India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) has heightened China's suspicions, with the US-led alliance viewed by Beijing as an "Asian version of NATO" aiming to contain China (Rasheed 2020). These developments have created an environment in which nationalist sentiments are easily inflamed, as illustrated by the fact that eight out of the ten most upvoted posts on Zhihu discussing India's pandemic are enmeshed with nationalism. By understanding these material changes, it seems to become clear that the creation of the text under study and its discursive practices about India are not divorced from the geopolitical dynamics shaping Sino-Indian bilateral relations.

Discussion and Conclusion

As analyzed above, within a discourse of strong-state pandemic governance, the representation of the Indian government is based on a logic of making contrasts and accentuating a supposed gap with the Chinese government, or, in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) terms, is based on a "logic of difference." As for the representation of Indian people, as previously shown, they are perceived as floating between desperate passivity and absurd overactivity. Within the discourse of modern medicine, religiously fanatical Indian people affect the world in a "ridiculous" manner, contradictory to modern medical notions, with Indian-related signifiers (cow urine and the Ganges) invested with meanings that disturb contemporary medical or business practices. Their representation is thus anchored by their incompatibility with and exclusion by modern civilization, or put differently, on a logic of difference. Therefore, I argue that the text's representation of India (the Indian government and Indian people) is a series of discursive practices underpinned by a logic of difference.

Since the 1978 economic reform, post-Mao China has been characterized by the following two features: "On the one hand, China has modeled on the developed West to marketize its economic system and enthusiastically participated in the Western-led globalization, embracing the neoliberal philosophy in all aspects of society; on the other hand, China has tried to stick to its political system and revive Chinese culture and traditions" (Feng 2023, 3). These features seem to have profoundly influenced how some Chinese people have repositioned the national Self and re-perceived the non-West and the West. The intertwining of these features appears to have shaped a dual ambivalence and Otherness in the formation of the Chinese national Self, as shown in the text. China, as a non-Western nation, despises the non-modern non-West. Simultaneously, it admires and desires the medical (and perhaps also economic and scientific) modernity of the West, but needs to disparage and spurn Western political modernity (if the democratic system is considered a form of political modernity). China identifies neither fully with the West nor with the non-West. Grappling with a dilemma of identity, it is haunted by an ambivalent and self-contradictory sense of national identity. In the discourse of national identity, this characteristic may be unique to developmental authoritarian regimes like China, Vietnam, and Singapore, where ruling parties mythologize Western-modeled economic modernization to sustain development while firmly maintaining their authoritarian political systems.

Through the case of a textual portrayal of India and using a linguistic perspective, the study enriches our understanding of the representational politics of Othering non-Western countries in Chinese nationalist narratives, an issue that has been relatively less explored in comparison to the issue of the Othering of the West. Unlike most studies in the relatively limited literature on the Othering of the non-West, my study examines the politics of Othering and Chinese national self-identification within a dynamic triadic relationship between China, the non-West, and the West. It effectively presents the intrinsic unfixity and multidimensionality in the negotiation of national identity. As the second contribution, my study builds on previous research, particularly Lams' (2017) linguistically grounded approach, shifting the focus to explore the Othering practices of a text from a non-official social media platform — a discourse field often overlooked within existing scholarship. It investigates how this non-official text intertextually engages with pre-existing official discourses (namely the state-crafted discourse of authoritarian legitimation and the discourse of medical scientism, which is fundamentally constructed through the CCP's authoritarian biopolitics). This study contributes new insights into China's Othering of the non-West within the discursive entanglement of official and non-official narratives. It enhances our understanding of how official ideologies filter into and imprint themselves in non-official discursive arenas for their continued reproduction. The third contribution involves Orientalism. Inspired by previous scholarship examining how China imagines its own modernity through Othering the non-West as non-modern (Liu 2018; Shi and Liu 2019), this study extends this line of inquiry by scrutinizing how nested Orientalism operates specifically within the domain of medicine. I illustrate how the examined text uses the lens of Western-defined medical modernity to construct India as medically non-modern while positioning China as modern. My study provides a new and nuanced perspective on how Orientalist discourses are reconfigured and reproduced within a specific social domain in the Chinese context.

Disclosure. None.

Notes

1 For example: "Will India's out-of-control pandemic affect China?" "India's daily COVID-19 death toll peaks at over two thousand. Why is this causing crematoriums to be overwhelmed?" "Has the ADE effect occurred during this COVID-19 outbreak in India?"
2 Italics added by the author for emphasis; same below.
3 It marks a text producer's own "interpretation of a speaker" (Machin and Mayr 2012, 60).
4 Mental processes mainly involve processes of feeling, sensing, and thinking, dealing with affection, perception, and cognition (Halliday 1985).

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