
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Chinese Citizens' Impression of India and the Influencing Factors: An Empirical Study Based on a Survey in 2020

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ABSTRACT

Impressions towards foreign countries increasingly play an important role in international relations. While much research has been conducted on other countries' impressions of China and China's impressions of European and American countries, little research has been conducted on Chinese citizens' impressions of India, which is also a mega-developing country. By exploring Chinese citizens' impressions and the influencing factors towards India, it is important to enrich both research and foreign policy formulation in the area of international trust. This study uses descriptive analysis and logistic regression modelling to investigate the factors influencing Chinese citizen's impressions of India through the framework of social identity, political efficacy, political participation, media socialisation, and intergroup contact, based on data from the India sub-subject of the public questionnaire survey conducted by the 2020 'Chinese View of the European Union (EU)' project. The study's findings show that patriotic tendencies are the most influential factor in Chinese citizens' impressions of India. The study results show that variables such as patriotic tendencies, social satisfaction, frequency of internet use, and religious acceptance strongly influence Chinese citizens' impressions of India. In contrast, the hypotheses of some theoretical variables need to be further confirmed as Chinese citizens' impressions of India are slightly lower than those of other large countries such as the US, Japan, and Russia.

KEYWORDS

Foreign Impressions; Sino-Indian Relations; Social Identity; Questionnaires

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1. Introduction

The foreign impression is a sum of beliefs, ideas, and opinions towards a specific country, and it represents a simplification of information and imagination related to that country, which is also a result of the attempt to grasp the mass data of a country through processing and framing (Gertner and Kotler 2004). In international relations, the foreign impression is important in foreign policy making. In the context of international cooperation, a positive impression towards a specific country will increase mutual trust and facilitate cooperation; during the conflict, the successfully projected impression of courage and resolute will increase the possibility of concession and compromise made by the opponent. Therefore, to keep a favourable impression in other countries, most states take the construction and projection of self-image seriously. Although it is hard for the masses to participate in the foreign policymaking process, they can still influence foreign policy through many means such as voting, protest, and boycott. Therefore, the foreign impression of the public has a significant influence.

China and India are the only countries with a population of over one billion, and they are two Asian civilisations living next to each other with a thousand-year history. India is an important country in China's neighbourhood diplomacy. In the 70 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India, diplomatic relations between the two countries have remained generally positive, despite occasional differences. The two governments have attached great importance to bilateral relations in recent years. Many high-level dialogue mechanisms have been established between the Chinese and Indian governments,

including the China-India Economic and Strategic Dialogue, the China-India Border Representatives Meeting, which represents the highest level of bilateral communication, the China-India Security and Counter-Terrorism Dialogue, and the China-India Strategic Dialogue.

Along with the changes in the world order and the restructuring of international relations in recent years, China and India have emerged one after another to occupy more and more weight in Asia and even the world. Their perceptions and aspirations for national relations have undergone more apparent changes. Although China and India are both Asian economies and growing world powers that cannot be ignored, their realistic external goals and paths of achievement have diverged significantly. As the world's second-largest economy, China's rise has been hampered not by South Asia and the Indian region but by the United States, which is more interested in establishing a peaceful neighbourhood to achieve economic take-off and a leap in political influence. On the other hand, India has pinned its vision of political and economic power on the United States, believing that the rise of China has limited India's voice and influence in Asia and even the world and has become more evident in the evolution of the Modi administration's policies. Since the Modi administration came to power, the Modi administration has been more concerned with the impact of individual events on the prospects of India-China development than the previous Singh administration was with the overall dynamics of India-China relations, i.e., the 'issue by issue Diplomacy' strategy (Hailin 2018). It is against this backdrop that Sino-Indian relations have gradually deteriorated. The casualties of the 15 June 2020 conflict in the Galwan Valley were a product of the deterioration of relations between the two countries, a continuation of the 18 June 2017 border clashes in Donglang, and a break with the decades-long non-use of hot weapons between India and China since 1987. The Modi administration's assertiveness and 'issue by issue Diplomacy' strategy have influenced China's strategy toward India in the new era, and the realities of the bilateral relationship call for an updated study of China's impressions of India. How does the Chinese public perceive India? What is the overall perception of India as a country and a citizen? What are the factors that influence the Chinese public's perception of India?

Based on the history and current state of Sino-Indian relations, this study focused on Chinese citizens' impressions of India in 2020. It focuses on the impact of key variables such as social identity, intergroup contact, political participation, media socialisation, and socio-economics on Chinese urban citizens' impressions of India. Data analysis and significance tests are used to explore the elements and extent of the influence of impressions of the two countries, which is important for enriching the research and formulating foreign policy in the field of international trust.

2. Existing research and explanatory framework on the foreign impression

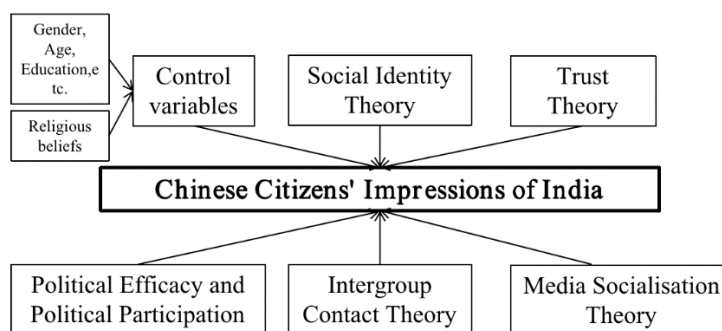
The impression is important in international affairs. Almost all the mainstream schools of international relations emphasise the necessity of maintaining a positive national image. Realists such as Han J. Morgenthau (1948) believe that status is not decided by our actual appearance but by our image in the other's mind, although this impression might not be accurate and even be distorted. Realists view a state's reputation as a different origin of power and argue that an excellent national reputation can increase national power. On the other hand, Robert O. Keohane (2005) points out that even for egoism, possessing a good reputation is very valuable because it could make government join the profitable international regime more easily, and those who have a bad reputation will pay the cost of the failed agreement. Furthermore, in world politics, the importance of reputation acts as a stimulating factor that encourages states to act according to the norm. Hence, the state needs to pay attention to self-image in the international society and maintain a good reputation in the relative realm. No matter security competition or trade cooperation, the projection and reception of impression will occur as long as interaction exists. Moreover, thus, impression management has significant implications for the achievement of foreign policy aims and the creation of a favourable external environment. On the state level, in order to influence the decision-making of others, the projection of elaborately designed impressions is taken seriously rather than releasing an unpolished national impression. Thus, the state always projects a fake image by manipulating the index and signal, acting forcefully in the conflict to compel the opponent, and behaving friendly and responsibly to strive for a favourable clause in the negotiation (Jervis 1989).

At the same time, the foreign image is essential to the masses' attitude. Masses' foreign image also poses an unneglected influence on foreign relations. The foreign image hints when the masses assess their country's foreign relations and policy. When the masses have a positive image of a given country, they intend to welcome a friendly foreign policy towards that country. On the contrary, when the impression of a given country tends to be negative, a more aggressive policy is supported to a more considerable extent, especially when a bilateral dispute happens; it is easier for them to demand the government response toughly (Hurwitz and Peffley 1999). In foreign policymaking, the masses' foreign image influences two aspects. On the one side, the public's demand for a stricter policy based on the negative image would limit the space and freedom for policy making. On the other hand, in the scene of a crisis, in order to demonstrate the resolution and increase the credibility of the signal to push the opponent to comprise, political leaders can also make use of the public's negative foreign image, decide to escalate the situation to produce the domestic audience cost to higher the cost of concession (Fearon 1994).

Research on foreign impressions. Paul R. Brewer studied the impressions of other countries in a random sample of the US population and found that age, party factors, political trust, and social trust influenced the impressions to some extent. At the same time, variables such as gender, income, and ethnicity did not significantly correlate with impressions and trust in other countries (Brewer et al. 2004). Benno Torgler examined people's impressions of and trust in the United Nations in different parts of the world, using a random sample of 38 countries. In this extensive cross-country survey, Torgler found that political trust impacts country-specific perceptions and the effectiveness of government and political institutions and that this impact varies between developed and developing countries. Torgler also adds the influence of variables such as social trust, corruption (a measure of government capacity to govern), geographical factors, and globalisation trends on changes in perceptions of the UN and levels of trust (Torgler 2008). Although fewer results are focused on Chinese people's attitudes and impressions of India, results on Chinese people's impressions and perceptions of other countries also bring experience and reflection. In 2007 and 2008, the Institute of European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (IES) conducted two national surveys on 'Chinese people's international outlook', in the form of questionnaires and interviews, on 'Chinese people's perceptions of the European Union and Sino-European relations.' The survey examined Chinese people's impressions of Europe based on variables such as age, gender, occupation, geography, economic status, education level, travel experience, and general knowledge of Europe and China (Zhou and Dong 2008). By controlling for the age, gender, education level, and economic status of individual Chinese scholars, Dong Lisheng (2011) analyses Chinese scholars' perceptions of China-Europe relations and the factors influencing them. Cognitive process variables such as impressions of the EU, sources of information, whether one is involved in China-EU academic acquisition, whether one's research involves Europe and whether one travels to Europe significantly impact China-EU relations. Chen Dingding et al. (2011) also used the 2010 survey 'Chinese view on European Union (EU)' to analyse the primary sources of international trust among Chinese urban residents. Age, family economic status, and education level all significantly positively impact international trust. Age, household economic status, and educational attainment all significantly positively affected international trust, while party membership and residency in Beijing did not significantly affect international trust. The study concludes with a further analysis of the importance of foreign perceptions and trust in formulating government foreign policy.

After summarising previous research findings, it can be found that basic information about individuals, such as age, occupation, gender, place of residence, education level, party membership, economic status, and so on, the effectiveness of government governance, such as the degree of corruption; and knowledge and experience such as the degree of general knowledge about other countries and the degree of contact with people in other countries all influence people's perceptions of other countries to a greater or lesser extent. This study draws rationalisation variables from the excellent results of previous scholars on foreign impressions, and then adds key-type important variables in the context of the historical background affecting the relationship between China and India, and attempts to explain the critical factors of Chinese people's impressions of India in the following dimensions.

Figure 1
Explanatory framework of Chinese citizens' impressions of India



Source: Made by the authors.

Social Identity Theory. Do differences in an individual's identification with different countries cause differences in the perception of their impressions? The explanatory power of Social Identity Theory (SIT) answers this question very well. Social identity theory suggests that the pursuit of self-esteem drives individuals to join groups and seek positive self-identity within them (Tajfel and Turner 2004; Tajfel et al. 1979). At the same time, the pursuit of self-esteem in groups makes in-groups assign negative characteristics to out-groups out of the need to promote positive identity, leading to an increase in intergroup cognitive differences

(Mercer 1995). As an important attribution of individual group identity, the nation is the main unit of in-group positivity and intergroup competition for individuals (Bloom 1993). Therefore, pursuing a positive group identity intensifies interstate competition and induces international conflict. It has been shown that citizens with more positive perceptions and a love of self-nation are more likely to generate negative attitudes toward other countries (Van der Noll and Dekker 2016). It is, therefore, reasonable to propose the hypothesis that Chinese citizens' evaluation of social satisfaction within the country, their sense of identity, and self-satisfaction with the country all have a significant impact on the perception of India:

H1: *The more satisfied people are with the social situation in China, the more positive their impression of India is.*

H2: *The higher the propensity for national identity, the more negative the impression of India is.*

H3: *The more satisfied people are with themselves (self-esteem), the more negative their impression of India is.*

Trust Theory. In contrast to social identity theory, trust theory directly impacts the degree of impressions between countries. Trust in others leads to positive attitudes, while suspicion and doubt tend to have a negative impact. Trust theory suggests that the more trust people have in the behaviour of others, the more likely they are to have friendly expectations of their neighbourhood (Inglehart 1991), and the more trust people have in other countries, the more likely they are to have expectations of the international community (Huddy and Khatib 2007). Thus, the rationalisation hypothesis can be made:

H4: *The more trust in other people, the more positive the impression of India.*

H5: *The more trust in other countries, the more positive the impression of India.*

Political Efficacy and Political Participation. Political efficacy refers to an individual's perception of his or her political ability and usually refers to an individual's perception of the influence of his or her participation behaviour on government, policy, and all political systems (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1971, 187). A higher sense of political efficacy means that more people believe their political participation influences political decision-making. Their recognition of government officials and even political subjects in their own countries increases, while their recognition of other countries decreases relatively (Kim 2015). Political participation refers to the critical factors for individuals to influence government decisions, and elections are effective policy participation. The more active the public is in political participation and the more opportunities for participation, the relatively stronger the political recognition and satisfaction of citizens (Zhong 2014). Thus, based on established theory, it is hypothesised that:

H6: *The more negative the impression of India among the people who think elections are important*

H7: *The more negative the impression of India among the people who have participated in elections*

Intergroup Contact Theory. Intergroup contact theory is based on psychologist Allport's 'intergroup contact hypothesis'. Allport believed increased contact between groups would dissolve intergroup boundaries and gradually eliminate group misunderstandings and discrimination. Intergroup contact helps people to understand the realities of the external environment, eliminates discrimination and prejudice against the unknowns of the external space, and thus generates a favourable perception of the external group environment (Pettigrew and Tropp 2005). Intergroup contact theory has been widely used to explain how barriers and prejudices between different races or ethnic groups can be overcome, from the 'ping pong diplomacy' between countries to the mutual study visits between universities in different countries. The intergroup contact of Chinese citizens can be measured through their experience abroad and their exposure to foreigners. Hypotheses can be formulated:

H8: *The more positive the impression of India is for people who have had the experience of going abroad.*

H9: *The more positive the impression of India is for people exposed to foreigners.*

Media Socialisation Theory. Media socialisation is one of how politics is socialised, and the public's perception of other countries is influenced by media socialisation (Buckingham 1997). With the Internet being the main channel of media socialisation today, the frequency with which people access international knowledge and the type of knowledge they acquire on channels such as the Internet somewhat affects their perception of India. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H10: *The more concerned people are about international news, the more negative their impression of India is.*

H11: *The more people use the Internet to learn about external information each week, the more negative their impression of India is.*

H12: *The more people care about India, the more positive their impression of India is.*

In addition, due to the importance of religiosity in country-specific studies on India, this study uses *religious beliefs* as a control variable to see if religion is among the significant critical variables in Chinese citizens' impressions of India, and hypotheses are made.

H13: *The more religious people are, the more positive their impressions of India are.*

3. Data, measurements, and research findings

3.1 Data collection

The data for the analysis of this study came from a public questionnaire survey conducted by the project team of the 'Chinese view on European Union (EU)' project. The survey was completed in November 2020 in six typical Chinese cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Xi'an, and Nanning, which cover a wide range of geographical and economic development differences in China. A multi-stage probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling method was used to select the sample, with a total of 3,000 valid samples, of which 500 were collected from each city. Respondents were all urban residents with local household registration, aged 18-74. Specifically, the average age of respondents in this data was 38.8 years ($SD=11.9$), and the gender ratio was similar to that of the total Chinese population (53.9% male); the average years of education was 14.64 years ($SD=2.942$), slightly higher than the national average for urban residents, with 43.8% of respondents having a bachelor's degree or above. Regarding political affiliation, 11.2% (335) of the respondents were members of the Communist Party, and 8.0% (241) were members of the Communist Youth League, similar to the distribution of political affiliation among urban residents nationwide. Regarding annual income, 72.9% of respondents had an annual income of less than RMB120,000 in 2019, with 40.0% distributed in the RMB60,000-120,000 range. In terms of employment, the employment rate of the sample was 93.4%. The top three work units were private or privately owned enterprises (55.7%), state-owned enterprises (20.3%), and institutions (8.5%), and the types of employment were mainly middle management in offices (28.8%), professional and technical staff (accountants, teachers, lawyers, and so on 24.5%) and general non-manual work (self-employed, clerks, and so on, 22.2%). The above distributions are broadly similar to the proportional distribution of urban residents nationwide.

Questionnaire structure. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 37 question categories with 122 items. The content covers the respondents' impressions and perceptions of important countries such as India, the USA, Japan, Russia, Switzerland, and Korea, which made it possible for us to conduct this study. The questionnaire also included questions related to the respondents' social and cultural values, media use, personal background, and other relevant issues. From the questionnaire data, we have created a new database containing 33 groups of variables and 3000 cases related to the content of the study for comparative analysis in this study. The analysis software used in this study was SPSS 26.0.

3.2 Operationalised measurement

Before analysing the factors influencing Chinese citizens' impressions of India, we need to conceptualise and measure the influencing factors. Based on the analysis and collation of the existing data, combined with the analysis and summary of variables from the existing literature, the existing data were combined into an analytical framework consisting of five main components: social identity theory, trust theory, political efficacy, and political participation, media socialisation and intergroup contact theory, each of which contains several independent variables were used to measure the degree of influence on impressions of India.

Social identity theory is measured by four variables. First, the social satisfaction and security satisfaction variables are derived from question 94 of the questionnaire, which asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with society on five dimensions: 'economic situation', 'employment situation', 'environment', 'social welfare', and 'social security' (recoded from 1 to 4 to indicate very dissatisfied to very satisfied). We used principal component analysis to extract two common factors from these five indicators, the values shown in Table 2, with factor 1 named 'social satisfaction' and factor 2 named 'security satisfaction'. The concept of national identity is based on Mikael Hjerm's research (1998), and we define national identity as the respondents' sense of identification with China. The variables are based on question 87 of the questionnaire, which asks respondents to rate the statement 'I am proud to be Chinese', and the recorded responses are assigned values ranging from 1 to 4 in a fixed order, where 1 means strongly disagree and 4 means strongly agree. The self-esteem variable is derived from one of the items in Rosenberg's Self-esteem scale (SES) (2015), question 91 of the questionnaire, which asks respondents to answer the question 'Do you agree that 'in general, I am satisfied with myself?'' The recorded responses were distributed in a fixed order from 1 to 4, where 1 means strongly disagree, and 4 means strongly agree.

Table 2
Factor analysis of 'social satisfaction' and 'security satisfaction'

* Principal component analysis	Mean	Factor1	Factor2
economic situation	2.95	0.723	-
employment situation	2.84	0.697	-
environment	2.87	0.657	-
social welfare	2.74	0.718	-
social security	3.30	-	0.877

*All passed the KMO and Bartlett's test; values for extracted components less than 0.6 are omitted in this table.

Source: Made by the authors.

Trust theory is measured by two variables. For trust in other countries, we used question 97, which asked respondents to rate 'In general, China can trust other countries', and for interpersonal trust, we used question 92, which asked respondents to answer 'Do you agree that most people are trustworthy?'. Both questions were recoded to give responses in a fixed order from 1 to 4, with higher values indicating a more positive response.

Political efficacy and political participation were measured by two variables. Respondents' perceptions of the importance of elections were measured through question 79, which asked respondents to rate 'Do you feel that the right to vote (to vote for a committee or grassroots deputies) is very important to you?' The responses were recoded and assigned a value of 1-4, where 1 means not at all important, and 4 means very important. Respondents' participation in grassroots elections was measured through three sub-stems of question 80 of the questionnaire. This question investigated respondents' participation in the past five years in the elections of district and county people's congresses, residents' committees, and owners' committees. The responses to the three sub-questions were combined into one. If respondents who had participated in one of the three elections in the past five years were assigned a value of 1, they were assigned a value of 0.

Media socialisation is measured by three variables. Respondent's Internet use was derived from question 77 of the questionnaire, 'How many days in the last week did you use the Internet to learn about issues?' The responses were distributed according to the number of days, from 0 to 7. The willingness to care about international news was taken from question 66, 'Do you care about international information?' with responses from 1 to 5, where 5 means very concerned, and 1 means very unconcerned. Respondent's concern about India was taken from question 67, which asked respondents to answer, 'Which two of the following countries or regions do you care about most'. This question was a double-choice item in the original questionnaire and was re-assigned a value of 1 (care about India) if the respondent chose India in one of the two choices; otherwise, it was assigned a value of 0 (care about other countries).

Intergroup contact theory is measured by two variables. The survey respondents' travel abroad was taken from question 105, 'Have you ever been abroad?' with a response of 1 means that they have been abroad and 0 means that they have not. Contact with foreigners is taken from question 109, 'Do you have any contact with foreigners in your work or life?'. The answer 1 means that respondents have had contact with foreigners, and 0 means that respondents have not had contact with foreigners. We could not investigate whether respondents had been to India or had contact with Indians because of the questionnaire's limitations, but this question still fulfills the primary setting of the intergroup contact theory.

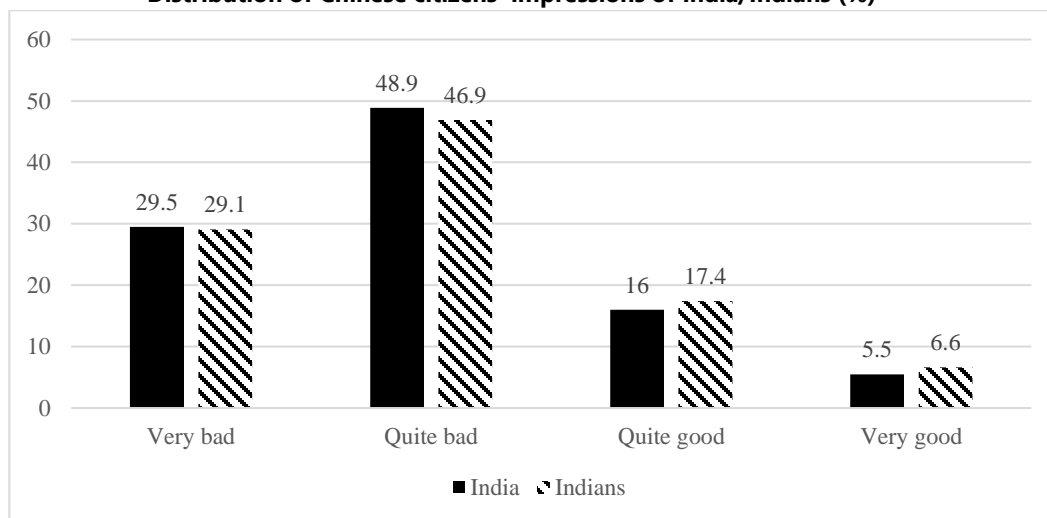
Finally, in addition to the control variables of gender, age (age squared), education (in years), and whether or not they live in Beijing, we added an item on religiosity, which was derived from question 99 of the questionnaire, which asked respondents to answer the question 'How important do you think religiosity is in your life?' The responses were recorded and distributed from 1 to 4, with 1 being 'Not important at all' and 4 being 'very important'. Although our questionnaire does not allow for a breakdown of respondents' perceptions of a specific religion, India, as one of the most religiously influenced countries in the world, as an overall religiosity variable, still provides some measure of its relationship with people's impressions of India.

3.3 Findings

First of all, we will make a descriptive analysis of Chinese citizens' impressions of India. Question 7 of the questionnaire asks respondents to respond to their impressions of India, and question 8 asks them to respond to their impressions of Indians, with four answers for both indicators, 1 being 'very bad' and 4 being 'very good'. The results are shown in Figure 2. In terms of favourable

impressions of India, 29.5% of people said they had a 'very bad' impression of India; 48.9% said they had a 'not very good' attitude towards India, while only 16% and 5.5% said they had a 'quite good' and 'very good' impression of India. In other words, according to our survey, more than three-quarters of Chinese people will have a negative impression of India in 2020. The distribution of Chinese people's impressions of Indians is more similar to that of their impressions of India, with the two variables showing a strong correlation ($r = 0.691, p < 0.000$). More than three-quarters of the Chinese citizens also have a negative impression of the Indian people.

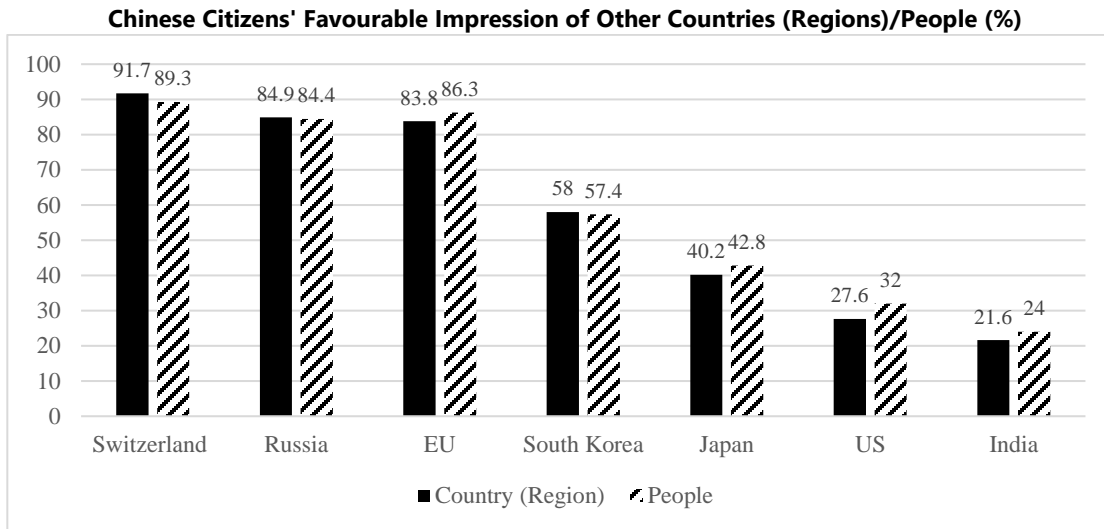
Figure 2
Distribution of Chinese citizens' impressions of India/Indians (%)



Source: Made by the authors

In order to measure more effectively the Chinese people's perception of India, we have selected questions from the questionnaire about Chinese citizens' impressions of the United States, the European Union, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and Switzerland and their citizens to make a cross-sectional comparison. The questions are the same as in the case of India, with four options, where 1 means 'very bad' and 4 means 'very good'. In order to visualise how Chinese citizens feel about the above countries and their people, the questions were recoded and regrouped into two dimensions, i.e., 0 for 'no positive feeling' and 1 for 'positive feeling'. The results of the integration are shown in Figure 3. More than 80% of respondents in all three countries and regions have a favourable impression of Switzerland, Russia, and the EU in 2020, with almost 92% of respondents having a favourable impression of Switzerland, the highest of all countries and regions. More than half (58%) of respondents have a favourable opinion of South Korea, and around 40% of the population have a favourable opinion of Japan. Respondents' attitudes towards the US in 2020 are influenced by the negative impact of the Trump administration's policy towards China, with only 27.6% of respondents expressing a favourable impression of the US, but this is still higher than the 21.6% of respondents who have a favourable impression of India. Respondents' impressions of the people in the above countries and regions are more consistent with their impressions of the countries and regions, and the proportion of respondents who have a favourable view of Indians remains the lowest of all respondents. Based on the above statistics, we find that in 2020, compared to the other six countries and regions covered by the questionnaire, the Chinese citizens have the most negative impression of India, and the data confirm the tension between China and India.

Figure 3



Source: Made by the authors

Table 1 presents the differences between the six control variables of gender, party membership, age, whether or not they live in Beijing, education level and religion among the respondents, and their impressions of India. Specifically, female respondents had a slightly higher favourable impression of India than male respondents, by 0.5%. Compared to respondents who are not members of the CPC, a higher proportion of respondents who are members of the CPC have a positive impression of India, at 26.9%, with a difference of 6.0%. In terms of age distribution, the age distribution of respondents' positive impressions towards India shows a U-shape, with the lowest proportion of young and middle-aged respondents aged 30 to 39, with only 16.0% of respondents aged 30-39 expressing a positive impression towards India, followed by young people aged 18 to 29, with 20.7% expressing a positive feeling towards India. The proportion of respondents aged 40 to 49 who had a favourable impression of India was 22.2%, similar to the overall average. Respondents aged 50 and above have a relatively deep favourable impression of India, with 29.2% of respondents aged 60 and above. Overall, if we use the age of 40 as the cut-off, then respondents over 40 have a significantly better impression of India than those under 40. Those living in Beijing are slightly more likely to have a positive impression of India than those living in the other five cities, with a difference of 2.1%. In terms of education, there does not appear to be a clear relationship between the level of education and the distribution of positive impressions of India. The group with the most profound favourable impression of India is those with a middle school education, which is significantly higher than the rest of the population, at 31.0%, followed by those with a Master's degree or above, at 23.8%, 2.2% higher than the overall favourable impression of India. The proportion of respondents with primary school or below, college, and university education who felt positive about India was broadly similar, all lower than the overall proportion, at around 20%. Finally, the more important people consider religious beliefs to be in their lives, the more likely they are to have a favourable impression of India. The proportion of people who consider religion very important has a favourable impression of India of 38.1%, exceeding the overall proportion of 16.5%.

Table 1
Distribution of Favourability Towards India among Different Groups in the Sample

	Gender		Party member		Age :					Whether living in Beijing	
	Female	Male	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5	Yes	No
% in the sample	46.1	53.9	11.2	88.8	27.0	27.1	24.5	14.3	7.1	16.7	83.3
% favourable impression of India	21.9	21.4	26.9	20.9	20.7	16.0	22.2	28.9	29.2	23.3	21.2

	Education level :						How important do you think religiosity is in your life?				Total
	1 : Primary school or below 2 : Middle school 3 : High school 4: College 5: University 6: Master's degree or above						1: Not important at all 2: Not important 3: Important 4: Very important				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	
% in the sample	2.0	7.2	22.3	24.8	40.9	2.9	23.3	42.6	27.9	6.3	100
% favourable impression of India	19.0	31.0	21.8	20.0	20.7	23.8	13.8	18.7	28.8	38.1	21.6

Source: Made by the authors

Do the group differences in the sample described above affect the impressions of the Chinese population toward India? Moreover, are Chinese people's impressions of India influenced by the hypothetical relationship described in the previous section? Next, we introduce a regression model for further analysis. Since the dependent variable selected for the model is dichotomous after recoding ('have a positive impression of India' = 1, 'do not have a positive impression of India' = 0), so we used binomial logistic regression analysis to build the statistical model. The specific regression results are shown in Table 2, with each column representing a separate regression equation.

Table 2
Binomial Logistic Regression Analysis on Chinese Citizens' Impressions of India

	Chinese citizens' impressions of India						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender (female=0, male=1)	-.026 (.031)	-.024 (.031)	-.130 (.097)	-.133 (.102)	-.101 (.104)	-.077 (.095)	-.201 (.119)
Age	-.027** (.009)	-.025 (.009)	-.056* (.028)	-.044 (.030)	-.049 (.031)	-.046 (.027)	-.046 (.035)
Age ²	.000** (.000)	.000* (.000)	.001** (.000)	.001** (.000)	.001* (.000)	.001* (.000)	.001* (.000)
Education level	.007 (.006)	.007 (.006)	.027 (.018)	.033 (.019)	.067** (.019)	.028 (.018)	.063** (.022)
Living in Beijing (no=0, yes=1)	.064 (.041)	.061 (.040)	.179 (.126)	.224 (.131)	.174 (.136)	.160 (.122)	.235 (.153)
Religious beliefs (1-4)	.188*** (.018)	.142*** (.018)	.345*** (.057)	.507*** (.060)	.371*** (.061)	.459*** (.054)	.230** (.071)
Social Identity Theory							
Social satisfaction		.113*** (.017)					.319*** (.071)
Security satisfaction		-.084*** (.015)					-.187** (.060)
National identity (1-4)		-.215*** (.030)					-.614*** (.117)
Self-esteem (1-4)		-.008 (.027)					-.026 (.114)
Trust Theory							
Trust other nations (1-4)			.607*** (.071)				.477*** (.087)
Trust other people (1-4)			.087 (.079)				.147 (.106)

Political Efficacy and Political Participation							
Importance of Elections (1-4)					-.262*** (.072)		-.303** (.092)
Participation in elections (no=0, yes=1)					-.217* (.111)		-.307* (.131)
Media Socialisation Theory							
Internet media uses (0-7)					-.256*** (.027)		-.245*** (.030)
Willingness to acquire international news (1-5)					.133 (.073)		.091 (.095)
Concerned about India (no=0, yes=1)					.485** (.163)		.507** (.192)
Intergroup Contact Theory							
Experience Abroad (no=0, yes=1)						.082 (.117)	.028 (.142)
Experience of contacting with foreigners (no=0, yes=1)						-.103 (.105)	.205 (.128)
Constants	1.900*** (.199)	.189 (.750)	-3.523*** (.660)	-1.482* (.675)	-1.874** (.708)	-2.153*** (.610)	.298 (.950)
Pseudo-R ²	.034	.078	.066	.042	.069	.034	.137
Number of samples	2850	2785	2785	2479	2582	2835	2358

Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

Source: Made by the authors

Model 1 included only control variables. Similar to the findings found in Table 1, the model shows a significant effect of the age squared and religion of the sample on the impression of India. Specifically, the Chinese population shows a positive U-shape in the age distribution of their favourable opinion of India, i.e., the middle-aged group has a relatively worse impression of India compared to the younger and older groups. Those who consider religion more important in their lives are more likely to have a favourable impression of India. Gender, education level, and whether or not one lives in Beijing have no significant effect on impressions of India.

In order to test the effect of different theories on people's impressions of India, models 2 to 6 introduce variables from a single theory after substituting them for control variables, respectively. The models' findings partially validate our first two hypotheses regarding social identity theory. That is, the more satisfied the population is with the social governance in China, the more positive their impressions of India; the higher the propensity to identify with China, the more negative their impressions of India. However, the model also finds that people more satisfied with security in China have more negative impressions of India. The model does not measure a significant correlation between self-esteem and impressions of India; whether people are satisfied with themselves or not does not affect their impressions of India. Thus, social identity theory partially explains the effect of Chinese citizens' impressions of India. Similarly, trust theory only measures the effect of country-level influences, i.e., the more trusting people are of other countries, the more positive their impressions of India. In contrast, the individual-level effects of trust theory are insignificant, with those who are more likely to have trusting feelings towards others not having deeper favourable impressions of India. The hypothesis was confirmed for political efficacy and political participation. The public thought the more important the elections, the more negative their attitudes towards India were. Compared to those who have not participated in elections (31.5% of the sample), those who have participated in elections have more negative impressions of India, with 19.5% lower odds of favourability ($1 - e^{-0.217}$). Theories of political efficacy and political participation can explain the Chinese citizens' impressions of India.

In media socialisation theory, the more days people use the internet per week, the less favourable impression towards India. In contrast, people who care about India (8.8% of the sample) are more inclined to have a favourable impression of India, and both hypotheses are confirmed in the model. However, the model did not find a significant correlation between the willingness to care about the news and favourable impressions of India. We speculate that this may be due to two reasons. On the one hand, willingness often does not equal actuality, people who are willing to learn about international news may not be actively seeking

information, and there may be other variables involved. However, we cannot further confirm the hypothesis that willingness does not equal frequency because of the limitations of measuring a single piece of data. On the other hand, it may be that it is not the official media that affect Chinese people's attitudes towards India, but rather the new media, such as Weibo and Tiktok, that are more likely to influence people's impressions of the outside world. Moreover, although Sino-India relations are an important bilateral relationship, India is not the main focus of the Chinese media and public, which is why there is no correlation between the willingness to care about the news and the favourable impression of India. Also, our model does not observe an effect of intergroup contact theory on people's impression of India, and neither the experience of going abroad nor the exposure to foreigners increases the positive perception of India. However, this result is likely due to the limitations of our data, which do not include Chinese people's experience of going to India or having contact with Indians. For the Chinese population, 'went abroad' and 'went to India' or 'contacted with foreigners' and 'contacted with Indians' are entirely different concepts. Finally, to test the impact of all the theoretical variables when combined, Model 7 includes predictors from all models. Except for the unstable positive correlation for education in the control variables, the effects of all other variables are stable, with approximately the same results as those obtained in models 1 to 6.

4. Conclusion

This paper examines the Chinese citizens' impressions of India and the factors influencing them. It uses data from the public questionnaire survey conducted by the 2020 Chinese People's View of the European Union project team and uses descriptive analysis and logistic regression models. The paper attempts to construct an analytical framework including social identity theory, trust theory, political efficacy, political participation theory, media socialisation theory, and intergroup contact theory to explain the factors influencing Chinese citizens' impressions of India. The results of the data show that social identity, political efficacy and participation, and media socialisation all influence or partially influence Chinese citizens' perceptions of India. Further analysis revealed that Chinese people's impressions of India are influenced by the country's foreign policy and official propaganda, showing significant correlations with both. For example, factors such as a higher propensity for national identity, having participated in elections, and using the internet more days per week all reduce people's impressions of India. As the Chinese domestic media frequently report the security situation in India, the public perceives it to a greater extent, and thus the more people approve of the security situation in China, the more they tend to have a negative impression of India. In addition, the study found that people's approval of religion also increased their favourable impression of India. However, there are also some theoretical variables in this framework for explaining attitudes towards India constructed in this study whose hypotheses have not been confirmed, which is mainly since for the Chinese citizens, the perception of and familiarity with India is slightly lower compared to other major countries, although Sino-Indian relations are significant country relations. The data shows that when choosing the country (region) of greatest interest (each respondent was given two choices), only 8.8% of the sample chose India, much lower than the US (67.5%), the EU (54.5%), Russia (41.4%) and Japan (22.2%). The lower perceptions resulted in some correlations measured in other countries in previous studies that were not found in this study, such as individual-level variables like self-esteem tendencies and impressions of others that did not impact people's impressions of India.

Foreign impressions are an important part of people's impressions, and foreign impressions play an enlightening and informative role in the people's assessment of the country's foreign relations and foreign policy. The data of this study shows that nearly 80% of the people in the sample showed negative impressions of India in 2020, and the predicament of deteriorating Sino-Indian relations is inescapable. How to explain Chinese people's impressions of India has thus become a pressing issue. The empirical research in this study goes a long way to fill this gap in the study of Sino-Indian relations. While most of the previous studies on foreign impressions have been based on a single theoretical perspective, the theoretical framework developed in this study attempts to analyse Chinese citizens' foreign impressions systematically. It can also be used to analyse people's impressions of other countries. Indeed, due to the limitations of the data and other factors, there are still many flaws and shortcomings in this paper. Although the data on 'Chinese people's perceptions of the European Union' supports most of the hypotheses put forward in this paper, as a database whose primary purpose is to study the European Union, the questionnaire on other countries is necessarily lacking. For example, there is a lack of country-specific and national exposure surveys. In the media socialisation theory, we also only included respondents' attention to and use of the media, ignoring respondents' perceptions of the media itself and the message, and, although we found a relationship between people's religious beliefs and their impressions of India, it is clear that the scope of religion needs further refinement. The cross-sectional data based on a single questionnaire also results in many of the interpretations in this paper being tentative. Improving these shortcomings is not only the future direction and goal of this study but also an opportunity to deepen the process of scholarly research on the external impressions of the Chinese people, especially their impressions of India.

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