

The Transitive Construction of China's National Image in the Editorials of *The New York Times*

Xinyang Dai

Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia;
Department of International Education, Hebei Finance University, Baoding, China

Hanita Hassan

Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

Abstract—The construction of a country's national image depends not only on its promotion and construction in media but also on other countries' reports on and comments about it, especially when they are in conflicting states. Taking the transitivity system theory within systemic functional linguistics as its theoretical basis, this study employed a qualitative method to investigate the construction of China's national image in the editorials about the Sino-US trade dispute in *The New York Times*. This study first calculated the frequency of each process; then, it analyzed the distribution and function of each process regarding its role in the construction of China's national image. The findings showed that, at 75.85%, the material process comprised the largest proportion, depicting the actions China has taken or the things that have been done to China. The verbal process ranked second, through which editorials aimed to persuade the readers and ensure authority. The percentages of mental and relational processes were similar. Moreover, an analysis of the relational process showed the attributes and values added to China. The images constructed by the editorials in *The New York Times* were mixed and conflicting. China was simultaneously constructed as the victim of the trade dispute and also as a country of over-production capacity, a voracious consumer of world raw materials, and a competitor with unfair techniques. Furthermore, China's damages to the United States were highlighted and emphasized.

Index Terms—transitivity, China's national image, trade dispute, editorials

I. INTRODUCTION

American scholar Boulding (1959) states national image is a combination of how a country perceives itself and is perceived by other agents in the international system, a consequence of information input and output. A good national image contributes to trust and cooperation, whereas a bad one may incite hostile reactions and undermine the country's security (Kopra, 2012). Mass media are major channels for people to obtain information about the world outside their community (Saleem, 2007), and such media play an important role in projecting and disseminating national images (Kunczik, 2016).

China has developed its economy with unprecedented speed since the implementation of the reform and the opening-up policy. Although China has become the second-largest economy in the world, its national image does not align with its economic power on the international level (Meng, 2020). China's national image (Meng, 2020) is frequently defamed and misinterpreted. Therefore, it is significant to investigate the construction of China's national image in China-related news reports and editorials in other countries' mass media, especially when such countries are in a relatively tense relationship with China.

When news media present the conflicting states of two countries, the national images of the two countries are constructed based on the media's interests, values, and ideologies (Wang & Ge, 2020). Even though the national image is influenced by the nation's comprehensive power, it is also determined by how other countries identify and construct the image in the international world based on those countries' social and economic interaction (Meng, 2020).

The Sino-US trade dispute started in March 2018 when Donald Trump, the then-President of the United States, signed an order to impose tariffs on about USD 60 billion worth of goods imported from China. Therefore, China announced tariffs on 128 products imported from the US (Wang & Ge, 2020).

The trade war lasted for several months, during which both the Chinese and American mass media covered it extensively, including publishing many editorials to discuss its causes and possible consequences. Different from news reports, editorials represent the ideological attitudes of the newspaper's owners and managers, especially in the coverage of less familiar yet more complex international events which may influence the public and policy makers' perception of other countries in the world (Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007). The news editorials in mainstream media have a major impact on the construction of national images (Entman, 2010). Thus, it is significant to study how China's national image is constructed through the editorials about the Sino-US trade war in mainstream American media.

As one of the leading newspapers in the coverage of international news and opinions in the US, *The New York Times* attracts readers from every state and all around the world. Moreover, *The New York Times* also contributes to setting the inter-media agenda, especially in global news coverage (Golan, 2006). Therefore, this study aims to examine China's national image constructed by the editorials related to the Sino-US trade war in *The New York Times* from the transitivity perspective. Based on systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), this study focuses on the transitivity analysis of the ideational metafunction to scrutinise the construction of China's image.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Systemic Functional Linguistics

SFL studies language and its function in social settings. Three metafunctions of language were proposed in SFL: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The ideational metafunction construes the human experience and represents reality through the transitivity system. Furthermore, the interpersonal function establishes and maintains interactions between people through the mood system. Finally, the textual function organises messages based on context through theme and rhyme.

The ideational metafunction is further divided into experiential and logical functions. As the realisation of the experiential function, the transitivity system consists of six processes that focus on the meaning representation in a clause. The processes are material, mental, behavioural, verbal, relational, and existential processes. The material process refers to the process of doing with two participants, namely the actor who does the activity or action and the goal. The mental process is the process of sensing with two participants, namely the senser and the phenomenon. The relational process shows the processes of being, which are subdivided into attributive and identifying processes, comprising three participants, namely the sayer, the verbiage, and the receiver. The verbal process is the process of saying something. The behaviour process refers to physiological and psychological behaviours such as breathing, smiling, and coughing. Finally, the existential process shows the existence of something, with the signal word 'there'.

Transitivity analysis has been frequently used in different contexts, for instance, in political speeches (Muhassin, 2023; Xiang, 2022), novels (Yousif & Bulaila, 2023), news reports (Seo, 2013) to show the construction of certain events and embedded ideologies. The transitivity analysis can reflect the media's construction of actions, events, and situations through language choices. This study aims to investigate the language choices made by the editorials in *The New York Times* to express their views about the trade war and their construction of China's national image.

B. China's National Image

The definition of 'national image' differs across scholarship. American scholar Kenneth Ewart Boulding (1956) defined national image as a combination of a country's self-perception and the perception of nations in the international world. In the modern world, a country's national image plays an important role in its international communications with other countries. National image construction has been considered relevant by every state in the international community (Ding, 2007). Studies regarding the national image have been conducted in various academic fields, such as international relations (Anholt, 2007), communication (McCourt, 2021; Peng, 2004; Sutter, 2021), and linguistics (Huan, 2023; Liu & Liu, 2021).

China's economy has developed rapidly during the past decades after the reform and opening-up policies, and the country has become the second-largest economy in the world since 2010 (Lin, 2011), drawing much more attention from the international community. Accordingly, studies on China's national image have also grown significantly in the 21st century. Research on China's national image construction in the news reports of international media using corpus-based critical discourse analysis is immensely popular (Huan & Deng, 2021; Tang, 2021). A corpus analysis primarily focuses on the collocation of words, high-frequency words, and certain sentence patterns to give insights into national image construction. Data are usually collected from the hard news section. Relatively few linguistic studies have been conducted on the mainstream media editorials to reveal their construction of the national image, which is highly significant since editorials express more about the ideological stance of the newspaper's owners and managers (Henry & Tator, 2002). There are also many studies on China's image in the country's English-language papers, the translations of government reports, and the speeches of political officials (Zhang & Ju, 2020; Zhu & Ji, 2018). These studies have been conducted using metafunctions, especially the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions of SFL, to reveal language choices in meaning-making (Liu & Liu, 2021; Zhu & Ji, 2018). The SFL approach mainly focuses on language choices and their functions in the construction of the national image. Therefore, this study aims to examine the construction of China's image in the editorials of *The New York Times* using transitivity analysis in SFL.

C. Sino-US Relationships and the Trade War

Since its normalisation in 1972, the Sino-US relationship has experienced many ups and downs. Over the past 40 years, this relationship has been both competitive and cyclical, changing from periods of relative stability and cooperation to ones of frustration and confrontation (Medeiros, 2019). Studies on the Sino-US relationship have attracted the attention of numerous linguistic researchers (Boylan et al., 2021). The outbreak of the trade war increased the volume of research into the Sino-US relationship from the discourse analysis perspective (Chen & Wang, 2022). Chen and Wang (2022) conducted a comparative corpus-based study of the news reports on the trade war from both the

Chinese English-language newspaper China Daily and The New York Times. In their study, they found that The New York Times tends to construct the event as a trade war and emphasises China's potential threat to the national security of the US, while China Daily prefers to describe the matter as a 'friction', indicating China's willingness to negotiate about the topic. The previous discursive studies focused on the hard news of the trade dispute from different media with corpus-based critical discourse analysis. Furthermore, there is relatively less research on the editorials related to the trade dispute from the transitive analysis of SFL. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this gap in research by conducting a transitive analysis of *The New York Times*' editorials to examine their constructions of China's national image.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Data

This study used 10 editorials related to the Sino-US trade dispute written by the Editorial Board between January 2018 and December 2019 as research data. This period was chosen because it witnessed the beginning and progress of the trade dispute (Chen & Wang, 2022). The titles of the 10 selected editorials are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
THE TITLES OF THE EDITORIALS

Number of the Editorial	Date	Name of the Editorial
Editorial 1	Mar. 02, 2018	Trade Wars are Destructive. Of Course, Trump Wants one.
Editorial 2	Mar. 08, 2018	Donald Trump's Empty Words on Trade
Editorial 3	Mar. 22, 2018	Trump's Half-Baked China Tariffs
Editorial 4	Apr. 06, 2018	Putting Trump's Trade Bombast to Test
Editorial 5	May 31, 2018	America Declares War on Its Friends
Editorial 6	Jun. 15, 2018	Chinese Tariffs are already Hitting Trump Voters
Editorial 7	Dec. 04, 2018	You Don't Understand Tariffs, Man
Editorial 8	Mar. 09, 2019	Will Trump Trade the Future for a Hill of Beans?
Editorial 9	Aug. 06, 2019	President Trump's Fruitless Trade War
Editorial 10	Aug. 23, 2019	With the Economy on Edge, Trump Sees Only Enemies

The data were collected in several steps. First, the keywords 'China', 'Chinese', 'trade', 'trade war' or 'trade dispute' were combined and entered into the search engine on the official online website of *The New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com>). After the opinion section and the specific time range from January 2018 to December 2019 were set, all the articles under the opinion section showed up.

Second, since the search engine could not distinguish between the news editorials written by the editorial board and op-eds and the other columns under the opinion section, a manual check was conducted to identify all the editorials related to the Sino-US trade war written by the Editorial Board. During the manual check, the editorials written by individual contributors and those that were less relevant to the topic of the trade war were eliminated.

B. Research Objectives and Questions

When it comes to the construction of a country's national image, especially over an international dispute or in a period of conflict, that country's mainstream media tend to support and legitimise its national claims and interests (Chen & Wang, 2022). This study aimed to investigate how the editorials in *The New York Times* constructed the trade dispute between the US and China. The implicit experiential meaning and the underlying reality of socio-political situations can be revealed through a transitivity analysis. Therefore, the present study adopted a transitivity analysis of the clauses related to China to uncover China's national images constructed by the editorials.

The following research questions were explored.

1. What are the distributions of the transitivity processes in the verbal construction of China's national image?
2. What are the realisations and functions of the processes in the construction of China's national image?
3. What kinds of national images of China were constructed by the *The New York Times* editorials between January 2018 and December 2019?

C. Research Design

This study was based on a transitivity analysis of SFL. The research followed the framework for transitivity analysis given in Figure 1 to identify the process types and participants in the clauses for exploring the construction of China's national image.

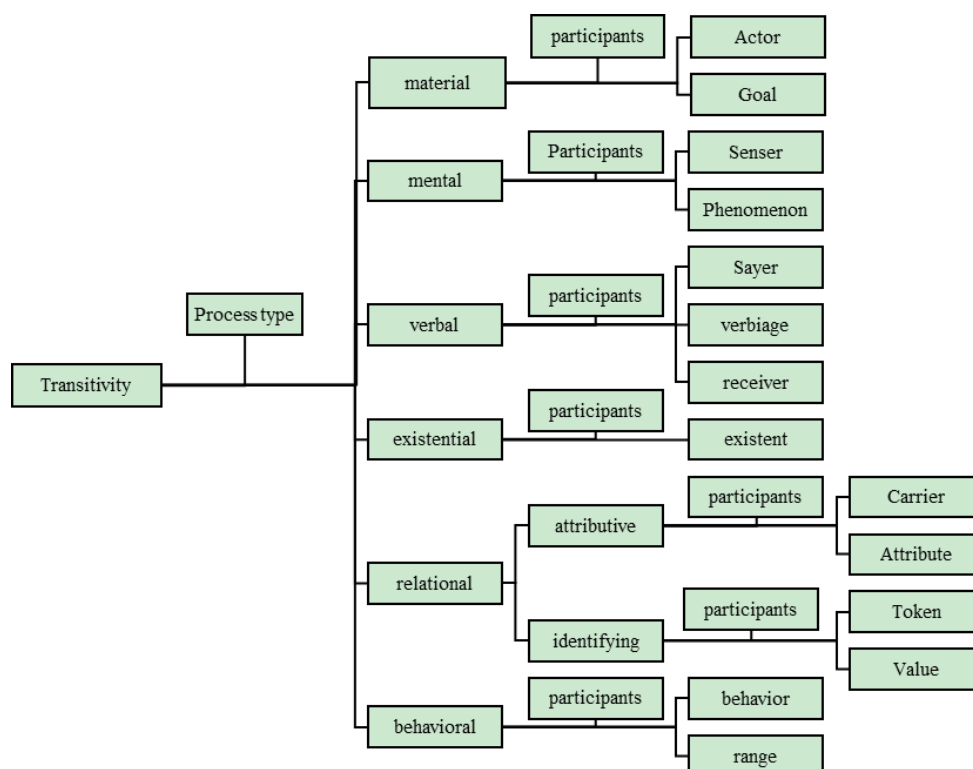


Figure 1. The Process Types and Participants in Transitivity System

The data analysis process was divided into four steps. First, the titles of all the editorials were examined from a transitivity perspective. Second, each editorial was carefully reviewed to select all the China-related expressions. Further, the clauses in the editorials were analysed to eliminate the data that were not relevant to the descriptions of China. The transitive analysis concentrated on the clauses related to China in which the country was a participant of any kind, for example, the actor, goal, sayer, possessor, or senser. All the China-related clauses in the editorial were collected and copied into a new Word document to collate the China-related data.

Third, the process types and participants of the China-related clauses were identified and calculated. Upon completing the transitive analysis, it was double-checked to ensure the annotations were correct. The frequency of different processes was also calculated.

Finally, a detailed discussion of the realisation and function of each process was conducted with specific examples to explore the construction of China's national images through transitivity. The constructed images of China were identified through an analysis of the participants and process verbs selected from the clauses.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Distribution of the Transitivity Process

This study found 352 clauses directly related to the description of China. The distribution and percentage of the six processes of the transitivity analysis are shown in Table 2. Material processes comprised the largest proportion at 75.85%, which depicted the things that China had done and the things that had been done to China. The verbal processes accounted for 10.23% of the processes, most of which were the quotations of officials and experts to support the editorial's opinion. Moreover, the most frequently used verbs in the verbal process were 'say' and 'said'. The use of mental processes and relational processes was almost the same. Mental processes reflected the inner activities of the officials and experts. China's constructed national image was revealed through the use of the mental process verb and the phenomenon. The relationship process showed the attributes and values assigned to China. However, the behavioural process, which refers to the physiological and psychological behaviours of a conscious being (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), was not found in China-related clauses.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE TRANSITIVITY PROCESS

Process	Number	Percentage
Material processes	267	75.85%
Verbal processes	36	10.23%
Mental processes	24	6.82%
Relational	22	6.25%
existential	3	0.92%

B. *Transitivity Analysis of the Title of the Editorials*

As the titles of the editorials in Table 1 indicate, of the ten-trade war-related editorials, only Editorial 6 directly mentioned China, while the other editorials focused on the then-President Trump. This fact reflects that the editorials were primarily concerned with the behaviours and decisions made by Trump and the effects of the trade war on America.

Editorial 6 was titled 'Chinese tariffs are already hitting Trump voters'; it was a material process with Chinese tariffs as the actor and Trump voters as the goal. The use of the process verb 'hit' revealed that the tariff imposed by China has caused some damage to Americans. Through the selection of semantic words and the use of the material process, China was constructed as a country that negatively influenced Americans. The title of Editorial 1 was 'Trade wars are destructive. Of course, Trump wants one'. In this title, the first clause was a relational process with the trade war as the carrier and the term 'destructive' as the attributive. This clause showed the attitude of the editorial board towards the trade war: they thought the trade war would cause significant damage. The second clause was a mental process with President Trump as the senser. By using 'want' as the mental process verb, the editorial emphasised that the trade war was desired and started by Trump himself. Because a mental process is more subjective, the editorial employed this mental process clause to convey the information that Trump was responsible for the destructive trade war.

The titles of Editorials 2, 3, and 9 were nominal phrases, not clauses, but the choices of terms such as 'empty words', 'fruitless', and 'half-baked' reflected the editorial board's negative attitude towards the implementation of the trade war.

The clause 'Putting Trump's Trade Bombast' in Editorial 4 is a material process where the process verb is 'putting'. This clause indicated that Trump's trade policy was not mature and was in the testing period, which highlights the editorial board's lack of confidence in the trade war.

The analysis of the titles revealed that although the editorial board admitted that the trade war was started by Trump and did not speak highly of it, they, nevertheless, agreed that the tariff response made by China caused some damage to Trump's supporters. In this way, China was constructed as a country that negatively influenced Americans.

C. *Transitivity Analysis of the China-Related Clauses in the Editorials*

(a). *Realisations and Functions of the Material Process*

Material processes were used to describe the actions in the real world. Different aspects of the event were highlighted by selecting different actors and process verbs to construe the same event in the real world. First, the material process analysis revealed that The New York Times editorials concurred it was Trump who started the trade war but tended to justify his behaviour by constructing China as a country with an excess steel and aluminium capacity competing with lower prices in the global market.

Excerpt 1: Two years after the Trump administration imposed its first punitive measures on China, the United States is mired instead in an escalating trade conflict with no clear strategy, no discernible goals and no end in sight (Editorial 3).

Excerpt 2: He would impose a 10% tariff on \$300 billion of Chinese imports to the United States. He already had imposed a 25 percent tariff on about \$250 billion of Chinese imports (Editorial 9).

Excerpt 3: The steel and aluminium tariffs are ostensibly aimed at punishing China, which has been driving down prices for those commodities by producing far more metal than the world can use (Editorial 1).

Excerpts 1 and 2 take Trump as the actor and use the material process verb 'impose' to show the tariff policies Trump implemented on China, which started the trade dispute. In Excerpt 3, 'punishing China' is a material process. The use of the process verb 'punish' tends to justify Trump's implementation of the tariffs on China. It gives the impression that China had done something wrong and that the US improved its tariffs in response to it. The next two clauses explain why China was punished by using the material process verbs 'driving down' and 'producing'. Furthermore, through the material process, the clause 'producing far more metal than the world can use' constructs China as a country with over-capacity. Through excess production, China drove down the prices of steel and aluminium, and this action was regarded as an improper way to promote competition. These material process verbs may give the readers the impression that China was not competing healthily against the other countries. This implication is further illustrated by Excerpts 4 and 5.

Excerpt 4: The Trump administration has argued that it is protecting American industry from China, which in recent years has flooded the global market with cheap metals (Editorial 2).

Excerpt 5: China is engaged in a wide range of unfair trade practices, including subsidising domestic manufacturing, impeding the sale of foreign goods, and stealing intellectual property (Editorial 9).

In Excerpt 4, the clause 'flooded the global market with cheap metals' is a material process. The use of the process verb 'flood' depicts China as a natural disaster in the global market that brought widespread negative influences with cheap metals. In Excerpt 5, the material process verbs 'subsidising', 'impeding', and 'stealing' construct China as a country that carried out many unfair trade activities.

Furthermore, the damage caused by China's responsive actions to the American economy is highlighted. In Excerpt 6, the process verb 'hit', emphasises the negative influence of China on the American economy.

Excerpt 6: China's retaliatory measures are also hitting the American economy, particularly the farm belt (Editorial 9).

Although the excerpts above indicate that the editorials focused more on the negative actions taken by China, they also reveal the losses incurred by China and legitimise some of its actions in conducting international business. Moreover, the excerpts also showcase the alternative ways in which China responded to the trade conflict.

Excerpt 7: The Chinese government supported the rise of export industries in the 1990s and 2000s by suppressing the exchange value of the yuan, which allowed people in other countries to buy Chinese goods with smaller sums of their own currencies. But over the past half-decade, China has sought to stabilise the value of its currency – in part by resisting depreciation (Editorial 9).

Excerpt 7 gives a relatively objective description of Chinese behaviours. By using the material process verbs ‘support’ and ‘suppress’, it shows that China took some actions to promote its export business and its currency manipulation history. However, the material process verbs ‘seek’ and ‘stabilise’ give credit to China’s efforts in preventing the depreciation of its currency.

Excerpt 8: The Chinese are already establishing new patterns of trade – buying soybeans from Brazil, opening export factories in Southeast Asia, and investing in European infrastructure (Editorial 9).

In Excerpt 8, ‘the Chinese’ are the actors, while the material process verbs are ‘establishing’, ‘buying’, ‘opening’, and ‘investing’. These linguistic choices show the measures China took to buffer against the trade dispute. The editorial’s description of China’s activities serves to convey the information that the US was not the only option for China’s business endeavours and it sought to do business with other countries, thus emphasising that the improved tariff did not effectively impact China.

(b). Realisations and Functions of the Verbal Process

Verbal processes were also widely employed in the editorials to persuade the audience and show authority and reliability through direct or indirect quotations of the experts and officials. The frequently used verbal process verbs in the clauses were ‘say’, ‘announce’, ‘tell’, ‘vow’, ‘claim’, and ‘promise’. The process verb ‘announced’ was always accompanied by the sayings of President Trump to describe his tariff decisions against China, as shown in Excerpts 9 and 10. China and Chinese officials were considered the sayers in the clauses to show China’s willingness and actions in solving the trade dispute.

Excerpt 9: Mr Trump announced on Thursday a three-pronged attack on China (Editorial 3).

Excerpt 10: Mr Trump announced last week that he would impose a 10% tariff on \$300 billion of Chinese imports to the United States (Editorial 9).

Excerpt 11: The Chinese told the Americans they would be willing to reduce China’s steel production capacity by 150 million tonnes by 2022 (Editorial 2).

Excerpt 12: Earlier this year, China’s premier, Li Keqiang, promised to ‘further widen market access, raise policy transparency and exercise fair and impartial regulation’ (Editorial 7).

In Excerpt 11, the clause ‘the Chinese told the Americans’ is a verbal process, and the process verb is ‘told’. The conversation between China and America is established with the Chinese as the sender and the Americans as the receiver. Furthermore, taking the Chinese as the Sayer signals that China started the conversation, with the implied construction of China’s active attitude in solving the dispute between the two countries. The mental process verb ‘willing to’ and the material action verb ‘reduce’ depict China’s initiative and the action taken in solving the conflicts. Excerpt 12 takes China’s premier as the Sayer, ensuring the authority and reliability of the content. The process verb ‘promise’ emphasises China’s determination to promote a healthy market environment and its willingness to solve the trade dispute.

(c). Realisations and Functions of the Relational Process

An effective way to discover the constructions of the national image is through the analysis of relational processes, which characterise and identify (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). A relational process shows the relationship between two entities and the connections between them. An analysis of the attributes and values used to express China-related events reveals the construction of China’s national image in the editorials.

Excerpt 13: China has a history of currency manipulation (Editorial 9).

Excerpt 14: The new focus on currency manipulation is particularly misguided (Editorial 9).

Excerpt 15: China, in other words, is not to blame for the trend (Editorial 9).

Excerpt 16: Mr Trump’s move will have a limited effect on China (Editorial 1).

Excerpt 17: The tariffs will have little impact on China (Editorial 2).

The above excerpts are examples of attributive relational clauses. In Excerpt 13, China is attributed with a history of currency manipulation through a possessive attributive clause. In Excerpt 14, the intensive attributive relational process indicates that the recent focus on China’s currency manipulation is not appropriate right, giving an objective description of China and denying the idea proposed by the Trump administration that China was manipulating its money during the trade dispute. The term ‘trend’ refers to the dollar’s movement against the yuan and the depreciation of the Chinese currency in Excerpt 15. Moreover, the attributive feature ‘not to blame’ highlights that it was not China’s responsibility for the depreciation of its currency. The attributive clauses in Excerpts 16 and 17 reflect that the tariffs imposed by the Trump administration did not have much influence on China. Through the above attributive relational clauses, the editorials construct China as a country with a previous history of currency manipulation while also giving an objective

description that it was not engaged in currency manipulation in the recent trade dispute. The negative attitudes towards the improved tariff policy are also revealed through the relational clauses.

Excerpt 18: China's decision to escalate the trade war was a blow to Mr Trump, who has insisted American tariffs will force the Chinese to make concessions (Editorial 10).

Excerpt 19: The Chinese are voracious consumers of the world's raw materials (Editorial 8).

In Excerpt 18, the first clause is an identifying relational clause, with 'China's decision to escalate the trade war' as the token and 'blow' as the value. The value 'blow' reflects that China did not respond in the way that Mr Trump insisted and took some tough actions instead. These linguistic choices construct China as a country with strong reactions against the imposed tariffs.

In Excerpt 19, 'the Chinese' are the token and 'the voracious consumers' are the value. By using voracious consumers to identify the Chinese, the editorial reflects China's great demand for the world's raw materials relatively negatively.

(d). *Realisations and Functions of the Mental Process*

Mental processes are concerned with the experience of the inner world of a conscious person. There are four subtypes of sensing, namely perceptive, cognitive, desiderative, and emotive sensing. The description of the inner activities of China provided by some experts reveals the construction of China's national image.

Excerpt 20: The country's leaders fear that moving faster could hurt its economy, harm state-owned banks that have lent to the metal industries, and create unrest among workers who lose their jobs (Editorial 2).

Excerpt 21: China has suffered a loss of sales in the American market (Editorial 9).

The use of the mental process verb 'fear' in Excerpt 20 reflects Chinese leaders' worries about the negative impacts of shutting down the steel mills and aluminium smelters in their country. Through this mental process, the editorials intend to convey that China was not discontinuing the operation of factories for its development and prosperity at the expense of causing damage to international countries. Thus, China is constructed as a country that is obsessed with its development and ignores the global interests of others. China's loss of sales during the trade dispute is vividly depicted through the mental process verb 'suffer' in Excerpt 21, and the country is regarded as the victim of the trade dispute.

Excerpt 22: Experts generally agree that China is not manipulating its currency (Editorial 9).

In this clause, experts are taken as the sensors, and the process verb is 'agree'. These choices deny China's image as a currency manipulator. Furthermore, taking the experts as the sensors helps to objectively express the editorials' attitude towards China in the trade dispute.

(e). *Realisations and Functions of the Existential Process*

Excerpt 23: Historians say there is little precedent for Mr Trump's direct and forceful targeting of China (Editorial 4).

The primary function of the existential process is to depict reality and facts objectively (Liu & Liu, 2021). By using the existential process phrase 'there is', the editorial conveys the information that the measures taken by Mr Trump were rarely seen in history and that China was constructed as the victim of the tariff policies.

V. CONCLUSION

In this study, the transitivity processes, participants, and process verbs in China-related clauses were analysed in the editorials about the Sino-US trade dispute. The study is significant because it identified the different types of processes and discussed the function of the processes in the construction of China's national image in the editorials of the trade dispute. This study contributes to the research on national image construction from a discourse perspective by focusing on the transitivity system of the ideational metafunction in SFL.

Even though previous studies of the news reports about China in *The New York Times* showed a negative tendency in the portrayal of China's national image, the country's national images constructed by the editorials on the Sino-US dispute in *The New York Times* were mixed and conflicting. On the one hand, these editorials constructed China as a country that had brought damage and significant losses to the US by taking retaliatory measures against Mr Trump's tariff policies. On the other hand, they also constructed China as the victim of the trade dispute and highlighted that China was not the only country to blame. The editorials also defended China against some of the notions put forward by the Trump administration, such as currency manipulation. Moreover, they portrayed China as a country that has made some efforts to solve the trade dispute.

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Xinyang Dai was born in Baoding city, Hebei province, China in 1989. She is currently a PhD student at the Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. She is also a lecturer in the Department of International Education at Hebei Finance University, China. She received her Master's degree in English Linguistics from China University of Petroleum in 2014. Her research interests include systemic functional linguistic (SFL), multimodal discourse analysis and media discourse studies.

Hanita Hassan is an associate professor of the Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. She has written and co-authored a few books, among others include Multimodal Communication of Corporate Website Design which won the Original Book Award, UTM in 2012. Her research interests include Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), multimodality, language in media and intercultural communication.