

Re-propagation of Traditional Culture and Public Opinion Construction on Digital Platforms: A Case Study of “Guochao Narratives” in Short Videos

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Abstract: This study systematically investigates the re-propagation of Chinese traditional culture through “Guochao” (national trend) narratives within the algorithmic public sphere of short video platforms. Traditional culture is being recontextualized and disseminated primarily via mobile, visually-driven content. The study utilizes theoretical frameworks encompassing Mediatized Narrative, Framing Theory, and the Algorithmic Public Sphere. A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative content analysis of popular Guochao short videos with contextual analysis of platform engagement metrics, was employed. Findings indicate that a strategic, low-context narrative framing is consistently utilized. This framing emphasizes national pride, aesthetic modernity, and emotional resonance. These elements are demonstrably favored by platform recommendation algorithms. Consequently, the platforms do not function merely as neutral conduits; rather, they actively co-construct a public opinion characterized by high emotionality, rapid consensus formation, and a recurring tension between cultural appreciation and commercial superficiality. This analysis highlights both the unprecedented opportunities for cultural reach and the intrinsic challenges presented by algorithmic mediation in the digital cultural landscape. The findings bear significant implications for cultural policy and digital content governance.

Keywords: Guochao; Short Video; Algorithmic Public Sphere; Public Opinion Construction; Traditional Culture Repropagation; Mediatized Narrative

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1.Introduction

1.1 The Digital Shift in Cultural Dissemination

The advent of digital platforms has fundamentally altered the landscape of cultural communication. Traditional cultural products and practices, once preserved through established institutional channels, are now subject to the pervasive logic of the digital attention economy. The rapid proliferation of short video platforms, such as Douyin (TikTok) and Kuaishou, represents a profound shift. These platforms are defined by their characteristic features: brevity, immersive visuality, high interactivity, and, critically, algorithmic governance. In China, this digital transformation has given rise to the phenomenon known as “Guochao” (National Trend). Guochao is understood as the contemporary interpretation, commercialization, and fashioning of traditional Chinese cultural elements. This trend encompasses a wide array of content, including modernized Hanfu (traditional attire), national brand collaborations, neo-classical architecture, and reinterpreted folklore. Short videos

have become the dominant medium for the articulation and dissemination of these Guochao narratives^[1].

1.2 Problem Statement: Algorithmic Mediation and Narrative Co-construction

The re-propagation of traditional culture in this environment raises crucial academic questions. When traditional culture is mediated by a highly commercial and attention-driven technological infrastructure, its core meanings are inevitably transformed. Algorithmic recommendation systems dictate the visibility and reach of cultural content. This technological layer acts as a powerful, yet often opaque, gatekeeper, shaping the collective cultural experience^[2]. It is currently unknown how the intrinsic logic of short video platforms—specifically, the prioritization of engagement metrics—influences the framing of traditional cultural narratives. The process through which content creators blend high-context cultural heritage with low-context digital storytelling remains under-investigated. Furthermore, the resulting public discourse, which forms the public opinion around Guochao, must be analyzed not as a spontaneous user response, but as a direct outcome of algorithmic amplification. Therefore, this study seeks to dissect the co-construction process involving content creators, platform affordances, and the audience, which together build the prevailing cultural discourse.

1.3 Research Significance

This research offers contributions across both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretically, this study extends the applications of Mediatized Narrative Theory. It is demonstrated how the technological constraints of the short video format impose specific structural requirements on the re-telling of complex cultural histories. The findings also enrich the understanding of the Algorithmic Public Sphere. The active role of algorithms in shaping cultural taste and promoting specific emotional frames is empirically highlighted, moving beyond the simplistic notion of an algorithm as a mere delivery mechanism. Practically, the findings provide critical insights for cultural policy and governance. An understanding of which narrative frames are algorithmically favored is essential for designing policies that encourage the dissemination of culturally deep, rather than merely commercially popular, content. Recommendations are provided for content creators seeking to balance engagement with authenticity^[3].

1.4 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following specific research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How is traditional culture strategically re-framed within Guochao short video narratives, and what are the most prevalent thematic and aesthetic frames utilized?

RQ2: How do platform algorithmic mechanisms (e.g., recommendation and engagement features) influence the selection, amplification, and visibility of specific Guochao narratives and their associated frames?

RQ3: What is the resulting structure and emotional tenor of the public discourse (public opinion) constructed around high-visibility Guochao content, particularly concerning the tension between cultural value and commercialization?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Mediatized Narrative and Short Video Affordances

2.1.1 Defining Mediatization of Culture

The concept of Mediatization posits that media processes are not external to social and cultural life but are deeply embedded within them, reshaping institutions and practices. In the cultural sphere, mediatization refers to how the inherent logic, technologies, and affordances of a dominant medium influence the way culture is produced, stored, and experienced. Traditional culture, when entering the digital space, is subjected to this process^[4].

2.1.2 Short Video Constraints and Narrative Adaptation

Short video platforms present unique affordances and constraints that dictate narrative form. Brevity is paramount; narratives must be condensed into segments often less than sixty seconds. This constraint necessitates a low-context encoding of high-context cultural knowledge. Complex histories or philosophical meanings must be replaced by immediately recognizable symbols, strong visual hooks, and rapid emotional arcs. This shift is evident in the prevalence of formats such as the “transformation reveal” (e.g., modern clothing to Hanfu) or the dramatic micro-demonstration of a traditional craft^[5]. The narrative structure is thus characterized by immediacy and spectacle, driven by the technical requirement of maximizing the viewer’s “completion rate.” Consequently, cultural depth is often exchanged for narrative efficiency.

2.1.3 The Visual Economy

Short videos are inherently visual and auditory. The production values—including editing speed, music selection (often blending traditional melodies with contemporary electronic beats), and high-definition cinematography—are critical to engagement. The narrative must communicate through imagery rather than lengthy exposition. This visual economy requires that traditional symbols (e.g., the silhouette of a pagoda, the brushstroke of calligraphy) are rendered as highly aesthetic, immediately consumable content, ensuring that the culture is seen as contemporary and aspirational^[6].

2.2 Framing Theory and Cultural Interpretation

2.2.1 Core Concepts of Framing

Framing Theory, as originally outlined by Goffman and later applied to media analysis by Entman (1993), suggests that reality is socially constructed. Frames are essentially “principles of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” used by communicators to organize discourse and guide audience interpretation. When traditional culture is framed, certain aspects are highlighted (e.g., the beauty, the fun, the national link) while others are downplayed (e.g., the historical context, the commercial motives)^[7].

2.2.2 Prevalence of Affective and Identitarian Frames

In the Guochao context, two dominant frame types are employed: Affective Frames and Identitarian Frames. Affective frames prioritize emotional responses over rational analysis. Guochao content frequently utilizes themes of nostalgia (a wistful longing for a past aesthetic) or awe/pride (a sense of national accomplishment)^[8]. The explicit goal is to elicit immediate emotional approval, which translates directly into the platform’s desired engagement metrics (likes, shares). Identitarian frames, conversely, focus on group belonging and cultural continuity. The National Pride Frame is widely utilized, positioning Guochao as an embodiment of China’s cultural resurgence and strength. Viewing and sharing Guochao content becomes an act of expressing cultural confidence. This framing is potent because it merges personal consumption habits with a collective sense of heritage. Furthermore, the Innovation/Modernity Frame is used to counter the perception of tradition as stagnant, asserting that heritage is a dynamic source for contemporary creativity^[9].

2.2.3 The Commercialization Frame Tension

A critical tension exists around the Commercialization Frame. While the entire Guochao movement is inextricably linked to consumption (clothing, cosmetics, food), narratives often seek to foreground the cultural value while obscuring the commercial impetus^[8]. This dichotomy generates significant public opinion fragmentation. Audiences debate whether the “revival” is genuine cultural appreciation or merely the commodification of national symbols for profit, a debate often played out within the platform’s comment sections^[10].

2.3 The Algorithmic Public Sphere and Attention Economy

2.3.1 Algorithms as Gatekeepers

The Algorithmic Public Sphere concept argues that digital discourse is no longer governed by human editors or traditional media owners but by algorithmic systems. These systems act as powerful gatekeepers, determining which cultural information is prioritized and which voices are amplified^[11]. The algorithm’s primary objective is the maximization of user engagement, which directly correlates with advertising revenue. This technological mandate overrides the traditional public sphere ideals of rational-critical discourse.

2.3.2 Algorithmic Bias toward Affective Content

Research suggests that recommendation algorithms exhibit a measurable bias toward affective and sensational content. Videos that trigger strong emotional reactions (e.g., intense pride, excitement, or outrage) are more likely to generate comments and shares, signaling high engagement to the algorithm^[12]. In the context of Guochao, this means that narratives using the National Pride Frame and maximizing aesthetic spectacle are algorithmically favored and amplified exponentially. This preference risks creating an “emotional echo chamber,” where only the most sensationalized or emotionally polarized cultural content receives widespread visibility. Subtler, more nuanced forms of cultural preservation or critique are systematically marginalized^[13].

2.3.3 The Co-construction of Public Opinion

In this sphere, public opinion is not organically formed but is co-constructed by three principal factors:

Creator Strategy: Deliberately using highly engaging, low-context narrative frames.

Platform Logic: The algorithm rewarding content based on engagement metrics.

Audience Feedback: Users supplying the emotional data (likes, comments) that fuels the algorithm.

The resulting public opinion, or cultural discourse, is therefore a technologically mediated artifact, characterized by rapid consensus around certain emotional frames and a fleeting attention span.

3.Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Scope

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this investigation, combining qualitative content analysis of the video texts with quantitative and qualitative contextual analysis of engagement data. This approach allows for a robust linkage between the creative production (narrative frames) and the platform’s distributive effects (algorithmic amplification and public opinion structure)^[14]. The study focused on content generated on Douyin, the leading short video platform in China, given its dominance in cultural content dissemination and its sophisticated recommendation architecture.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

A purposive, stratified sample of 100 Guochao-themed short videos was selected. The sampling criteria were established as follows:

- Platform: Videos published exclusively on Douyin between January 2024 and June 2025.
- Topic/Hashtag: Inclusion required the use of core Guochao-related hashtags or appearing on Douyin’s official “Cultural Trend” topic page.
- Engagement Threshold: Only videos that surpassed one million views and ten thousand comments were selected. This criterion ensured the analysis was focused on content that had already been significantly amplified by the platform’s algorithm, thus representing the established, high-visibility discourse.
- The final sample included a diversity of content creators (official cultural institutions, MCN-affiliated influencers, and independent users) and genres (fashion, crafts, food, micro-drama).

3.3 Content Analysis Coding Scheme

A detailed coding scheme was developed and applied by two independent coders. Inter-coder reliability was established at an average Cohen’s Kappa of K=0.85, confirming the robustness of the coding instrument. Key coding variables included:

Table 1: Content Analysis Coding Scheme

Variable	Operational Definition	Measurement
Cultural Symbol Used	Primary traditional artifact or practice featured.	Categorical (e.g., Hanfu, Porcelain, Calligraphy, Opera)
Narrative Structure	Method of storytelling used to present the culture.	Categorical (e.g., Transformation Reveal, Micro-Documentary, Humorous Skit, Dialogue/Vlog)
Primary Thematic Frame	The dominant interpretative frame emphasized (RQ1).	Categorical (e.g., National Pride, Aesthetic Awe, Commercial/Product Focus, Educational/Historical)
Emotional Intensity Score	The calculated visual/auditory sensory input (e.g., fast cuts, loud music, dramatic lighting).	Ordinal Scale (1=Low, 5=High)

3.4 Algorithmic Contextual Analysis

- To address RQ2 and RQ3, quantitative data on audience response was meticulously collected for each video:
- Engagement Metrics: Total likes, shares, and save-to-favorites ratios were recorded.
- Comment Section Analysis: The top 50 comments for each video (N=5,000 comments) were extracted. These comments, highly visible due to algorithmic ranking, represent the dominant public discourse.
- Discourse Coding: The top 5,000 comments were coded for: a) Sentiment Polarity (Positive, Negative, Neutral); b) Primary Discourse Theme (e.g., Cultural Appreciation, National Identification, Authenticity Critique, Commercial Questioning). The

ratio of positive/negative sentiment was used as a proxy for the affective nature of the public sphere.

4. Findings I: Narrative Framing and Mediatization of Guochao

The content analysis revealed a consistent set of narrative strategies employed by high-visibility Guochao content creators, demonstrating a sophisticated adaptation to the short video medium's demands.

4.1 The Strategic Deployment of Low-Context Aesthetics

4.1.1 The Dominance of Visual Spectacle

The core characteristic of Guochao narratives is the prioritization of visual spectacle over informational depth. The majority (78%) of sampled videos utilized a highly produced, "New Chinese Aesthetic" characterized by vibrant color palettes (often saturated reds, golds, and jades) and cinematic lighting. Historical accuracy was frequently secondary to aesthetic impact. For instance, in videos featuring Hanfu, the complexity of period tailoring was often simplified in favor of dramatic drape, flowing movement, and modern fabric choices. The cultural symbol was thus de-contextualized from its historical origin and re-contextualized as an object of immediate, aspirational beauty.

4.1.2 The Three-Second Hook and Transformation Reveals

To meet the high-engagement demands of the algorithm, nearly all videos (92%) employed a strong "three-second hook." This hook typically involved an immediate visual transformation, a dramatic opening beat change in the background music, or the introduction of a captivating scenario. The Transformation Reveal structure (e.g., a rapid change from casual modern wear to full traditional attire) was identified as the single most effective narrative structure, accounting for 45% of the high-engagement sample. This structure capitalizes on the human psychological tendency to value sudden, high-contrast visual information. Cultural education, when present, was typically delivered in superimposed text during the final 15-20 seconds, only after viewer retention had been secured by the spectacle.

4.2 Prevalence of Affective and Identitarian Frames (RQ1)

The coding of the primary thematic frame revealed a clear hierarchy, with frames emphasizing emotion and collective identity being overwhelmingly dominant.

Table 2: Prevalence of Primary Thematic Frames

Primary Thematic Frame	Percentage of Sample (N=100)	Narrative Function
National Pride / Cultural Confidence	41%	Establishes the culture as a symbol of collective achievement and national identity.
Aesthetic Awe / Emotional Appreciation	35%	Focuses solely on the beauty, "coolness," or dramatic effect of the cultural artifact.
Commercial / Product Display	17%	Explicitly links the cultural element to a product or brand for purchase.
Educational / Historical Context	7%	Provides detailed background, technical information, or historical accuracy.

4.2.1 The Amplified National Pride Frame

The National Pride Frame was identified as the most frequent primary frame. These narratives employed techniques such as cross-generational comparison (e.g., a grandparent's traditional craft inspiring a young, successful modern designer) or direct comparisons with external cultures (e.g., showing the superiority of Chinese design). The underlying message communicated was that engaging with Guochao is synonymous with celebrating national identity. This framing is highly effective because it transcends niche cultural interest, making the content relevant to a broad, identity-conscious audience, thereby maximizing the potential for mass amplification.

4.2.2 Marginalization of Educational Content

Conversely, videos primarily employing the Educational/Historical Context Frame were significantly underrepresented in the high-engagement sample (7%). When educational content was included, it was usually brief, shallow, and supplementary to a

dominant visual hook. This finding strongly suggests a systemic tension between the requirements of the short video medium and the delivery of nuanced, academically rigorous cultural information. Depth and detail are being systemically marginalized by the forces driving visibility.

4.3 Mediatized Symbolism: Simplifying High-Context Culture

The selection of cultural symbols was not random; high-context artifacts were consistently simplified into low-context, highly recognizable symbols. For example, traditional Chinese painting, with its complex history and philosophical underpinnings, was primarily represented by the immediate visual appeal of the color “China Red” or the stylized image of a mythical creature like the phoenix. The richness of the cultural source was condensed into a readily understood, visually striking signifier. This process aligns with the principle of mediatization, where cultural complexity is necessarily reduced to fit the technological parameters of the medium. The symbol is thus made accessible to the mass audience, but at the cost of its original, multi-layered significance.

5. Findings II: Algorithmic Amplification and Public Opinion

5.1 Algorithmic Bias toward Affective Framing (RQ2)

5.1.1 Correlation between Emotional Intensity and Visibility

A significant positive correlation (Pearson $r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$) was found between the video’s coded Emotional Intensity Score and its final engagement metric composite (total likes + shares + comments). This statistical relationship confirms that content designed to elicit a strong, immediate emotional reaction is systematically favored by the algorithm. The platform’s optimization for user retention and interaction implicitly translates into a structural bias toward affective framing. Creators who successfully integrated dramatic aesthetics and the National Pride Frame were demonstrably rewarded with higher visibility.

5.1.2 Reinforcement of the “Quick Consensus”

The algorithmic recommendation system functions to create a “Quick Consensus” around highly engaging topics. When a Guochao video achieves high initial engagement (e.g., 500 likes in the first hour), the algorithm pushes it to progressively larger user pools. This mechanism rapidly converts isolated viewing into a mass cultural phenomenon. The short-lived, spectacular nature of the content is thus counteracted by the algorithm’s power to momentarily elevate the topic to the status of a collective cultural experience, which subsequently shapes the collective cultural memory.

5.2 The Emotional and Polarized Nature of Discourse (RQ3)

The analysis of the top-ranked comments provided a clear window into the algorithmic public sphere, revealing a discourse dominated by strong sentiment and internal fragmentation.

5.2.1 Dominance of Positive Sentiment

The comment discourse was overwhelmingly dominated by positive sentiment. Overall, 82% of the top-ranked comments expressed explicit positive emotions, such as “Awe,” “Pride,” or “Admiration.” Typical phrases included, “This is true Chinese elegance!” and “I am so proud of our culture.” This high positivity is not merely a reflection of content quality; it is a direct consequence of the algorithmic ranking process. Comments that echo the video’s dominant emotional frame (e.g., the National Pride Frame) are more likely to be liked by other users, and these high-like comments are then boosted to the top of the comment feed. The algorithm, therefore, functions as a mechanism for sentiment stratification, amplifying consensus and suppressing critical discourse at the surface level.

5.2.2 The Submerged Authenticity Critique

Despite the dominance of positive sentiment, a persistent vein of critical discourse—specifically, the Authenticity Critique and Commercial Questioning—was identified in 18% of the coded comments. These comments challenged the content’s historical accuracy or the creator’s commercial motives. Examples include: “This is beautiful, but that style is historically inaccurate,” or “Another ad disguised as culture.”

Crucially, while these critiques existed, they were rarely found at the very top of the comment feed. They were consistently ranked lower than the purely affective comments, suggesting that while the public sphere is aware of the commercialization frame tension, the platform’s ranking mechanism prioritizes emotional affirmation over rational critique. The critical

discourse is thus submerged, present but structurally disadvantaged in terms of visibility.

5.3 Public Opinion Construction: The Guochao-as-Identity Narrative

The totality of the findings suggests that public opinion regarding Guochao is being constructed around the central idea of Guochao-as-Identity. The cultural artifact itself (the Hanfu, the porcelain) is less important than its function as a readily available, aesthetic symbol of national strength and self-confidence.

The co-construction process proceeds as follows:

Creator Input: Creators use high visual spectacle and the National Pride Frame.

Algorithmic Filter: The algorithm promotes this affective content due to high initial engagement (likes/shares).

Audience Output: The audience is exposed to and responds with overwhelmingly positive, consensus-driven, and identity-affirming comments.

Feedback Loop: The positive comments further signal to the algorithm that the content is valuable, increasing its distribution. Through this loop, a public opinion is constructed where the dominant discourse affirms the beauty and value of Guochao, simultaneously reinforcing the viewer's sense of cultural belonging. The commercial and historical complexities of the cultural revival are deliberately sidelined by the combined forces of mediatized narrative and technological gatekeeping.

6. Discussion and Implications

6.1 The Dual Nature of Cultural Mediatization

The findings unequivocally demonstrate the dual impact of cultural mediatization. On one hand, the short video format has provided an unprecedented democratic platform for the re-propagation of traditional culture. Cultural knowledge, once restricted to scholarly texts or museums, is now immediately accessible to millions of digital natives^[15]. The utilization of the low-context, high-spectacle aesthetic has successfully engaged a young audience that might otherwise be indifferent to traditional heritage. This fulfills the objective of cultural outreach.

On the other hand, this mediatization process imposes a tyranny of the spectacle. The imperative for virality and engagement necessitates the simplification of cultural complexity. The high correlation between emotional intensity and algorithmic visibility confirms that the platform structurally favors the emotional shell of culture over its intellectual core^[16]. The cultural artifact becomes a performative symbol, valued primarily for its ability to elicit collective pride, rather than for its intrinsic historical or artisanal significance. This creates a critical challenge: a broad reach is achieved, but potentially at the expense of genuine, deep cultural understanding.

6.2 Algorithmic Bias and the Commodification of Pride

The study provides empirical support for the theoretical critique of the Algorithmic Public Sphere. The algorithm, driven by commercial goals, acts as an affective filter, consistently amplifying the National Pride Frame. This amplification effectively turns cultural affinity into a marketable commodity. When a user expresses pride or awe via a like, they are providing valuable data that can be monetized. The cultural experience is thus fundamentally integrated into the attention economy^[17]. The submerged nature of the authenticity critique is particularly concerning. While users are capable of critical thought, the structural design of the platform minimizes the visibility of rational discourse. The algorithmic feedback loop rewards the simplest, most affirming expression of emotion, creating a skewed representation of public opinion. This systemic preference risks fostering a culture of superficial engagement, where the act of consuming and affirming the cultural symbol is mistaken for genuine cultural practice or knowledge acquisition.

6.3 Framing and the New Cultural Gatekeepers

The findings highlight a new form of gatekeeping that exists not at the level of censorship, but at the level of algorithmic prioritization. The most successful Guochao creators are those who have mastered the art of encoding high-context culture into low-context, algorithm-friendly narratives^[18]. These creators, often operating within sophisticated MCN (Multi-Channel Network) structures, function as the new cultural gatekeepers. Their ability to successfully frame tradition as national pride or aesthetic marvel grants them privileged access to the mass public, shaping the cultural agenda more effectively than official cultural institutions. The question is no longer what content is allowed, but whose frame of culture is privileged.

6.4 Practical Implications for Policy and Practice

Policy for Algorithmic Transparency and Value Weighting: Platform governance must move beyond content moderation toward algorithmic accountability. Policy frameworks should incentivize platforms to introduce non-engagement metrics (e.g., educational value, historical accuracy review) into the recommendation weightings. This would require the integration of cultural experts into the algorithmic design process.

Creative Strategies for Depth: Content creators should be encouraged to integrate their emotional hooks with moments of genuine cultural insight. This could involve the use of the “Narrative Reveal”—where the spectacle (the hook) leads directly to a brief, verifiable cultural fact—as a means of balancing entertainment with education.

Cultural Literacy Initiatives: Efforts must be made to raise digital cultural literacy among audiences. Viewers need to be educated on the nature of the platform’s affective bias, encouraging them to seek out the submerged critique and demand greater historical accuracy, thereby fostering a more robust and self-aware algorithmic public sphere.

7. Conclusion

This study has confirmed that the re-propagation of traditional culture through Guochao narratives on short video platforms is characterized by profound mediatization. RQ1 was answered by identifying the dominance of the National Pride and Aesthetic Awe frames, which prioritize visual spectacle and emotional immediacy. RQ2 was addressed through the finding that platform algorithms exhibit a structural bias toward affective content, correlating highly emotional narratives with visibility and amplification. Finally, concerning RQ3, the public opinion constructed is one of high emotional consensus and sentiment affirmation, where the persistent critique regarding commercialization is systematically submerged by algorithmic ranking. The platform thus plays an active role in the co-construction of cultural discourse.

This study, while utilizing a large sample of high-visibility content, is limited by its reliance on publicly available metrics. The specific, proprietary mechanism of the Douyin algorithm remains a “black box.” Future research could mitigate this by conducting controlled experimental studies to isolate the effect of specific narrative variables (e.g., music tempo, visual contrast) on user engagement rates. Furthermore, comparative analysis across different short video platforms (e.g., Douyin vs. Kuaishou) or across international platforms (e.g., TikTok) would provide deeper insight into how varying algorithmic cultures affect Guochao’s narrative framing and reception in different national contexts. The long-term impact of this affective cultural consumption on actual identity formation and knowledge retention also warrants longitudinal investigation.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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