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Research on the Creation and Influence of *the Records of Lacquering*

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Abstract: The Records of Lacquering 《髹饰录》 was written in the Ming Dynasty, has been cited by Chinese and foreign researchers as the most classic text in the study of ancient Chinese lacquer art. The book was lost in China during the Qing Dynasty, and it was not until modern times that it was introduced back to China. In addition to the legendary circulation of *the Records of Lacquering*, the knowledge of ancient Chinese lacquer art recorded in this book is also invaluable. Huang Cheng (黄成), the author of the book, and Yang Ming (杨明), the annotator, are from Xin'an (新安), Anhui (安徽) Province, and Xitang (西塘), Zhejiang (浙江) Province respectively. Although they did not come from the same place and lived in different periods of time, with the frequent exchanges between craftsmen in the Jiangnan (江南) area in the late Ming Dynasty, and the continuous expansion of lacquer production, the related craft knowledge also circulated rapidly. Eventually, these two master lacquer carvers, though in different ages and places, had the opportunity to bring together various popular lacquer art knowledge, which led to the Creation of *the Records of Lacquering*. It played an invaluable role in the dissemination of traditional Chinese lacquer knowledge.

Keywords: Ming Dynasty; Lacquer; The Records of Lacquering; Influence

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Introduction

In the long history of the development of lacquer art in China, the Records of Lacquering 《髹饰录》 is the only specialized record that has been handed down to date. The importance of this lacquer art text is especially prominent in the face of the rich heritage of traditional Chinese lacquer art. As China is a vast country with a long history of lacquer art, how to categorize and name the large number of ancient lacquer artifacts that have been handed down from various places through the ages has become an issue that many scholars continue to explore. In this regard, the Records of Lacquering have become an indispensable reference text. Lacquer is a unique invention of Chinese ancestors, and the writing style of the Records of Lacquering is also very rich in Chinese characteristics.

This book appeared in the fifth year (1625) of the Tianqi period of the Ming Dynasty, and consists of two volumes. One of the volumes mainly records the various materials and tools used in the production of lacquerware, as well as the rules of work that the craftsmen need to pay attention to and the defects caused by improper operation. The other volume records the various types of lacquer decorations popular at that time, as well as knowledge as regards making and restoring ancient lacquerware. The book is preceded by a preface written by an annotator, who records that the original author of

the book was Huang Cheng, a lacquerer from Xin'an, and the annotator was Yang Ming, a lacquerer from Xitang (西塘).

The Circulation of the Records of Lacquering

For a long time, the Records of Lacquering has been little known, including the recognition of its original author, Huang Cheng, and its annotator, Yang Ming, as the most famous lacquerers of the Ming Dynasty, which was only formed in recent times. One of the reasons for this is that they are seldom mentioned in ancient literature. Another important reason is that the Records of Lacquering was lost in the mid-Qing Dynasty at the latest. It was not until the mid-1920s that the Records of Lacquering received renewed attention. With the gradual spread of the book in the domestic literature and museums, the question of why its author and annotator were talented has once again received attention. The question of why the Records of Lacquering was lost in China began to be discussed in domestic academic circles after the book was reintroduced to China. The most popular and influential viewpoint in this regard focuses on the low value placed on craftsmen and artisans engaged in manual labor in ancient China, which led to the low value placed on the writings of craftsmen and artisans. In short, it is a conceptual interpretation of the loss of the Records of Lacquering from the ancient Chinese literatis' tradition of emphasizing philosophical thinking but neglecting practical matters. The inner context of this interpretation points to the reality that cultural discourse in ancient Chinese society was long monopolized by the ruling group and a few upper-class literati.

In addition, the abbreviated and unspecified nature of the Records of Lacquering record and the use of many scriptural and historical allusions, among other things, in the description have led many researchers to develop two more direct perceptions in the process of interpreting it. First, the Records of Lacquering is thought to have come from the knowledge of lacquerers who passed it on privately, and it was passed down in the form of a script. Because it was not distributed in the form of an engraved book, it was not widely circulated, and it was eventually lost. Second, because the text and description of the *Records of Lacquering* are obscure and difficult to understand, it is believed that the book was not originally written to disseminate the knowledge of lacquer decoration and was probably written by the author to show off his knowledge. With the change between the Ming and Oing Dynasties the text was forgotten and eventually lost. The key to the understanding that the Records of Lacquering was lost during the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty (1796-1820) is the record of Huang Cheng, the author of the Records of Lacquering, in the Qing Dynasty. It last appeared in the Notes of Jianyang《尖阳丛笔》, written by the bibliophile Wu Qian (1733-1813), which mentions that in the Yuan Dynasty there were two lacquerers, Zhang Cheng and Yang Mao, who were the most skillful in lacquerware production. During the Longqing period (1567-1572) of the Ming Dynasty, Huang Pingsha (黄平沙) from Xin'an specialized in the production of carved red lacquerware (剔红), and a carved red lacquer box was worth 3,000 wen. (三千文) [1] Wu Qian was a book collector in Haining, Zhejiang Province, during the Jiaqing period, and it

is said that his life hobby was to collect books; the number of his books was not less than 50,000 volumes [2].

Although Wu Qian (吴骞) recorded information about Huang Pingsha, a lacquerer from Xin'an, this likely did not come from a knowledge of the Records of Lacquering. In addition to the fact that the Records of Lacquering is not mentioned in it, it is also because the record is very similar to that of the Ming Dynasty bibliophile Gao Lian (高濂). Gao Lian was a theater writer and bibliophile active in Qiantang (present-day Hangzhou) during the Wanli period (1573-1620) of the Ming Dynasty. In his book the Eight Treatises on Following the Principles of Life《遵生八笺》it is recorded: "The Ming Mu Zong (1537-1572) period, from Xin'an Huang Pingsha (新安黄平沙) made the level of carved red lacquerware comparable to palace lacquerware workshop orchard factory production. He carved red lacquer works with flowers, fruits and figures as decorative motifs, and his carving technique was smooth and delicate. Unfortunately, nowadays, in order to chase profits, a large number of mediocre craftsmen have imitated this, but the production is very poor. In the past, the value of 3,000 wen's work we now no longer see; where else can I find it? [3]" Wu Qian's record of Huang Pingsha is the same as his, and perhaps Wu Qian's record came from Gao Lian. Gao Lian lived in an era close to that of Huang Cheng, and his evaluation of the author of the Records of Lacquering should be a more authentic record of Huang Cheng's situation at that time. However, Gao Lian did not record Huang Cheng's the Records of Lacquering, so it can be seen that the Records of Lacquering was not yet popular in the Wanli period.

Nowadays, only the codex of the Records of Lacquering is in circulation, during the time when the preface was written - March 1625 ("Spring March of Tianqi yichou") - and is preserved. This suggests that the Records of Lacquering, with its preface and annotations, began to spread and become popular in the Jiangnan region only after 1625. The Records of Lacquering was lost in China after the mid-Qing Dynasty, but before it was lost in China, it was spread to Japan in the form of a handwritten codex and has been preserved to this day. Because of Japan's ancient admiration for Chinese craftsmanship, the Records of Lacquering was further circulated to Japan, and several other codices were produced. Among these codices, two of the most famous ones have been handed down to the present day, one from Kimura Kenkado (木村蒹葭堂), a famous bibliophile in Osaka during the Edo period, and the other from the family of Muneyoshi Tokugawa (德川宗敬). After the death of Kimura Kōkō (木村孔恭) in 1802, the codex of the Records of Lacquering in the Kimura Kenkado collection was transferred to the Confucian school under the Tokugawa Shogunate of Japan in 1804, along with his huge collection of books. Until the fifth year of the Meiji era (1872), when it was merged with the Yamamomiji Mountain Library, the codex entered the Asakusa Bunko of the Tokyo Public Library. In 1881, it was added to the Ueno Museum, which was later renamed the Tokyo National Museum (1947). With the original copy of the Records of Lacquering in the Kimura Kenkadō collection coming into the public eye earlier, it was soon followed by several editions copied by arts and crafts institutions such as the Tokyo Fine Arts School for research and teaching purposes. This led to the early popularization of this codex in Japan.

The codices collected by Muneyoshi Tokugawa came from the family collection of Tokugawa Doda (德川道达), Count of Hitotsubashi Tokugawa. The Hitotsubashi Tokugawa family (一桥德川家族) began collecting various books related to arts and crafts as early as the Edo period, and their collection reached more than 30,000 books in the late Edo period. In 1943, his descendant, Muneyoshi Tokugawa, donated these valuable collections to the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum. Since then, the two earliest and most representative codices have been housed in the Tokyo National Museum. The Kimura Kenkado's codex was first publicized and brought to the attention of researchers who taught at the Tokyo Fine Arts School. As a result, when news of the book was sent back to China, the copy of the Records of Lacquering that came with it was considered by most scholars to be a copy of Kimura Kenkado's codex, copied by the Tokyo Fine Arts School. In fact, the relationship between these two codices of the Records of Lacquering, which are believed to be the earliest, remains inconclusive. Although the Records of Lacquering codex in Muneyoshi Tokugawa's collection has been in the Tokyo National Museum since the mid-1940s, it did not come to the attention of researchers until after the 1960s. It was not until the 1960s that the codex became known to Chinese scholars.

The Creation of the Records of Lacquering

In addition to the earlier known codex in the Kimura Kenkadō collection and the more beautifully copied codex in the Muneyoshi Tokugawa's collection, other codices have been circulating in Japan. According to Japanese researchers in the Meiji era (1868-1912), the codices that appeared at that time were mainly based on those in the Kimura Kenkadō. This is mainly due to the fact that the codices by Muneyoshi Tokugawa were not yet available to the public, and it was believed that the former was the only codex of the Records of Lacquering that had ever been handed down. It is clear from the fact that other codices found later were also annotated with the signature "Master of Shourūdo" (寿碌堂主人) that the first codex of the Records of Lacquering that came to Japan was copied by this Japanese person. According to an influential Japanese theory, this "Master of Shourūdo" was probably the armorer Haruta Nagatoshi (春田永年), who lived in Osaka during the Edo period. In fact, the version of the Records of Lacquering copied by him is still difficult to trace, and may have long been lost. Because Kimura Kenkadō and Muneyoshi Tokugawa's collection of the codex on the "Master of Shourūdo" annotations in a number of places have "One book" "another book" text. This means that it was possible to refer to more than one original version when copying.

Each copy of *the Records of Lacquering* seen today consists of four parts. They consist of the original text by the author Huang Cheng, the preface and notes by Yang Ming, and the eyebrow mark by the "Master of Shourūdō" - Haruta Nagatoshi. The preface to *the Records of Lacquering* is extremely important, as the date it bears reveals the book's status in China at the time of its completion and before it was transmitted to Japan. Moreover, the information in the codex that was transmitted to Japan indicates that the book began to be disseminated overseas in earnest in 1625, when it was supplemented by Yang Ming's annotations. In addition, the preface also introduces the author, Huang Cheng, saying,

"Huang Pingsha (Huang Cheng) from Xin'an was a famous craftsman who was praised at that time. Not only did he specialize in lacquer techniques, but he also authored the twovolume book *(the Records of Lacquering).* The mismatch between decoration and texture, inappropriate design, and unattractive appearance of lacquerware production are not specifically described in them, but only the importance of the method is emphasized." [4] This further confirms Huang Cheng's identity as a famous lacquerer of the Ming Dynasty, and also mentions his hometown, Xin'an. In ancient China, several places were called Xin'an at different times. Nowadays, the "Xin'an" mentioned in *the Records of Lacquering* is generally considered to be the present-day city of Huangshan in Anhui Province, which was called Xindu or Xin'an in ancient times.

In the third year (1121) of Song Huizong Xuanhe, Shezhou (歙州) was renamed Huizhou (徽州). It is said to be due to the pacification of the Shezhou people's uprising, because the word "Hui" (徽) has the meaning of binding, but also said to have originated from Jixi, with the name of Hui Ling (徽岭), Hui Xi (徽溪) [5]. Thereafter, until the third year of Xuantong (1911) the name of Huizhou was used as the name of the state capital. 1987 to 1988 saw the abolition of Huizhou, Tunxi (屯溪) City, Huangshan City (county level), and the establishment of the new city of Huangshan, under the Tunxi, Huangshan, Huizhou and other districts, and She, Xiuning, Qimen, Yi (歙, 休宁, 祁门, 黟) and other counties. As the name of Huizhou was used for a long time, the so-called "Huizhou studies" (徽学) have been formed at the level of cultural research. "Huizhou studies" includes both the Ming and Qing Dynasties around the Huizhou as the center of the geographic and cultural generalization, and its scope is not limited to today's Huangshan City, Anhui Province, Jixi County, but also covers Jiangxi Province Wuyuan County (江西省婺源县), as well as today's Zhejiang Province, Chun'an County (浙江省淳安县). Geographically they are in the north of the Qiantang River basin, especially the Xin'an River in Huangshan City today, which was also known as Hui Harbor, and also known as Gradual River and Zhejiang in ancient times. Thus, Xin'an becomes a flexible geographical concept, and is culturally comprehensive, able to connect Xin'an (新安) culture with Huizhou culture. Thus, it is easy to understand that, including the preface of the Records of Lacquering, despite the fact that the name of the place had already been changed to Huizhou at that time, the literature of the Ming and Qing Dynasties still wrote "Xin'an Huangpingsha" when referring to Huangcheng (黄成).

It is worth noting that in the past, there was once a discussion about whether "Pingsha" (平沙) in "Huangpingsha" was a place name of Huizhou or a name of Huang Cheng. Because "Xin'an" and "Pingsha" in "Xin'an Huang Pingsha" are both place names. The description of place name + family name + place name does not conform to the traditional practice of address. Moreover, Xin'an, where Huang Cheng is located, is considered to be Huizhou, but there is no conclusive proof that "Pingsha" belongs to Huizhou. The idea that "Pingsha" is a place name is still popular today, which is related to the fact that the title of the volume of *the Records of Lacquering* is "written by Huang Cheng of Pingsha". Why "Pingsha" is not a place name will also become a question worth discussing. In fact, this question is mainly related to exploring the background of Huang Cheng's origin and life and upbringing. If this information could be made clearer, it might shed light on the Creation of *the Records of Lacquering*. However, apart from the fact that it is difficult to determine the specific affiliation of "Pingsha" as a place name, other information related to Huang Cheng is also very scarce. Even in the preface of *the Records of Lacquering*, there are only a few words, which mainly focus on the annotator's explanation of why Huang Cheng wrote the book.

According to the preface of the Records of Lacquering, Huang Cheng, as a famous craftsman at that time, studied ancient and modern lacquer techniques. He wrote this book only in the direction of the technique, and did not make detailed records of the specific problems related to the production of lacquer ware. From this, combined with fewer records in the Eight Treatises on Following the Principles of Life《遵生八笺》 of the Ming Dynasty, it can be concluded that Huang Cheng was mainly active during the Longqing period of Emperor Mu Zong of the Ming Dynasty (1567-1572). In the eyes of the people of the time, his carved red lacquer works were comparable to those of the royal lacquer workshops. The author of Eight Treatises on Following the Principles of Life, Gao Lian, lived between the Jiajing (1522-1566) and Wanli (1573-1620) periods of the Ming Dynasty, and his records were intended to criticize the fact that the carved red lacquerware (剔红漆器) of the period was not as good as before. However, it highlights the high standard of carved red lacquerware produced by private lacquer-workers between Yongle (1403-1424) and Xuande (1426-1435), which peaked between the late 15th and mid-16th centuries. From this point of view, it is possible to understand the key factors that led to the creation of *the Records of Lacquering.* On the one hand, the early period was no longer represented by the highest level of lacquerware made by the court, and on the other hand, the high level of lacquerware made by the private sector also regressed after the Wanli period. Thus, Huang Cheng was promoted to the role of preaching and teaching, and logically wrote the Records of Lacquering to summarize his experience and teach the lessons.

The Influence of the Records of Lacquering

The above discussion of the Creation of *the Records of Lacquering* centers on its author, Huang Cheng, and the book's popularity in the early 17th century. And it relies on some of the views of the time to sort out the possibilities before and after the appearance of the book. However, in today's view, the process of the Creation of *the Records of Lacquering* is connected with many other necessary conditions and influences. In fact, the development and dissemination of the book between the Longqing and Tianqi yichou years is far more complex than the single-line relationship described above. There are, for example, various historical references in the original text of *the Records of Lacquering*. How did Huang Cheng, a lacquer carver, acquire knowledge of these cultural classics? The previous analysis of Huang Cheng's Creationplace, Xin'an, that is, Huizhou, has actually responded to this question to a certain extent. Perhaps this is closely related to the author Huang Cheng from Huizhou in the Ming Dynasty. Huizhou was one of the famous book carving and printing centers in the Ming Dynasty. When book stores were all over Huizhou, other places to hire people to carve and print books (刻书) were also keen to hire carvers from Huizhou, not only with the prevalence of book engraving, but also to promote the local social atmosphere of reverence for reading [6]. In the Huizhou time, when merchants promoted Confucianism, Huizhou became a place of cultural and educational prosperity. Although Huang Cheng was an artisan, he grew up and lived here, and was thus influenced by the local Confucian classical education.

The flourishing culture of literature and education provided the foundation for Huang Cheng to write *the Records of Lacquering*. However, the more critical issue is that Huang Cheng listed the various materials and tools needed to make lacquer, as well as various popular styles of lacquer without describing the specific practices. Obviously, this contradicts today's view that Huang Cheng wrote *the Records of Lacquering* in order to pass on his excellent lacquer art skills. What was Huang Cheng's real purpose in writing *the Records of Lacquering* if it was not to disseminate the experience of lacquer decoration making?

In the past, there were three popular views on this question. The first is that Huang Cheng, although a lacquerer, lived in Huizhou and was influenced by the local cultural atmosphere, and deliberately demonstrated his knowledge of the classics. Secondly, it is believed that experience was accumulated by the craftsmen over the years, and in order to control its dissemination, Huang Cheng therefore applied the classics to make his knowledge and experience not easily accessible. Thirdly, it is believed that *the Records of Lacquering* is not a technical guide to teach lacquer art, but a collection guide to teach the experience of lacquer art appreciation. It was not written for the purpose and use of instructing lacquer making. All three views have some merit, especially the last one. In the last part of *the Records of Lacquering*, the annotator Yang Ming points out even more directly, "The last part of the book is named "reverence for the classics" (尚古), probably where Huang Cheng's purpose in writing this book lies. Therefore, this book is primarily a record of the effects of decoration, without developing a description of the specific method of construction. So, this book was written to learn from the past." [7]

However, careful readers will find that in the preface of the Records of Lacquering it mentioned that Huang Cheng wrote the book about the lacquerware production of the decorative and texture mismatch, inappropriate design, the appearance of the inappropriate, but among them was no specific description. Only emphasize the importance of the method of characteristics; in fact, this is also from Yang Ming's statement. Yang Ming then goes on to state his reason for annotating the Records of Lacquering: "The original text of each Huang Cheng is now accompanied by an annotation, so that it can be used as a reference for later craftsmen and help a little in the progress of the craft." [4] In addition to what Yang Ming said earlier, the last part of the book is called by the author reverence for the classics, which is probably the purpose of Huang Cheng writing this book. At this point, it can be realized that the Creation and use of the Records of Lacquering may have changed between the author Huang Cheng and the annotator Yang Ming. Perhaps what really happened is that the original text of the Records of Lacquering was originally Huang Cheng's record of the information he had on popular lacquer art. However, after the text was acquired by Yang Ming, he recognized Huang Cheng's record of lacquer art and wrote the book by annotating each article of the original text with a preface that positioned the text as a reference for later craftsmen to help them advance in their craft. It is also interesting to note that Yang Ming wrote the preface and supplementary notes for the *Records of Lacquering* in the fifth year of the Tianqi era (1625), which is nearly 60 years from the year of Longqing (1567), when Huang Cheng was active, to the fifth year of the Tianqi era. So how did Huang Cheng's *the Records of Lacquering* circulate to Yang Ming in Xitang during this period?

The concept of the Qiantang River Basin is crucial to the exploration of this issue. Xin'an in Anhui Province is in the northwestern part of the Qiantang River basin, while Xitang is located in the northeastern part of Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province. Although there is some distance between the two places, they are connected by waterways. As early as in the Yuan Dynasty, Xitang in Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province was a lacquer production center where famous craftsmen gathered.

At the end of the Yuan Dynasty, Tao Zongyi (陶宗仪) recorded in the Retirement to the Countryside《辍耕录》: "In Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, there are lacquerers from Yanghui (杨汇), specializing in depicting gold lacquer (戗金), and depicting silver lacquer (戗银) craft. All kinds of utensils and articles first use black lacquer as the base, and then use needles to carve landscapes, trees and stones, or flowers and birds, pavilions, characters and stories and other decorative themes, all very perfect." [8] The Ming Dynasty Wang Zuo in the New Edition of Important Discussions about Assessing Antiques 《新增格古 要论》 said: "Depicting gold lacquer technology needs to be carried out on a hard lacquer base and depicted perfectly in order to be considered a fine product. In the early Yuan Dynasty, there was a very famous craftsman named Peng Junbao (彭君宝) in Xitang, Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, who used the technique of depicting gold lacquer. The landscapes, figures, flowers, trees and other subjects he made with the technique of gold bumping were all very exquisite." At the same time the book mentions, "Yang Hui, a lacquerer from Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, during the Yuan Dynasty, as well as Zhang Cheng and Yang Mao, who were the most famous craftsmen making carved red lacquerware at the time." [9] It can be seen that the famous craftsmen of Xitang in the Yuan Dynasty were numerous, and the depicted gold of Peng's family and the lacquer craftsmen of Zhang and Yang's two branches were the most famous. Yang Ming, the annotator of the Records of Lacquering, is generally regarded as a lacquerer or a descendant of the same family of the Yang family in Xitang in the Yuan Dynasty [10].

In fact, Huang Cheng's original text of *the Records of Lacquering*, which was transmitted to Xitang and annotated by Yang Ming, became a reference text that served as a guide to both appreciation and production. It is likely that Huang Cheng's original *the Records of Lacquering* was written only for customers or collectors, and may have served to publicize his lacquerware production. However, it is clear from the literature that Huang Cheng was most skilled in the production of carved red lacquer, and perhaps in some other types of lacquerwares as well.

However, *the Records of Lacquering* lists all the basic types of lacquer art popular during the Ming Dynasty. It can be said that no lacquerer, including Huang Cheng, could have mastered all the types of lacquer recorded in *the Records of Lacquering*. This indirectly suggests that knowledge of various types of lacquer decoration could have been spread rapidly. Therefore, this also indirectly indicates an important premise for the formation of

the Records of Lacquering, which is the possibility of the rapid spread of knowledge of various lacquer decorations at that time. This was made possible by the transportation in the Qiantang River valley, and the cultural space created by the mobility of craftsmen, the transmission of texts, and the consumption of crafts.

Conclusion

In terms of the circumstances summarized above, the Creation of the Records of Lacquering was also supported by a much larger material and cultural milieu of the late Ming Dynasty. This environment led to the emergence of a close communication and connection between Huizhou and Jiaxing in terms of the exchange of lacquer knowledge, thus creating an opportunity to summarize the knowledge of numerous lacquer decorations. Located in the northwest of the Qiantang River Basin, Huizhou lacquer production has a long history of development, such as the Local Records of Shexian《歙县志》 that mentioned that there were the Yu family (余氏), and the Wang family (汪氏) as being most specialized in lacquer production, the production of which can be close to the orchard factory records [11]. It can be seen that Huizhou was one of the important production centers of lacquer art in the Ming Dynasty. The Records of Lacquering was originally born here and spread to Xitang through the communication between lacquer craftsmen and the circulation of lacquer products and knowledge. The book was then supplemented and enriched by the lacquerers of the region, making it a classic of lacquer art that combines appreciation of the craft with knowledge of its production. Subsequently, through the frequent exchanges between the three Wu (三吴) regions, the book spread to Japan, where it has been treasured and preserved to this day. In summary, we have seen the Creation of the Records of Lacquering and its use of the examination, from which it can be seen that the late Ming Dynasty Chinese lacquer culture had internal and external exchanges frequently. At the same time, it also reflects the repercussions of the rapid expansion of folk handicrafts in the consumption of lacquer art and cultural exchanges brought about by the loosening of craftsmen's service and the development of the commodity market in the mid-to-late Ming Dynasty.

Conflicts of Interest:

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this research.

Author Contribution:

The author has written the article alone without collaborating with anyone else.

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