

Political Mobilization in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area from the Rural Traditional Perspective (1932-1935)

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How to cite this paper: Liu, X. C. (2023). Political Mobilization in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area from the Rural Traditional Perspective (1932-1935). *Advances in Historical Studies, 12,* 77-87. https://doi.org/10.4236/ahs.2023.123006

Received: June 21, 2023 **Accepted:** August 26, 2023 **Published:** August 29, 2023

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Abstract

In the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet area, the Communist Party of China carried out political mobilization through rural tradition. Firstly, by making the masses feel the improvement of their material life, it stimulated their traditional ethic of gratitude. This ethic prompted them to join the Red Army. Secondly, it influenced them with popular and vivid newspapers according to the traditional farmers. Thirdly, the influence of the people of the Red Army or the Soviet government was used to lead their family members and fellow villagers to join. The Communist Party of China succeeded in mobilizing the masses to join the Red Army through the above efforts.

Keywords

Rural Tradition, Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area, Political Mobilization

1. Introduction

In December 1932, the Fourth Red Front Army moved into Sichuan and Shaanxi to open up the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area. In April 1935, the red army left the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area. At the same time, the red army launched some wars against the Sichuan warlords Tian Songyao and Liu Xiang. The Red Army needed to constantly replenish its soldiers to cope with the frequent wars. To achieve this goal, the Communist Party of China (CPC) needed to politically mobilise the vast number of peasants in the Soviet area. However, to peasants living in a traditional rural society, modern concepts such as "Communist Party of China" and "Soviet Union" seemed strange. It was difficult for the peasants to respond to the Communist Party of China. As Xu Xiangqian recalled, many farmers in northern Sichuan "lived in the corners of the mountains with closed traffic, and had never even heard of the 'Three Principles of the People' or the 'National Revolution', let alone 'Communism' and the 'Soviet movement'" (Xu, 1987). How can the rural peasants in the Soviet revolutionary movement be encouraged by the rural population?¹ was the key for CPC.

At present, academic studies on political mobilization of the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet area mainly focuses on the following three aspects. Firstly, it summarizes the background, subject, object, content, method, strategy, effectiveness, limitation and contemporary value of the political mobilization². Secondly, it discusses the issue from the perspective of mass interests and mass assemblies³. Thirdly, it analyzes the political mobilization in the women's movement and the children's movement⁴. Fourthly, the relationship between people's life and political mobilization was analyzed⁵.

Existing achievements need to be deepened. Firstly, the content of the study has yet to be expanded. Secondly, there is a lack of analyses on the mentality of the masses. Thirdly, the influence of rural traditions on the Communist Party of China political mobilization was neglected, thus observing it from a perspective external to the CPC.

In this study, the historical literature of the CPC, the Kuomintang and the public were utilized to analyze how the CPC mobilized the masses by integrating its policies and ideas into the mass life of rural traditions.

2. Meeting the Material Needs of the People

The material life of the masses consisted mainly of land and money. By fulfilling the needs of the masses to achieve the goals of the revolution, the CPC inspired the traditional moral concept of "gratitude" among the masses and rewarded the

²Representative papers include: Zhou Zhijun, Research on the Populace Mobilization in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Areas, the master thesis of university of Electronic Science and Technology of China, in 2017. Chen Yueyao, Politic mobilization and contemporary Value research in the revolutionary base of Chuan Shan, the master thesis of China West Normal University, in 2018. Wang Hua, Research on Social Mobilization in Sichuan and Shaanxi Revolutionary Base Area, the master thesis of Shaanxi Normal University, in 2018.

³Representative papers include: Zhang Xiqing, A Study of Mass Interests and Politics Mobilization—Based on the Experience of Sichuan-Shanxi Soviet Revolutionary Area, Journal of China West Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences) No.1, 2011. He Xiancheng, Liu Xinchen, A Study on Mass Meetings in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area from the Perspective of Political Mobilization, Journal of China West Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences) No.5, 2020.

⁴Representative papers include: He Xiancheng, On the Political Mobilization Ways of Women's Movement in the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Areas, Journal of China West Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences), No.4, 2019. He Xiancheng, Paths and Effects of Political Mobilization in Women's Movement of Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area, Research on Soviet Area, No. 6, 2019. Liu Changjiang, Liu Xinchen, Children Team and Mobilization for Children in the Period of Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet, Journal of Chongqing Normal University (Edition of Social Science), No.1, 2021.

⁵Representative papers include: Chen Xianchuan, Drama and Revolution: A Research on the Red Theaters in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area, Sichuan University of Arts and Sciences Journal, No.1, 2016. Yang Fengying, The research of women's life change in Chuan Shan Soviet Area, the master's thesis of Sichuan Normal University, in 2014. Yang Fengying, A Study on Women's Life Changes in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area, Chinese Culture Forum, No.7, 2017.

¹Rural traditions include the ethical of gratitude, farmers preference for popular reading, the social structure of differential order pattern and so on.

CPC by joining the Red Army.

1) Meeting people's demand for land

Before the Red Army entered Sichuan, the people in Sichuan and Shaanxi lacked land. They faced many taxes, land rents, the looting of warlord and bandits (Shi, 2002). Social personage bitterly criticized "north Sichuan land taxes had been levied until 2171 year" (Agricultural Weekly, 1933). The Kuomintang authorities also believed that Nanjiang County, which later became one of the important areas of the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area, "saw the corrupt officials in the past, the local tyrants and the evil gentry, the dark despotism had existed for a long time"⁶. Heavy rental taxes made it difficult for people to make ends meet.

CPC realized that the hardship in life would become a motivation for the masses to participate in the revolution. In February 1933, CPC pointed out that "in the Sichuan-Shaanxi area, the young workers and peasants have their own special revolutionary demands due to the brutal oppression of the Kuomintang warlords and the total bankruptcy of the rural economy."⁷ Some newspapers and periodicals in the Kuomintang-controlled region also argued that the people of northern Sichuan responded positively to the CPC because of exploitation by the warlords. For example, Shun Pao said that "the people in northern Sichuan are poor and are forced by the warlords to take desperate measures." (Shun, 1933) Ta Kung Pao believed that "the suffering of the people of Sichuan is deep. For the warlords, who all have the feeling that they are going to die with you, they are prone to accept too many ideas." (Ta, 1933) The New Shu newspaper pointed out that "the authorities exploited the people too much, causing disgust" (Xin-shu Newspaper, 1933).

In this regard, the CPC conducted the agrarian revolution to meet the peasants' demand for land: from February to October 1933, the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet government carried out land reform. In addition, the CPC performed the movement of land inspection to consolidate the achievements of land reform from October 1933 to April 1935. Land meant a lot to the peasants. "Land is the first element for farmers' survival, and the desire for land remains the most direct drive of interest for the peasants to understand, accept and move towards revolution." (Huang, 2011) The CPC clearly recognized that "the people of Sichuan, having received the benefits of land, would no longer be subject to the reactionary oppression of Tian Songyao and the landlords, which must have greatly increased their determination to resist."

2) Meeting the financial needs of the masses

The CPC also helped the people to put out fires and improve their material ⁶The Sichuan Post-War Rehabilitation Supervision Office has appointed the County Chief of Nanjiang, issuing an appointment letter. The County Chief has submitted a governance outline, inspection report, and various official and gentry documents to the Sichuan "Pacification Headquarters" in the form of a telegram. (1934). Sichuan Provincial Archives.Min048-01-0030.

⁷School of History and Culture of China West Normal University, Museum of Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolutionary Base. (2012). The Collections of Historical Documents in Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolution Base. Sichuan University Press. (In Chinese)

life, so that people can see CPC is good for them. On December 20, 1932, a fire suddenly broke out in the streets of Dawa Shipu in Tongjiang County. Xu Qiangian recalled that the Red Army got up to put out the fire immediately and "put it out after midnight." People said that "They never saw such a good army. Those soldiers helped them put out fires, and saved their lives and property. The people praised the Red Army" (Xu, 1987). When the Red Army arrived at Shisha Village in Yingshan County, they confiscated the property of a landowner named Xiao Mengchun, including silver money, rice, clothes, and utensils. The locals Gong Jian, his son Gong Yongqiang and others also took the opportunity to "rob" and "to satisfy his desire for profit to enrich their family".⁸ From the perspective of the landlord and the Kuomintang, the Red Army, Gong and others were looting private property. However, for Gong and others, the Red Army who led them to acquire the property of the landlord was benefactor. On the eve of the traditional Spring Festival in Bazhong, every family would buy Spring Festival goods. Even if the poor did not have the money to buy Chinese New Year goods, "eating meat was also good."9 After the Red Army arrived, the masses had a wonderful year. Songs from Sichuan and Shaanxi at the time were eloquent, "This is not an unusual year, the poor have money for the New Year," and "I've bought all the presents, and I still have the New Year's money in my wallet." Pressure money, in this case, refers to money left over from the New Year. The ballads emphasized that after the arrival of the Red Army, the material life of the people in Sichuan and Shaanxi improved. People had enough financial means to have a good year. These ballads may have been composed by the CPC for propaganda purposes and their content is somewhat exaggerated, but it shows the CPC's awareness of the importance of a good material year for the masses.

The above memories might have exaggerated the reaction of the masses, but the people saved their lives and property, acquired the property of the landlords, and then they realized the benefits that the CPC had given them in their material life. This made them grateful to the CPC. Some ballads reflected the relationship, "The Bashan pine was green and green, and the Red Army was the great savior." "The kindness of the Red Army was above the mountain." Those ballads even stressed that the party's kindness better than people's parents. "We all love the Communist Party. Only with the party can we enjoy happiness. Different land and land sitting, kindness is better than parents." Even though the ballads were propaganda for the CPC, it still reflected their ideal civil-military relationship.

Making the masses feel grateful was not the ultimate goal of the CPC. More importantly, the CPC mobilized the masses to join the army in this way.

Satisfying the masses' needs for land, grain, salt, meat and other necessities, on the one hand, fuelled class antagonism. As the CPC believed, the land reforms ⁸Xu Wenqi, head of Shisha Township of Yingshan County, and landlord XiaoMengchun have submitted a report of Xiao Mengchun's property confiscated by the Red Army and Gong Tu'an to Sichuan "Pacification Headquarters". (1934).Sichuan Provincial Archives. Min 048-01-0026. (In Chinese)

⁹The Committee of Compilation of Local Chronicles of Bazhong County of Sichuan Province. (1994). Local chronicles of Bazhong County. Bashu Publishing House. (In Chinese) "has created a situation where you die and I live", and "if the enemy is eliminated, then land interests can be consolidated, which is the only way to survive." On the other hand, it also stimulated the moral concept of the masses to repay the kindness of the Communist Party of China—For traditional farmers, gratitude is one of their basic moral ethics. This ethic made them close to the CPC and respond positively to political mobilization.

From the CPC's point of view, they had achieved an excellent result. The masses were mobilized to join the army. "Soviet area did not lose money, divided the land, overthrew the landlord, gentry, capitalist, Kuomintang's rule. This directly stimulated the young people of workers and peasants in Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces and made them understand the rightness of the leadership of the Communist Party. The young workers had a way of life under the Soviet regime, which led to a rapid rise in enthusiasm among the masses of young workers. Hundreds of young people joined the Red Army. They participated in the rebellion and the revolutionary war." After the inspection, the Kuomintang's reporters also concluded that the land laws of the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet areas "were implemented generally. It is also an undeniable fact that many poor farmers and hired laborers in the red area followed the Red Army. Solving the land issue was the central plank of the Red bandits. The reason why the Red Army is not easy to collapse due to oppression is that he must win the considerable support of the poor farmers from the considerable realization of this program." (Xun, 1935a)

Moreover, the CPC realized that the interest and emotional connection between the poor peasants and the local clans was a resistance to mobilize them to participate in the revolution. For example, in December 1933, the Zhongjiang County Party Committee found that although the local farmers were exploited by warlords, "under the blind of the patriarchal clan concept, their understanding of the Kuomintang's means of exploitation became blurred. Despite the extremely high fighting mood, the struggle that against the powerful gentry (the running dogs of the Kuomintang warlords) could not be resolutely implemented". Meeting the material needs of the masses is also conducive to making them feel the benefits brought to them and transferring their interests and emotional dependence on the local clans and landed gentry to the CPC in response to political mobilization.

3. Publicity in Newspapers and Periodicals

The CPC also mobilized the masses to participate in the revolution through the press and instilled revolutionary ideas in the people. "We must ensure that wherever an incident occurs, the policies and propositions of the party could be through issuance quickly and deeply, so that the masses are exposed to the Party's political influence and leadership." In the rural society, farmers mainly acquire the ethics of loyalty, filial piety and righteousness through the opera or other forms that they liked. Therefore, CPC published popular newspapers that

were influenced and mobilized by the peasants.

1) Type, distribution and content of newspapers and periodicals

In Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet area, CPC had published many newspapers and periodicals, such as Cadres must read, North Sichuan poor, The Communist Party, Soviet, Battlefield, The red army, Young pioneer, Axe, Economic construction, The small daily, Red Sichuan, Red flag, Victory, Red army pictorial and so on. Among them, Cadres must read was the official publication of the Northwest Revolutionary Military Committee. In February 1933, The Poor in northern Sichuan was designated as the official newspaper of the Sichuan and Shaanxi Provincial Party Committee and the provincial Soviet Government. After the suspension in August of the same year, The Communist Party and Soviet became the new official newspapers of the Party Committee and the Soviet government respectively. The Battlefield Daily, the official newspaper of the Political Department of the Northwest Military Region, was founded in January, 1933 and ceased publication in August. Meanwhile, The Red Army was founded and became the new organ newspaper of the Political Department of the Northwest Military Region. Young Pioneer was the official newspaper founded by the Sichuan-Shaanxi Provincial Party Committee of the Communist Youth League in August 1933. Axe was issued as the official newspaper of the Sichuan-Shaanxi Provincial Federation of Trade Unions. Economic Construction was the official newspaper of the Provincial Soviet Government Finance Committee and Economic Committee. Blood Flower was the official newspaper of the Political Department of the Red Fourth Front Army General Hospital. The Small Daily was the official newspaper of the Provincial Workers and Peasant Hospital. The Red Army Pictorial was the official newspaper of the General Political Department of the Fourth Front Army. The Red Flag was the official newspaper of the Political Department of the 9th Red Army. Red Star was the political department of the Fourth Red Army. Red Sichuan was the official newspaper of the Political Department of the 30th Red Army. Red Light was the official newspaper of the political department of the 31st Red Army.

The CPC attached importance to the construction of the newspaper distribution system, "from the branch to the district party committee, county party committee, provincial party committee, should establish a distribution system. This work is to be established in the organs of power and in the mass organizations" in order to "enable the propaganda power of the Party to reach the farthest and widest circles". These newspapers and periodicals were transmitted through red post, task teams (groups) and propaganda teams. The Red Army and local armed forces distributed newspapers through special channels. Distribution departments and bookshops at all levels sold newspapers everywhere. "Some were one a day, others three days" (Xun, 1935b).

The contents of newspapers and periodicals included all kinds of documents of party, government, military and mass organs, articles of leading cadres, editorial articles or editorials and news reports. Noteworthy among them was the support and participation of the general public in the army. As *the Communist* *Party* reported, Han Pengjiu, a representative of the workers, actively supported the Red Army and "automatically provided 15 yuan to the Red Army", suggesting that he "has known that the Red Army was the army of his own class." (Liu, 1987) Everyone should learn from him. According to *Young Pioneers*, in Bazhong County, an old man in his sixties "personally sent his son, Gou Xingyuan, to join the Young Pioneers" and warned him, "You must do well. As poor people, we would have a way to live when Liu Xiang was eliminated. Now, you are determined to go to the front and capture Liu to commemorate the Guangzhou Uprising." (Liu, 1987) Through reading or listening to newspapers, the masses learned about these people who actively supported and joined the army. However, worker Han Pengjiu and other peasants were ordinary people whose behavior could easily influence others. Meamwhile, the news also transformed the CPC's abstract policy of supporting the army and expanding the red army into the cases that concrete and easy to understand. As a result, it made the masses realize how to support the work of the Party and the Red Army.

2) People should read newspapers and periodicals

The main ways in which people read newspapers were in reading rooms, or by newspaper reading classes, literacy classes, or by the staff of the township soviets.

The CPC called for "spare schools, clubs, literacy classes and newspaper reading classes should be held. The literacy movement should be step up". "Each village should establish newspaper reading classes, libraries, literacy classes to develop the culture of the Soviet area." The CPC put this into practice. The part opened newspaper reading rooms in the county seat and the big market. The poor people in Sichuan and Shaanxi generally lack education. In the early years of the Republic, "the people were poorly educated." Before 1932, Tongjiang and Nanjiang counties "not only did not have a secondary school, but also a few well-equipped primary schools. There were usually some private schools, controlled by the landlord class. Hence, few people were literate, with more than 90 percent being illiterate."10 Nevertheless, the CPC conveyed the contents of newspapers and periodicals to the masses by reading, and the Organic Law of the Chuan-Shaan Soviets stipulated that village soviets were to "read and write" for the peasants, and that township soviets were to "carry out cultural education such as general literacy and reading of newspapers". The district Soviet Culture and Education Committee should "distribute the newspapers, notices, declarations and slogans that caused by the superior to the township", and checked the results of the township newspaper reading. In addition, the content of education received by traditional Chinese peasants was mainly the Three Character Classic and other excellent books. In order to adapt to the tradition of farmers in Sichuan and Shaanxi, the newspaper articles were "not too theoretical, and the language was simple, fluent, and easy to understand. Many articles were even written in the northern Sichuan dialect. It made an organic combination of con-

¹⁰Committee of Cultural and Historical Data of Sichuan Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. (1980). Selected Collection of Sichuan Cultural and Historical Data (Vol. 21). Sichuan People's Publishing House.

tent and form, full of encouragement" (He, 2021).

The lack of historical documentation makes it difficult to accurately explain the reading, influence and interaction of the press. Liu Ruilong recalled that "the red Square and reading rooms were also opened up in all counties and important towns, which played a very important role in activating the cultural life of the people." (Liu, 1991) These newspapers "played a great role in encouraging the masses and the Red Army soldiers to fight a hard battle". (Liu, 1991) However, Liu Ruilong's expression may have exaggerated the influence of the press. However, the presence of newspaper reading rooms in people's daily lives helped to stimulate curiosity and motivate people to participate in reading. In addition, the township soviet government organized newspaper reading classes, literacy classes and newspaper reading classes. Therefore, newspapers and periodicals have a certain audience.

4. Mobilizing Family Relations among the Masses

According to Fei Xiaotong, in traditional Chinese rural society, interpersonal relationships are characterised by a "pattern of difference", i.e. "the ripples of a stone hitting the water. Each person is the centre of his or her circle of social influence. It is pushed by the ripples of the circle." (Fei, 2013) The CPC also used the influence of rural relationships to mobilize the masses for Soviet power or the Red Army.

This effect was reflected in the family members. In July 1933, the Communist Youth League of Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces proposed that "a working woman in every family should mobilize her husband and relatives to join the Red Army". In April 1934, the CPC put forward "the masses needed to accept more publicity and education of the masses, old man sent his son, brother sent his brother, woman sent her husband and relatives to participate in the Red Army and local armed forces". In September of the same year, Zhang Guotao stressed that "only the people should send their sons and husbands to join the Red Army and guerrilla warfare".

People joined the Red Army means that their families life were affected. In 1934, someone found that a middle-aged woman with two children alone after her husband joined the Red Army, in the countryside of Langzhong County. Her life was miserable, dressed in "quail's dress with a thousand knots", with "the legs of the children's purple stiffness showing" (Chu, 1934). However, there were still many families in the Soviet area who participated in the revolution. For example, Gong Ji'an, a primary school teacher who participated in the confiscation of landlord property in Shisha Township of Yingshan County. His uncle Gong Limen was the Soviet chairman of the township, and "the company commander Gong Deqiong was his cousin". Both Pan Xuewen's father and brother worked in the Soviet regime or guerrillas. "My father Pan Zhilin washed meat and cooked in the Soviet in Quxian County. My brother Pan Xulou was a squad leader in the third platoon of the second company of the guerrilla independent battalion. I took a seat."11 This had to do with Communist Party. The CPC emphasized that "The members of party and league should lead the masses to participate in the Red Army". A member of CPC "not only be able to publicize many people to join the Red Army, but also take the lead in joining the Red Army." This put pressure to cadres of grassroots party. The CPC wanted to set an example for the masses. This would enable them to mobilize family members. For instance, Sun Ke's brother was the Soviet chairman of the first district of Bazhong County. She wanted to join the Red Army troupe, but was opposed by her mother. She said to her mother, "If you do not let me go to join the new troupe, are not you afraid that people will think our family is backward?" She said to her brother: "How can you mobilize the masses with your mother's ideas?" As a result, the mother no longer objected (Wang & Zhang, 1989). As Soviet cadres, Sun Perrin and her husband in Cangxi, Guangyuan, "mobilized seven members of her family to join the Red Army".¹² On the other hand, there was the influence of traditional rural family characteristics. According to Fei Xiaotong, "we can say that in Chinese rural society, no matter political, economic, religious and other functions, they can be performed by the family. In addition, in order to run a business, the structure of the family cannot be limited to a small combination of only parents and children. The family must be expanded" (Fei, 2013).

5. Conclusion

Zhang Guotao recalled, "The northern Sichuan Soviet area was only a war base, and its mass base was far inferior to the Hubei-Henan-Anhui Soviet area". For about two and a half year in northern Sichuan, we were busy with the war. "Therefore, we lacked manpower in northern Sichuan Soviet area. Our works were not carried out as deeply as in the Hubei-Henan-Anhui Soviet area" (Zhang, 1998). Nevertheless, during the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet area period, the Communist Party of China did its best to mobilize the masses. In the Soviet area, except for the death of war, diseases and other reasons, the rest of the masses was mobilized by the CPC to participate in the revolution. At the peak of the Soviet area, "the Red Army grew from 15,000 to nearly 80,000" (Lin, Wen, & Liu, 1982). This expansion was significantly related to the CPC's use of rural traditions for political mobilization.

In terms of the material needs of the people, the CPC has divided the people through land reform, enabling them to achieve improvements in their lives. Yang Lian pointed out that in traditional Chinese society, there was an interactive relationship between people. This enabled the masses of people influenced by the ethic of gratitude to repay the CPC by actively joining the army. In traditional Chinese society, the ethical concepts of loyalty, filial piety and righteous-¹¹The Party History Working Committee of Qu County Committee of the CPC. (1988). Selection of Soviet documents in Quxian County in Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolutionary base area. (In Chinese) ¹²The Party History Working Committee of Guangyuan City of the CPC, "Red flag of gate of Sichuan" editorial board. (1988). Red flag of gate of Sichuan—a brief history of Guangyuan in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area. (In Chinese) ness were imperceptibly integrated into people's thoughts in the way they like. Therefore, the Communist Party of China published newspapers and periodicals, whose content was popularity to adapt to the characteristics of readers. They also set up reading rooms. It made reading a part of people's daily life and people understand the mobilization and propaganda of the Communist Party of China. Traditional interpersonal relationships in the countryside were also used by the CPC for political mobilization. In a family or in a village, what each member says and does will affect the others. Some people joined the army and others did the work of the Soviet government, which led to others and motivated the masses to join the army collectively.

Rural tradition became the driving force for the Communist Party of China to mobilize the masses. But did the rural tradition create difficulties for the CPC's revolution? What are these difficulties? These questions still deserve further research in the future.

Fund Project

Research Center of Sichuan Old Revolutionary Areas Development Project "Research on Political Mobilization in Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area from the Perspective of Daily Life" in 2021 (project number: SLQ2021CD-02).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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