

# ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE SINO-US TRADE CONFLICT

RuJia Wei

*School of International Relations, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin, China.*

*Corresponding email: [weirujia2022@126.com](mailto:weirujia2022@126.com)*

**Abstract:** Trade relations between China and the United States have a significant impact on the global economy and trade. Since 2010, China has become the world's second largest economy, growing at an unparalleled rate and giving it increased confidence to take on more responsibilities in the international community. The U.S. President, Donald Trump, has imposed various constraints on China, influencing relations between the two countries, and trade friction has developed increasingly, evolving into the largest-scale trade conflict in history. We propose that Sino-U.S. trade relations should follow a benign competition mode, promoting the development of the world economy and trade, by analyzing three perspectives of changes in economics, politics, science, and technology in Sino-U.S. trade relations over the last 20 years and even the impact on the entire world economy, and expounding the Thucydides trap theory on the negative impact of Sino-U.S. trade.

**Keywords:** China; The United States; Trade conflict; International relations; Technology; Economy

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the past, China was ruled by the different dynasty during the different period; the small-peasant economy was the country's main economic pillar; the idea of heavy agriculture and business suppression in the eyes of previous people is the most fundamental guiding ideology of economy. Relying on vast territory and abundant resources, as well as a large population, China accepted tribute from other neighboring nations. As the Tang Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty collapsed due to the opium war in its final years, the impact was felt throughout the world. China was forced to open its borders to engage in international trade, which progressively reduced China to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The Qing Dynasty's final imperial structure likewise collapsed under the pressure of internal and external forces. China has since then embarked on a national renewal journey, gradually entering the global stage and actively engaging in international affairs[1]. This process has been made possible by the gradual exploration and development under the State President's prudent leadership. As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, President Xi Jinping has advocated that China should inherit and uphold the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter, establish a new system of international relations with win-win cooperation at its core, and create a community to enrich of human destiny. The construction of a new type of international relationship should proceed as follows.

Mutual respect is a key precept, along with fairness and justice, win-win cooperation, a basic orientation, a changing balance of power, and consideration of both domestic and international imperatives [2,3]. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in 1979, the two countries have gradually made contacts and exchanges in the fields of economy, trade, science and technology, humanities, and education as they transitioned from hostility and confrontation to détente and exchanges. Secretary Kissinger and President Nixon both paid successive visits to China after the formalization of diplomatic relations. The process of global economic globalization accelerated toward the end of the 20th century, and the pattern of labor division in the world started to shift from the initial division of labor between industries to the division of labor in the value chain. Following the change in the labor market, the United States presently regulates the middle and top tiers of the value chain, mostly through fixed capital and intermediate exports. In order to ensure a smooth and orderly development of Sino-U.S. trade relations, the two sides have a relatively large degree of cooperation. However, in 2017, trade friction between China and the United States started to appear. According to the statistics of the US Department of Commerce, in the whole of 2017, the import and export of bilateral goods between the US and China amounted to 635.97 billion US dollars, which is 232 fold increase from the trade volume between the two countries when they first established diplomatic tie.

Following the economic crisis of 1929–1933, the 2008 U.S. subprime crisis triggered the collapse of numerous large consortia and gradually developed into a Wall Street storm. Ultimately, the fall of numerous large multinational corporations has caused the most severe global financial crisis since the end of World War II. As a result of the U.S. economic troubles, the world's economy has grown significantly slower than emerging countries like China, which have also contributed to U.S. economic problems. The deepening of economic globalization has also contributed to the shift in trends, and China and other developing countries have steadily evolved from being the leading proponents of the anti-globalization movement to being the main harvesters of the globalization era. Donald Trump's U.S. presidency made the course of policy clearer. Through a series of discussions, Trump resumed the North American Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Agreement [4]. The unilateralism and protectionism of the Trump administration demonstrate how the trend of globalization has affected the realist hegemony of the United States. The anarchy of the world provides the strongest argument in favor of the

implementation of jungle law. Jungle law is a theory which also known as survival of the fittest or natural selection. The belief that only the most powerful and capable individuals or groups can survive in any given environment. The law of the jungle has important implications for countries relations' development because it determines how nations interact with each other. The whole world is a community, but there has no unified government to manage every country. So the jungle law further intensifies competition between countries as they try to gain an advantage over another country by strengthening national defense forces or forming countries alliances with other powers. The United States is now more likely to pursue absolute interests, according to the Trump administration's clarification. The Biden administration, which took office in 2021, has changed its policy from the Trump era and rejoined the Paris Agreement, but it still views China as its 'toughest competitor,' with China's rapid economic growth and the growing trade tensions between the U.S. and China. casting doubt on the U.S. economy.

## **2 CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES DEVELOPMENT THEORY**

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, under the leadership of competent leaders, the economy has grown gradually from a small agrarian economy. The family contract responsibility system has been opened and reformed, foreign investment has been introduced, and the two 100-year goals are being worked towards. China has always firmly believed that the winners obtain greater benefits. Currently, China is working to create a more equitable, open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world by advancing its economic, military, science, and technological capabilities. Another trend is harmonyism, which China has contributed to uniquely by emphasizing inclusive diplomacy, companion diplomacy, docking diplomacy, mosaic diplomacy, and shared diplomacy[5,6]. China has endured poverty and suffering, and yet cherished a peaceful life[7].

With a founding history of 245 years and a capitalist model, the United States is ahead of other countries in terms of overall national strength and economy. The United States has progressed quickly thanks to the widespread development of technology, the economy, and politics. Science and technology advancements have led to a progressive rise in international relations theory in the United States. Realism, which stands for pursuing absolute rather than relative interests, has recently taken over the mainstream of American thought. The United States considers that China is its strategic rival and has adopted a boycott strategy towards China's development goals. This has a significant impact on U.S. foreign policy and negatively affects China-U.S. relations. With the United States' 'unilateralism' and 'trade protectionism' intensifying in recent years, China's active participation in international cooperation has created a stark contrast[5].

### **2.1 Development of the Trade Conflict**

From 2016 to 2019, when Donald Trump became the president, he decided to investigate China's behavior according to the '301 Clause' and raised tariffs by 25%. Soon after China stopped buying soybeans from the U.S., the U.S. Department of Commerce blacklisted HUAWEI. Trump signed an executive order requiring the U.S. to enter a state of emergency in which the commanding department in the U.S. did not have the permit to use unsafe telecommunication equipment.

The State Council declared that between 2019 and 2020, the United States would assist other nations in the development of their natural resources, thereby reducing the reliance of U.S. technology industry on China for the essential raw materials. China may receive the first 5G wide-area network in the world, according to a report on 5G mobile communications technology from the Congressional Research Service(CRS) . Several major retailers have banded together to call for an end to the trade conflict between the United States and China because it is harming the interests of numerous businesses and U.S. consumers. According to the U.S. National Tourism Office, soybean trade has been delayed and Chinese tourists to the U.S. have dramatically reduced. The United States Ministry of Commerce recently revealed the 'Entity list' in its most recent iteration, and it included names such as China technological dawning, the creator of the world's first supercomputer, integrated circuit manufacturer, and chip producer Haiguang. In the U.S.-China trade war, Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo have banded together to protest against Trump's authority of imposing tariffs, which may gravely harm the interests of the whole video game industry and its employees. The United States increased duties on about \$550 billion worth of Chinese imports, increasing the previous 25% tariff rate on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods to 30% and the 10% tariff rate on another \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports to 15%.

In response to 'unilateralism and protectionism,' China imposed tariffs on \$60 billion worth of American goods in June 2019. At the same time, the United States began to sign the phase one trade agreements with China, which covered law enforcement, access to financial markets, intellectual property protection, and purchase commitments. A second round of tariff exemptions related to the trade war went into effect in May, affecting sectors such as rare earth ore mining, semiconductor components, medical disinfectants, and financial services[8]. A concession in a broader trade dispute with the United States was made in September when the United States imposed a restraining order on cotton apparel imported from Xinjiang, extending immunity to 16 U.S. products for an additional year, including fishmeal and cancer medications. The American Treasury Secretary declared in February 2021 that he would maintain tariffs on China. China's State Council declared in September that it would continue to not impose duties on the 301 anti-U.S. measures. The 'Economic and Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the United States of America' was signed in 2020, and it covers a variety of economic and trade-related topics. The two nations agree that

their strengths are highly complementary and that they may collaborate to optimize resource allocation, modify the economic structure, foster sustainable economic growth, and promote bilateral trade relations in that direction. They also agree that constructive cooperation is necessary to gradually improve trade relations and encourage the expansion of bilateral trade. For manufactured items, agricultural products, energy products, and services, suitable provisions should be established[9]. The U.S. Senate approved 'the Inflation Reduction Act' in 2022, which makes investments in industries that find it challenging to adapt to the energy transition, increases the market for applications of clean energy technology, and employs clean energy technologies to reduce energy costs for small businesses and vehicles. The Act allocates more than \$2.5 billion for developing important scientific equipment and enriching fusion energy research facilities, as well as legal protection for the application of novel clean energy technology and advancing scientific research to achieve the next convergence objective[10].

China's natural gas imports to eight countries—Australia, Qatar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—increased dramatically compared to the U.S. since the beginning of the Sino-U.S. trade tensions. The analysis of the multi-stage regression model reveals that trade friction between China and the United States has a negative effect on China's import of U.S. natural gas since the regression coefficients in the third to fifth stages are negative[11]. The industrial chain between China and Japan has a directional impact due to trade tensions between China and the United States, and as these tensions have grown, so have the growth rates of trade and total investment between China and Japan. In the fields of semiconductors, health, and communications, China and Japan are increasingly differentiating cooperatively. Japan is open to exploring further chances for collaboration with China on 'carbon peaking' and 'carbon neutrality.' The tendency of bilateral cooperation is towards the clustering of technologies. Given the United States' dominance over the high-end technological industrial chain and its security partnership, United States has more opportunities to cooperate with Japan. Japan is also abiding by the alliance treaty that signed by the United States and Japan, which shows the positional relationship between them. When there has an interest negotiation between the United States and Japan, Japan must make concessions to the United States on its own interests, for example Plaza Accord. But there would possibly pose certain risks to trade cooperation between China and Japan[12]. Trade tensions between China and the United States continue in a similar manner under the Biden-Harris administration. The United States, in order to maintain its position as a leader in the fields of engineering, artificial intelligence, and 5G communication technology, continues to follow the policy of suppressing China. China is a leading nation in the world of science and technology, and the level of high-end industrial science and technology is steadily improving. Science and technology have steadily gained relevance in the areas of national development and international collaboration with the growth of intelligent globalization. A significant component of the national comprehensive strength evaluation is aerospace science and technology. Seven Chinese aerospace technology firms were placed on the export control list in August 2022, according to a public announcement made on the Bureau of Industry and Security's official website by the U.S. Department of Commerce. The control was instituted due to concerns that the companies might be used for military research and development.

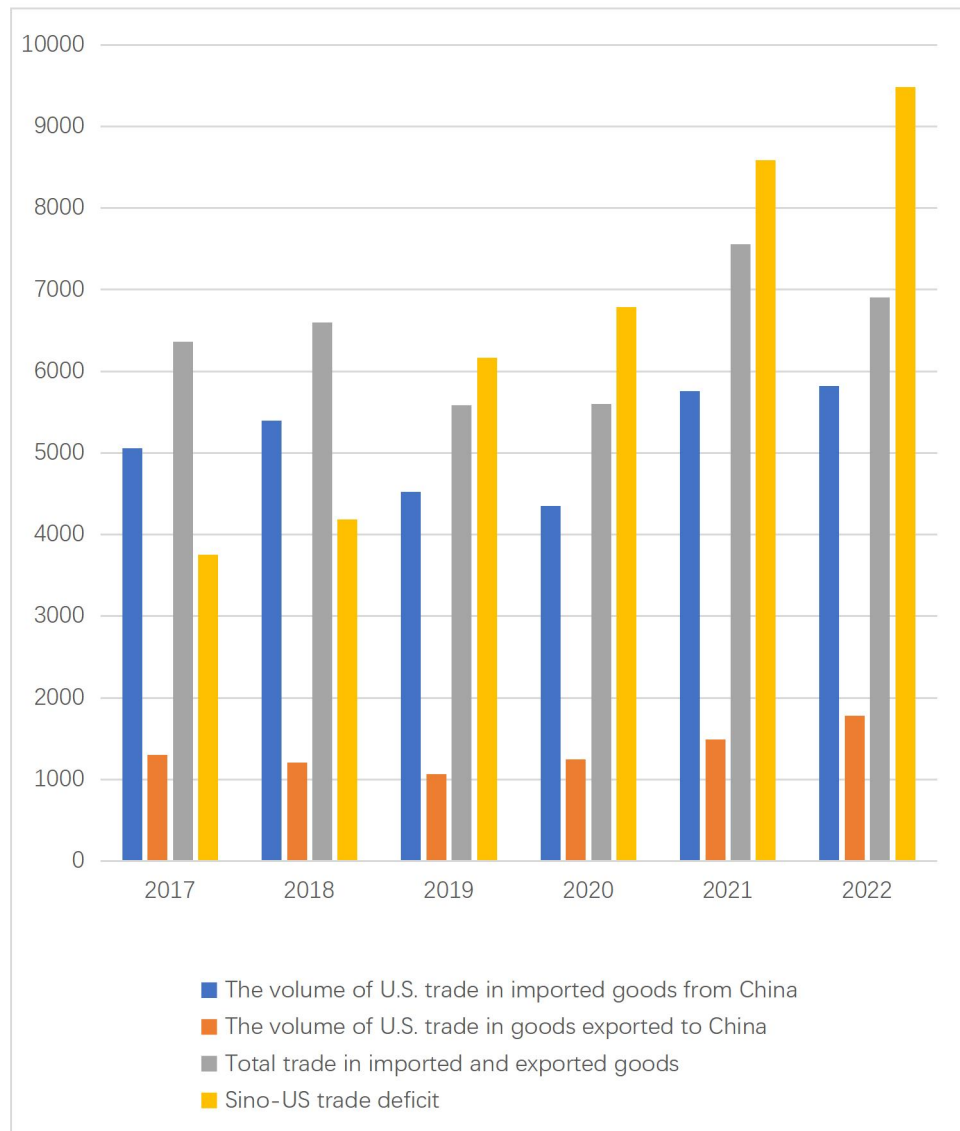
China's national space technology business is growing in the aerospace sector, propelling the nation to a new level of prosperity. In June 2022, a university in China was hit by a malicious international cyberattack. The National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center of China, as a technical analysis team, participated in the whole process, in which the U.S. National Security Agency, as the initiator of the incident, stole core data such as key network equipment configuration, operation, and maintenance data of the university. A department TAO of the Data Reconnaissance Bureau of the Information Intelligence Department of the U.S. National Security Agency was identified as the final point of contact in the traceability investigation results[13]. The National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center of the People's Republic of China summarized the U.S. National Security Agency's (NSA) cyberattacks on significant Chinese network information platforms and users, which conclusively demonstrates that tensions between China and the U.S. in the field of science and technology will persist.

## 2.2 Impact of Economic Factors on the Sino-U.S. Trade Conflict

There are two methods of trading in the global economy: government and private cross-border market autonomy, which are also the trade types between China and the United States. However, research has revealed that the Sino-U.S. trade conflict is a result of information asymmetry brought on by insufficient market competition[14]. The strategic trade policy hypothesis suggests that multinational monopolistic trading enterprises may not be fully competitive in the global market. Industrial products benefit from economies of scale, and some industries may need government assistance in the form of trade agreements, tax relief measures, or subsidies to survive. To succeed in technology-intensive industries with sizable industrial clusters that have attained a particular economic scale, technological competitiveness is essential [15].

International monopoly trading enterprises may not be completely competitive in global markets if the strategic trade policy theory is guiding them. Governments may support significant sectors through trade protection, tax relief, and subsidies since industrial commodities have economies of scale. At certain economic scales, international competitiveness is essential in companies reliant on technology. The other option is to engage in commerce within an open economy, although this could also result in trade friction. Policy interventions by different countries aimed at allocating excess profits can easily produce trade friction. China has been advancing its socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics consistently. Trump's proposed unfair market conditions do not exist since state-owned companies are a distinctive aspect of the Chinese economy. However, in recent years, China has also attempted to

change its foreign investment business environment, giving it preferential treatment. In 2017, the United States investigated China in accordance with ‘Article 301’ of the U.S. Trade Act, reflecting that patent law is barrier-free for technical knowledge; therefore, it is not allowed to enter the borderless market.



**Figure 1** Total Import and Export Volume of Trade in Goods (Source: Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China)

Trade friction is expected because of the government’s strategic response to domestic economic growth, higher employment rates, stable market pricing, and a balance between domestic and international income and expenditure. Several countries engage in international trade to maintain the balance of domestic imports and exports. Studies have demonstrated that discrepancies in domestic supply and demand as well as savings and investment can be mitigated through international trade. Since 2003, China has had the highest global trade deficit, and numerous studies indicate that the massive U.S. trade deficit with China is a major contributor to trade tension and, in some cases, actual trade war between the two countries. China has been on an accession status, encouraging the growth of its domestic economy ever since it joined the WTO in 2001. The bilateral trade volume in products between China and the United States, which is China’s second-biggest trading partner, largest export market, and sixth-largest source of imports, reached US\$6335.2 billion in 2018—an increase of 8.5% from the previous year. In the international community, trade cooperation between the United States and China is crucial. China’s service trade deficit with the United States decreased by 10.3% yearly from January to September 2018, and the overall amount of service trade increased by 4.2% annually.

In the field of non-financial two-way investment, the United States ranked third in China’s outward direct investment flows in 2018. China sees the WTO dispute as a feature of international trade diplomacy rather than a breakdown in relations or embarrassment. Relevant research shows that the trade deficit between China and the United States is not necessarily standardized. China’s foreign-funded enterprises have contributed to the US–China deficit. Domestic and international re-export trade may have repetitive statistical coverage. Some scholars have found that the United States launched trade wars with other countries during its slowdown of economic growth[16]. If the economic growth of both

countries continues to escalate, it may exacerbate economic and trade friction between them owing to the differences between China and the United States in terms of the types of export products and productivity. The United States has more technology-intensive industries, schools of social science theory, and other strengths. China has more middle and lower tier industries, which are generally labor-intensive; the United States has a middle-tier industry, technology-intensive, and capital-intensive; and the United States requires China to agree to a more restricted High-Tech Exchange Act, objectively increasing tensions between China and the United States.

### **2.3 Analysis of the Impact of Political Factors on the Sino-U.S. Trade Conflict**

The United States is an electoral democracy with a one-person, one-vote system. However, the actual percentage of votes cast is determined based on the total number of constituencies. When Western constitutional democracy is used in the political operation of the United States and Non-western countries, it reflects the flaws of constitutional democracy. The United States has always followed the path of constitutional democracy, with an effort to limit government power and enlarge citizen participation. Limiting the power of some governments will allow American citizens who meet certain voting requirements to participate in elections more fairly. The United States consortium is substantial; therefore, there are numerous interest groups, including different interest groups for elections. However, the priorities of the interest groups are focused on this small group, rather than the interests of the general public. Hence, interest groups can support election candidates or directly donate money to trade institutions, but they cannot do so directly to the government. Interest groups steadfastly oppose violations of their interests while also defending the interests of their own organizations. The domestic capital strength of the United States is strong, it can influence the direction of the U.S. foreign economic policy. Some scholars also believe that the international system has a great impact on the trade friction between China and the United States, but the existing international trading system mechanism is not conducive to the realization of the 'American first' policy[17]. The efforts of the WTO to deal with trade conflicts in the international community have been decreasing, and the mechanism of dispute settlement has also weakened. The United States launched a trade war against China to ensure its global hegemony and revised the existing international trading system so that it was more conducive to its own interests. Other scholars argue that Mr. Trump's personal experience has allowed him to remain a 'shrewd businessman' in office, maintain a clear policy direction [18].

Professor Shixiong Ni of Fudan University believes that the subject distance of politics and economics is close. Trade between China and the United States is related to geopolitics, and favorable or unfavorable economic cooperation depends on the follow-up effects of geopolitical games. The United States, promoting the establishment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, aims to counter-balance China. However, the subsequent '9·11' terrorist attacks caused China and the United States reduce tensions and focus on other crucial events[19]. Thus, both economic and trade relations could be developed. The long and tortuous history between China and the United States is common knowledge globally, and the foreign policy of the United States, as one of the formal actors participating in international community activities, serves domestic politics. The relationship between China and the United States has changed according to the different national development goals and strategies at different times. China's domestic economic level has risen to a new level with the reform and opening up, and at the same time, China has promulgated policy documents related to international trade and actively joined the WTO. China's economic level has improved more comprehensively after its formal accession to the WTO in 2001. However, with the establishment of new administration of Donald Trump, the differences between China and the United States have gradually reached their peak in the trade field. In 2017, President Trump released a tax reform plan. According to estimates from the American Tax Foundation, this tax reform plan will cause a significant reduction in federal fiscal revenues and the fiscal deficit will be serious. President Trump has advocated tax cuts, lowering the rates of Individual Income Tax and Business Income Tax, and completely eliminating Inheritance Tax. Since 2010, when China's economy was ranked second in the world, it has always maintained its participation in international affairs, which requires cooperation to promote economic improvement. China participates in the global political environment as a major producer, bringing new solutions to the global political environment, which gradually leads to the hegemonic stability theory, which states that a nation-state in a dominant position in the world will make the international system more stable[20].

### **2.4 Impact of Scientific and Technological Factors on the Sino-U.S. Trade Conflict**

In the early stages of 2018, ATT, the largest U.S. mobile operator, abandoned its partnership with Huawei and banned mobile operators from using federal subsidies to buy telecommunications equipment made by Chinese companies. The Commerce Department Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) announced that it would place Huawei and its affiliates on a regulatory list. However, Google announced a moratorium on the business of cooperating with Huawei, including those that offering Huawei hardware, software, and technology services, followed by Microsoft and Qualcomm. However, Advanced RISC Machines (ARM) , another U.S. technology company, suspended its cooperation with Huawei and its subsidiaries, and the International Solid State Technology Association (JEDEC) and the WIFI Union also imposed a ban on Huawei.

In modern history, humanity has experienced four scientific and technological revolutions, the first of which has promoted the industrial revolution. The second scientific and technological revolution replaced steam engines with electricity as a new practical driving force. The third scientific and technological revolution focused on atomic energy, electronic computers, and space technology development. The fourth scientific and technological revolution is aimed at

innovation in materials, energy, bioengineering, information technology, and other high-technology fields. Science and technology in the progress of the international community and economic and political status are inseparable; the United States of America's scientific and technological strength leads the rest of the world's dominant forces. China has also proposed that science and technology are its primary productive forces. In recent years, China has developed 'Oriental Magic Rice,' 'FAST,' 'Shenwei Taihu Light' supercomputer, and 'The Long March 2' rocket, successfully putting the first quantum experimental satellite into space to achieve quantum communications, which is one of China's great achievements. However, other countries are threatened by China's rise and do not see it as a cooperative power. Currently, the China-U.S. cooperation in the field of technology is in a restricted state, and its associated factors hinder the development of bilateral relations. However, this study opines that the development of normal trade relations between China and the United States needs to consider the progress of science and technology in different countries, which signifies focusing on more inclusive and cooperative concepts, to achieve one stable international community in the near future.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The Sino-U.S. trade friction is mainly in the political, economic, and technological fields. Therefore, the political stability, economic prosperity, and technological mutual progress of the two countries have a profound impact on world affairs. The current relationship between China and the United States is an important indicator for the international community; hence, China and the United States should cultivate a positive and collaborative partnership, setting a noteworthy precedent for the international community. This would showcase the potential for maintaining stable and progressive relations between two prominent global powers.

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### COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and its supplementary materials.

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