



# Chinese-English Interpreting Strategies from the Perspective of Communicative Translation Theory : A Case Study of Xi Jinping's Opening Speeches at the Belt and Road Forums

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has been enhancing its international collaborations and expanding its global influence. This paper examines President Xi Jinping's opening speeches at the Belt and Road Forum, highlighting the linguistic features and discussing effective interpreting strategies based on communicative translation theory. A qualitative method is employed to explain Xi's use of allusions and colloquialisms. It is found that effective communication strategies in interpreting from Chinese to English require careful consideration at lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. Specifically, it suggests modifying fragmented sentence structures to align with English expressions and enhancing discourse coherence through techniques such as repetition and conjunctions. As such, it is hoped to provide interpreters with practical insights for navigating challenges in interpreting activities.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the inception of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has enhanced its cooperation and exchanges with other countries, which not only stimulates global economic growth, but also ensures its own energy and raw material supply. Initially proposed by President Xi in September and October 2013, as China Daily reported, the BRI consists of two main programs, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. These initiatives aim to bolster the interconnection among Eurasian countries through infrastructure development, trade facilitation and investment promotion.

Over the past decade, China and the participating countries have benefited from the BRI. Enhanced connectivity across land, sea, air and cyberspace has laid solid foundations for deeper cooperation in trade and industrial capacity, and cultural exchanges. As the significance of the BRI continues to grow, President Xi has delivered numerous speeches reviewing the progress of projects conducted in the past year over various areas including politics, economy, military, culture, science and technology.

These speeches not only summarize the historical achievements, but also highlight the mutual benefits of the Belt and Road for all involved parties, hence instilling confidence in the project's continued success. Furthermore, they sum up valuable experience, emphasizing the BRI's alignment with the course of history and China's steadfast commitment to building a community with a shared future.

In international conferences, especially those like the BRI forums involving participants from difference countries, interpreters play a critical role in conveying information accurately. The speeches on the Belt and Road Initiative often contain words and expressions with unique Chinese characteristics, posing a challenge for interpreters who must possess cultural knowledge and respond quickly.

Xi's speeches have become a significant focus in interpretation studies, with particular attention given to his use of conceptual metaphor Dong G.Y. & Yue, X.H., [1] and culture-loaded words [2] Despite these emphasis, there remains a noticeable gap in research concerning

interpretation of Xi's speeches. To address this, the paper examines the interpreting strategies. The goal is to provide valuable insights for future research in this area.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of interpreting and translation studies is a dynamic and multifaceted domain that has evolved significantly over the years. Scholars worldwide have contributed various theories and insights that have enriched our understanding of the interpreting process, the intricacies of translation, and the strategies for effective communication across languages and cultures.

Interpreting studies have gone through four stages over 50 years [3]. According to Xiao [3], interpreting has shown four stages of development. The first stage, from the 1950s to the 1960s, explored issues including the linguistic and knowledge requirements for interpreters and the difficulties encountered in interpreting activities. Research at this stage did not yet form a theoretical framework. The second phase, the experimental psychology period from the 1960s to the early 1970s, was dominated by psychologists and psycholinguists. They utilized theoretical frameworks from psychology and psycholinguistics to study the cognitive aspects of interpreting and proposed a number of hypotheses about the process. During this period, notable figures such as Gerver and Lambert contributed significantly. Gerver proposed the earliest model of the entire process of simultaneous interpreting (Gerver, 1976, pp. 165-207, cited in Xiao, [3])

The third stage, from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, focused mainly on theoretical research conducted by interpreting practitioners. However, research in this stage did not integrate interpreting with other disciplines, and there was less emphasis on the significance of empirical research. The fourth stage began in the second half of the 1980s when various schools started extensive and in-depth exchanges, emphasized empirical research, and interpreting studies entered a more scientific and interdisciplinary research phase. During this period, Gile [4] from France conducted extensive empirical research, and one of his most notable achievements was creating the Effort Model from the perspectives of psychology and informatics.

The development of interpreting studies marks a significant expansion of the field, transitioning from empirical discussions to interdisciplinary research and offering unique perspectives on interpreting skills, theory application, and teaching methodologies. Cai X.H. [5] conducted research on interpretation thinking modes from an interdisciplinary perspective, introducing three important modes: the mode of consecutive interpretation, the mode of interpreters' ability development, and the mode of energy allocation. From an intercultural perspective, Xing D.D. [6] explored issues related to teaching interpreting in the English majors at colleges and universities and proposed effective strategies to develop this field. These strategies include cultivating students' intercultural awareness, teaching idiomatic interpreting, and combining the teaching of literal translation with free translation.

As for the studies of Xi's speeches, which primarily fall into three categories: rhetorical analysis, examination of linguistic features, and the perspective of translation theory [7]. It is noted that, from the perspective of translation theory, most prior research has employed Skopos theory and translation variation theory to analyze these speeches. Besides, research on Xi's speeches is typically structured around two types of content selection. The first involves analyzing speeches from specific years. For instance, Wu X.J. [8] analyzed five diplomatic speeches from President Xi's four visits in 2013, utilizing discourse analysis to explore the context, content, strategies, and dissemination effects of these speeches. Similarly, Tang G.Y. [9] focused on the rhetorical art in President Xi's 2014 speeches. The second approach selects individual speeches for in-depth analysis. An example of this is Cai Y.L. and Li X.J. [10], who examined a speech delivered by President Xi in Pakistan, exploring its rhetorical effectiveness to enhance China's role in international discourse.

To sum up, the literature review illustrates the breadth and depth of research in interpreting and translation studies. As the field moves forward, it remains imperative for researchers and practitioners to engage with interdisciplinary perspectives, foster intercultural awareness, and develop strategies that enhance the effectiveness of translation and interpreting in our increasingly globalized world. This evolving landscape of interpreting and translation studies not only enriches our academic understanding but also plays a crucial role in facilitating

international communication and cultural exchange.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This part introduces the concept of communicative translation and explains Peter Newmark's text types, laying a theoretical foundation for the analysis of communicative translation.

Newmark [11], a renowned linguist and translation theorist, introduced the concepts of "semantic translation" and "communicative translation". Newmark detailed these translation techniques extensively, noting that communicative translation emphasizes the comprehension and response of the target audience, while semantic translation focuses on preserving the semantic essence of the original text. Communicative translation aims to render both the content and the language of the source text acceptable and comprehensible to the reader, accurately representing the contextual meaning of the original text. According to Newmark, semantic and communicative translations emphasize different aspects of the translation process; they are complementary and can be flexibly applied to achieve communicative effectiveness.

To distinguish between semantic and communicative translation, Newmark classified texts into three types: expressive, informative, and vocative, proposing different translation methods for each text type.

Expressive texts aim to express opinions, and thus the speaker's or author's attitude is crucial. Examples include works of serious imaginative literature, authoritative statements, autobiographies, essays, and personal correspondence.

Informative texts are designed to convey material and information to the reader, including genres such as reports, news articles, and popular science writings.

Vocative texts are intended to prompt the readership to act, think, or feel in a specific way. Newmark highlighted two factors for consideration in translating vocative texts: the relationship between writers and readers, realized through grammatical functions and variants such as infinitives, first names, or titles, and the necessity for the texts to be

comprehensible to the readers. Examples of vocative texts include political speeches, advertisements, and notices, which require translations that can replicate the impact of the original on the target audience.

Considering the functions of these text types, Newmark suggested that expressive texts are best suited for semantic translation, while informative and vocative texts are more appropriate for communicative translation.

Public speeches, typical of vocative texts [12], thus make communicative translation a feasible approach for President Xi's speeches. This method focuses on the reaction and response of the target readers, implying that the translation should be fluid and native, achieved through reorganization of the original sentences. The applicability of communicative translation to Xi's speeches is supported by three features: the BRI forum's role as an international platform for collaboration and exchange, the predominantly international composition of the audience, and the presence of characteristic linguistic elements in the speeches, such as long sentences and poetic expressions. Consequently, interpreters need to enhance the readability of the translations to meet these challenges.

Based on Newmark's communicative translation and text types, this paper addresses the following questions:

**RQ1.** What linguistic characteristics are evident in Xi's speeches?

**RQ2.** How should interpreters choose appropriate strategies from the perspective of communicative translation theory during the interpreting process?

## 4. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research method to deeply interpret and analyze the complex issues associated with translation in specific contexts. The samples selected for this study are Xi's [13-15] transcribed keynote speeches from the first, second, and third opening ceremonies of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, respectively. These speeches were chosen to encompass the developments and changes over time. Together, the speeches comprise a total of 23,258 words in both Chinese and English, providing a substantial textual basis for analysis.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the complexity of Xi's speeches reflects a deliberate linguistic strategy to convey nuanced policy positions and cultural references. These complexities pose significant challenges for interpreters, who must navigate between maintaining the original's richness and ensuring clarity for an international audience. Further analysis demonstrates how certain interpreting strategies can effectively bridge these gaps.

### 5.1 Analysis at Lexical Level

Based on the linguistic form of formal conference speeches, a number of words with Chinese characteristics are utilized in formal occasion for the purpose of conveying traditional Chinese culture. In Xi's opening speech, translations of three-letter words and four-letter words are particularly common.

### 5.2 Paraphrase

Paraphrase means the reproduction of meaning in a written or spoken by using different words, so as to make the original meaning clearer. When interpreters confront intricate phrases or words, they need to paraphrase them to the audience.

#### Example 1

**Chinese version:** 面对未来，我们要聚焦重点、深耕细作，共同绘制精谨细腻的“工笔画”。

**English version:** Going ahead, we should focus on priorities and project execution, move forward with results-oriented implementation, just like an architect refining the blueprint.

The term “工笔画” refers to a traditional Chinese painting technique, which is characterized by the detailed portrait of subjects. Here, the translation does not stick to the literal translation “a brush paint”, because the meaning is not related to the Belt and Road cooperation. Instead, president Xi likens “工笔画” as the promising future of Belt and Road initiative. The character “工笔画” comes from the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Two years after the first session, the Belt and Road Initiative has made remarkable achievements, and the initiatives of the first Summit Forum have been successfully implemented, such as the basic

formation of the “six corridors, six roads, many countries, many ports” connectivity architecture. In this context, “工笔画” denotes that the Belt and Road international cooperation needs be further developed on the basis of past achievements. Thus, the interpreter focuses on explaining the painting technique, translating the term as “an architect refining the blueprint”, which expresses that the painter refines the painting over and over again.

### Example 2

**Chinese version:** 只要各国有合作的愿望、协调的行动, 天堑可以变通途, “陆锁国”可以变成“陆联国”, 发展的洼地可以变成繁荣的高地。

**English version:** When countries embrace cooperation and act in concert, a deep chasm can be turned into a thoroughfare, land-locked countries can become land-linked, and a place of underdevelopment can be transformed into a land of prosperity.

“洼地” in Chinese refers to a nearly closed terrain that is lower than the ground. “Low-lying land” is a phrase used in English. However, it typically highlights the idea of “lying” and frequently alludes to areas that are low in elevation. The word “洼地” in this context refers to underdeveloped nations. As a result, the interpreter renders it as a place of underdevelopment. Sometimes it is not possible to translate words literally due to differences in the Chinese and English languages; instead, we must paraphrase the meaning of the words.

### Example 3

**Chinese version:** 汇集着人类共同发展的最大公约数。

**English version:** Indeed, the BRI represents humanity’s joint pursuit of development for all.

Originally, the term“最大公约数”refers to a mathematical notion that is frequently used. “The greatest common divisor” is what it usually signifies. However, in this instance, it has another meaning. The Belt and Road provides a showcase for cooperation among countries, where they can develop their own countries through mutual cooperation. Every country has its own interests, but the most fundamental

interest is development, regardless of differences in civilization, culture and social systems. Therefore, the term refers to the process of trying to find a common point that serves the interests of all parties. As a result, the interpreter renders it as “joint pursuit” after considering the context.

### Example 4

**Chinese version:** 酒泉、敦煌、吐鲁番、喀什、撒马尔罕、巴格达、君士坦丁堡等古城, 宁波、泉州、广州、北海、科伦坡、吉达、亚历山大等地的古港, 就是记载这段历史的“活化石”。

**English version:** Today, ancient cities of Jiuquan, Dunhuang, Tulufan, Kashi, Samarkand, Baghdad and Constantinople as well as ancient ports of Ningbo, Quanzhou, Guangzhou, Beihai, Colombo, Jeddah and Alexandria stand as living monuments to these past interactions.

In Chinese, “活化石” originally refers to an extant species that survives from some extinction events. And the word is extended as something important that remains its trait throughout history, or it bears the memory of history. In the sentence, the ancient cities and ports mentioned by President Xi include China, the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Iraq and other countries. This is aligned with the concept of “openness and inclusiveness” in the original text. The ancient Silk Road was developed in these places. Even though the countries, the religions and the races varied, the ancient Silk Road prospered at that time. These buildings also prove that civilizations of various nation must thrive with inclusiveness and openness. Since the word “monument” refers to a building that has special historical significance, the interpreter renders it as “living monuments”. This interpretation presents the profound connotation of the original language that the Belt and Road has flourished despite different countries, races and religions.

### 5.3 Omission

In interpreting activities, interpreters need to convey the speaker’s information. However, in a speech, due to limited time, information that is of no consequence may increase the interpreter’s workload, and at the same time make output seem lengthy. Therefore, given the premise that omitting unnecessary elements does not affect the accuracy of the message conveyed, the

interpreter will delete some contents according to the needs.

#### Example 5

**Chinese version:** 群贤毕至，少长咸集

**English version:** This is indeed a gathering of great minds.

The meaning of the original text is that the wise, regardless of age, gathered together. In the translation of this speech, interpreters did not directly copy the classic translation, but made some adjustments to the translation according to the context and deleted the information in the latter part of the sentence. Age is not important in this forum and the word "old" is avoided in formal settings in Western societies, where even older people are only referred to as senior citizens. Therefore, the use of "old and young" to cover the age of the guests is unnecessary and may even cause misunderstanding. By removing unnecessary elements, the interpretation reduces the burden of understanding and conveys China's warm welcome to the guests at the right time.

#### Example 6

**Chinese version:** 一、构建“一带一路”立体互联互通网络。

**English version:** First, building a multidimensional Belt and Road connectivity network.

In this example, "connectivity" is also an expression with Chinese characteristics that is often cited by Chinese leaders at various international meetings. Although it contains two words, "interconnection" and "intercommunication", they have the same meaning, so interpreters also need to omit repetitive translations. This translation adheres to the style of phrase used by foreign listeners, and the removal of a few superfluous words aids in interpreters' dealing with the texts that follow.

#### Example 7

**Chinese version:** 我相信，只要大家齐心协力、守望相助，即使相隔万水千山，也一定能够走出一条互利共赢的康庄大道。

**English version:** The Interpretation: I am confident that as we **work closely together**, we will transcend geographical distance and embark on a path of win-win cooperation.

In this sentence, "齐心协力" and "守望相助" are Chinese four-character idiom. The former means common purpose and concerted efforts, and the latter means mutual help and protection. Both have similar meaning. President Xi uses two similar phrases to emphasize the importance of the joint efforts. Therefore, "work closely together" is acceptable to the target listeners to understand the essential meaning.

#### 5.4 Analysis at Syntactic Level

A sentence is often considered a unit to interpret. However, there is difference of two languages in syntax. English is a hypotactic language, which stressed the sentence structure of clauses and connection between clauses. On the contrary, as a paratactic language, Chinese is short without connectives. Interpreters should be aware of such difference and convey information according to English structure. This part will analyze the interpretation of allusions and loose sentences.

#### 5.5 Explanation of Allusions

Since Chinese allusions were written in ancient Chinese like poems, these allusions express profound meanings and difficult to understand. In speeches the explanation helps the meanings in allusions be conveyed clearly.

#### Example 8

**Chinese version:** “春秋多佳日，登高赋新诗。”

**English version:** As a line of a classical Chinese poem goes, “**Spring and autumn are lovely seasons in which friends get together to climb up mountains and write poems.**”

Ancient Chinese poems are generally more concise in form and have a fixed format, but their inner meanings are very rich and can express profound truths in short words. When translating ancient poems, interpreters must have profound knowledge of ancient Chinese culture, be proficient in Chinese language and culture, and understand the profound philosophy contained in ancient poems. “春秋多佳日，登高赋新诗” comes from one of poems of a famous poet, Tao

Yuanming, which means “There are many good days in spring and fall, and I often climb up high with my friends to recite new poems.” The interpreter use simple words to express the same meaning. Besides, the interpreter use “in which” to link two parts of the original sentence to indicate their connections.

### Example 9

**Chinese version:** 这是民心相通不断促进的 4 年。“国之交在于民相亲，民相亲在于心相通”。

**English version:** These four years have seen strengthened people-to-people connectivity. Friendship, which derives from close contact between the people, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations.

When it comes to “民心相通”, President Xi stated that “国之交在于民相亲，民相亲在于心相通”. This quote emphasizes the significance of humanistic interaction. The original text also refers to cooperation projects in this regard. In general, the idea is that closeness among individuals is essential for amicable interactions between nations. The national conditions of different countries vary. Only by fostering relationships among people, enabling them to develop genuine mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, can the relation between nations become firm. The interpreter do not keep the original form but decide to express the core information to the audience. In the translation, the attribute clause guided by “which” shows the significance of humanistic interactions, and at the same time says that friendship is the key to nation-to-nation interactions. Besides, after citing following examples in the original text, this allusion allows the audience to better recognize this importance.

## 5.6 Reconstruction of Loose Sentences

Loose sentences are typical in Chinese. They are short and characterized by a central theme. Although there are no connectives to join them, the sentence structure is arranged logically. When translating this kind of sentence into English, the translator needs to be sure to adjust the word order and add connectives.

### Example10

**Chinese version:** 共商共建共享、开放绿色廉洁、高标准惠民生可持续，成为高质量共建“一带一路”的重要指导原则。

**English version:** Important guiding principles for high-quality Belt and Road cooperation have been laid down, which include the principle of “planning together, building together, and benefiting together,” the philosophy of open, green and clean cooperation, and the goal of pursuing high-standard, people-centered and sustainable cooperation.

In Chinese, it is customary to put the important content at the end, while in English, the priorities of the sentence is emphasized in the subject. The English language avoids long subjects. “共商共建共享”“开放绿色廉洁”“高标准惠民生可持续” are three principles that should be upheld in the Belt and Road cooperation. If they are put at the beginning of the sentence as the subject, it will not only look like a lengthy subject, but also make the sentence draggy and confuse people’s focus. Therefore, taking “important guiding principles” as the subject of the sentence, and then using an attributive clause to summarize the above contents.

### Example 11

**Chinese version:** 世界现代化应该是和平发展的现代化、互利合作的现代化、共同繁荣的现代化。

**English version:** Global modernization should be pursued to enhance peaceful development and mutually beneficial cooperation and bring prosperity to all.

The meaning of the original sentence is that all countries should strive to achieve modernization for peaceful development, mutually beneficial cooperation and common prosperity. President Xi uses three “现代化” here to emphasize that the modernization of the world should achieve these three aspects. However, due to the difference between the Chinese and English languages, it would be redundant if the translation used several “现代化” in a row. Therefore, the translator has omitted the redundant part to make the sentence more concise and clear.

## 5.7 Analysis at Discourse Level

A discourse is a unit of spoken or written language, such as an essay, a speech, or a poem. A discourse is not a simple combination of isolated strings of sentences. This part will focus on the study of discourse.

### Example 12

**Chinese version:** 10 年来，我们坚守初心、携手同行，推动“一带一路”国际合作从无到有，蓬勃发展，取得丰硕成果。

**English version:** Over these 10 years, we have stayed committed to this founding mission. Thanks to our joint efforts, Belt and Road international cooperation has gotten off the ground, grown rapidly and produced fruitful outcomes.

While sentences in English may need to rely on specific connectives to describe the internal logic between sentences, sentences in Chinese can be linked without them. There is a logical relationship in the original sentence that the joint efforts of all countries contributed to the success of the Belt and Road. In the translation, the translator utilizes “thanks to” to represent this relationship and it actually acts as a link between the two sentences, enhances cohesion of fragmented sentences.. That indicates the significance of cooperation. Besides, this importance is also mentioned below, which leads to a closer connection among the paragraphs.

### Example 13

**Chinese version:** 座座水电站、风电站、光伏电站，一条条输油、输气管道，越来越智能通达的输电网络，让能源短缺不再是发展的瓶颈，让发展中国家绿色低碳发展的梦想得以点亮，成为新时代可持续发展的绿洲、灯塔。

**English version:** Hydro, wind- and solar energy based power plants, oil and gas pipelines, and the increasingly smart and interconnected power transmission networks are removing the development bottleneck caused by energy shortage and fulfilling the dream of developing countries to achieve green and low-carbon development. These energy projects have become the oasis and lighthouse for sustainable development in the new era.

The example starts by telling the audience about the aspects of energy development and the impact on development, then uses a metaphor to demonstrate their significance. The original text's subject is overly lengthy, and repetition is rare in English vocabulary. Therefore, interpreter then segregates the sentence because of the

metaphor which compares these energy projects to oases and lighthouses. Also, “these energy projects” is used in place of the previous sentence's subject to avoid repetition, which improves coherence. Substitution is a common technique used to keep language coherent and concise by avoiding duplication of the same element. By replacing the previous reference to energy with the word “these energy projects”, the interpretation avoids repetition and allows the two sentences to be semantically linked.

### Example 14

**Chinese version:** 我们还制定了《“一带一路”融资指导原则》，发布了《“一带一路”债务可持续性分析框架》，为共建“一带一路”融资合作提供指南。中方今年将举办第二届中国国际进口博览会，为各方进入中国市场搭建更广阔平台。

**English version:** We have also formulated the Guiding Principles on Financing the Development of the Belt and Road and published the Debt Sustainability Framework for Participating Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative to provide guidance for BRI financing cooperation. In addition, the Second China International Import Expo will be held this year to build an even bigger platform for other parties to access the Chinese market.

In this example, the first sentence is China's guiding principles for Belt and Road cooperation, and the latter concrete measures. Both are China's efforts to promote cooperation. The translation uses the word “in addition” to let the audience know that China does not have empty talk, but also takes practical actions. In Chinese, coordinate sentences are frequently employed without obvious conjunctions. So the logical relationship between sentences is not always expressed directly. Nevertheless, it is inconsistent with how English is used. Consequently, in order to better connect the entire sentence, interpreters can appropriately add a conjunction. The phrase “in addition” suggests a coordinate relation even though there are no clear words to describe the relationship between the sentences. As a result, the speaker's message will be more clear to the audience.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper provides an analysis of communication strategies at lexical, syntactic,



and discourse levels used in the interpretation of President Xi's speeches. Lexically, the study highlights the need for interpreters to address the use of Chinese cultural words and allusions, recommending strategies such as paraphrase and omission for three-character or four-character phrases that cannot be literally translated. Syntactically, it is necessary to explain and reconstruct allusions and loose sentence structures to make them comprehensible to an international audience. At the discourse level, strategies like substitution and conjunction were identified as crucial for maintaining coherence and articulating the transformed logic of English. These findings resonate with previous studies which emphasize contextual connotations Cai Y.L. & Li X.J., [10] and the proper delivery of allusions [7]. They even extend Tang G.Y.'s [9] work, which explored how logical adaptation in translation affects the interpretability and flow of translated speeches.

Despite the application of communicative translation strategies leading to some positive outcomes, this study faces limitations due to its narrow scope—analyzing only three speeches from the Belt and Road forums. Future research could benefit from a larger and more varied set of materials to enhance the robustness of findings. Additionally, integrating communicative translation theory with semantic translation could offer a more nuanced understanding of the interpretive challenges faced. This could lead to more refined strategies that better address the complexities of translating diplomatic language, building on the preliminary successes and insights gained from this study [16].

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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