Art Communication and Community-Based Arts Education in a University–Village Partnership in China

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Abstract
University–village art partnerships can place students and residents in the same cultural setting, but reports of activities are not equivalent to evidence of education. This study asks what a publicly available documentary record establishes about place-based arts learning and community participation in Maying Village, Anhui Province, China. Seven dated public accounts issued between 2021 and 2026 were examined through a transparent, episode-based analysis. Six individual pages could be read directly; one substantial People's Daily report was accessible through its indexed text. We extracted reported educational objectives, tasks, teaching roles, feedback, residents' influence over content, and evidence of assessed or sustained learning. The strongest educational account concerned a November 2025 university course in in-depth reporting: it described guided interviews, a student reflection excerpt, and planned feedback on subsequent writing. Other accounts documented arts-related encounters, a heritage-practice facility, and student performance, but rarely the process or results of learning. The findings expose an asymmetry between well-publicised cultural outputs and sparsely documented pedagogical decisions. We propose a four-domain evidence framework distinguishing access, participation, pedagogical authority, and demonstrated learning and continuity. The framework is a bounded analytic heuristic, not a validated effectiveness scale. No unmeasured gain in competence or programme-level causal impact is claimed.

1. Introduction

Rural arts education is not confined to classrooms. An exhibition can offer encounters with artistic representations of a place; a heritage workshop may bring craft knowledge into view; a field assignment may ask students to produce reports, performances, or visual material. Yet these episodes differ educationally. Displaying an artwork establishes cultural provision, not necessarily instruction. Taking part in a performance establishes activity, not measured improvement. Learning requires questions about what participants were asked to do, who supported them, what they could change, and how the resulting work was evaluated. Recent research on culturally responsive art education in rural China (Luo & Guan, 2023) and the sustainability of volunteer teaching (Luo, 2025) illustrates why educational processes cannot be reduced to attendance counts.

A university–village partnership can connect academic expertise with craft knowledge, collective memory, and locally situated concerns. The relationship is therefore educationally promising but potentially unequal. University educators may select an assignment and provide assessment, while residents are approached only as hosts, interviewees, or an audience. Place-based and service-learning scholarship draws attention to reciprocal arrangements and community partners' perspectives (Cooke et al., 2024; Tijsma et al., 2023). The analytical problem is to determine whether the documentary record shows access to an activity, engagement in a task, meaningful influence over its learning content, or evidence that learning changed and continued.

The distinction matters across educational populations. University students may learn interviewing, theatre, or cultural interpretation; residents may teach a craft without receiving formal instruction themselves; visiting international students may acquire new impressions without a documented assessment. Studies of community learning centres and rural educational partnerships identify organisational conditions of nonformal learning (Hayat et al., 2024; Zeng et al., 2024), while research into rural early-childhood learning and arts participation uses participant-level evidence to support educational claims (Qiao et al., 2024; Luo & Xie, 2025). These designs show why a public statement that an event was successful is not interchangeable with evidence of learner development.

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Maying Village in Changfeng County, Hefei, Anhui Province, offers a useful documentary case. Public records describe a village-themed painting exhibition in 2021, an intercultural encounter with 19 international students in April 2024, the establishment of an intangible-heritage practice base in September 2024, a university visit involving seven students in October 2024, a theatre production by nine students in March 2025, and a field-reporting course visit in November 2025 (Anhui Xinhua University, 2021, 2024a; People's Daily, Anhui, 2024; Anhui Xinhua University, School of Culture and Media, 2024b, 2025a, 2025b). A separate 2026 report documents a multi-university design initiative in the same village (China Youth Daily, 2026). These are documented accounts of different activities, not proof of a unified educational programme with a measured outcome.

Existing literature warns against treating arts-led rural transformation as a single pathway. Gimbut and Rega (2022) analyse art–place relationships; Dai et al. (2026), Qian et al. (2025), and Song et al. (2026) consider social and spatial conditions of art-based renewal. Luo (2025), Fu et al. (2026), and Zeng and Mu (2024) examine unequal power and representation in cultural initiatives. For education, these debates become more specific: when cultural work is described as learning, what instructional sequence is actually visible, and whose knowledge and decisions define that sequence? Research on arts-integrated rural nature education shows the added explanatory value of teaching plans, learner work, observation and reflection rather than publicity alone (Su & Maulan, 2026).

The challenge is therefore not simply insufficient publicity or an absence of rural arts education studies. Compared with research examining culturally responsive instruction, community-service learning, and actual participant perspectives (Luo & Guan, 2023; Lang et al., 2024; Li et al., 2026; Xue & Cao, 2025), institutional announcements are rich in events and thin in educational processes. A report can nonetheless document a meaningful task for example, guided field interviews without documenting its longer-term effect. Treating this middle category carefully is central to a defensible analysis. Kong (2026) also demonstrates why rural place-based pedagogy must be interpreted in relation to what teachers actually make of local contexts, not inferred from the mere existence of a field visit.

Three research questions guide the study: (1) Which educational objectives, learning tasks, and educator–participant roles are explicitly reported in Maying's public accounts? (2) What differences appear between evidence of activity, evidence of a learning process, and evidence of learning outcomes? (3) What do the records reveal, and leave unresolved, about residents' influence over cultural and pedagogical decisions? The article contributes a case-specific evidence audit and a four-domain framework for evaluating public claims about community-based arts education. It does not assess individual competence or infer that the university caused village-wide educational change.

2. Method

A bounded qualitative documentary case analysis was undertaken using seven publicly available, dated reports selected for their explicit reference to Maying Village and identifiable cultural or educational encounters. The evidence base excludes the unpublished programme account used in earlier drafting: its provenance and publication rights were not established, so none of its uncorroborated descriptions or outcomes is treated as evidence in this version. Six reports were inspected as full, publicly accessible article pages. The seventh, a People's Daily report of 30 April 2024, was available through a detailed indexed text record, although a fresh direct-page fetch returned an error; its claims are identified accordingly. The publication dates range from December 2021 to 9 November 2026. No privately held archive, interview transcript, or participant dataset is included.

Selection proceeded by targeted searches combining Maying Village (马郢村), Anhui Xinhua University (安徽新华学院), cultural or artistic activity, and education-related terms, followed by inspection of linked institutional and news records. Eligible items had a date, named location, a recognisable actor, and an activity episode relevant to artistic or community learning; undated generic descriptions were excluded. The resulting bounded corpus is purposive rather than exhaustive. Five reports originated from the focal university or its School of Culture and Media, one from People's Daily, and one from China Youth Daily. The last item is an explicitly separate multi-university initiative included only as a contrast in attribution; it must not be counted as an achievement of the focal university.

The unit of analysis was the reported activity episode, not an individual learner. For each item, the analysis recorded: date and source position; named organiser and participants; stated educational purpose; described task or artefact; specified lecturer, mentor, or local knowledge holder; reported feedback or reflection; and evidence, if any, of community decisions and assessed learning. Three inference rules were applied. First, the existence of a dated event supports an activity claim but not an effectiveness claim. Second, a description of a learning task or a quoted reflection supports an account of pedagogical process as reported by the publisher, not independently measured competence. Third, claims of co-designed content, sustained skill, or programme-level outcomes require identifiable decision or follow-up evidence. Items silent on a criterion were coded 'not reported', never 'did not occur'. Morgan (2022) and Sankofa (2023) support this attention to provenance and

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missing perspectives; Malandrino (2024) cautions against treating documentary links as a measured social network.

Analysis involved a first-pass extraction of reportable episodes, a second-pass classification of educational claims, and a negative-case comparison of reports that describe artistic provision without explicit instruction. The November 2025 Depth Reporting course report was retained as a more informative case because it names a course, teachers, an interview task, a student reflection excerpt, and planned subsequent written feedback. By contrast, the 2021 painting exhibition names a professor's artistic output but not a learner assignment. This contrast is an analytic finding, not a numeric estimate of prevalence. Coding and interpretations were assembled for the present manuscript by reading the public sources; they were not preregistered, independently double-coded, or tested for inter-rater reliability. Cross-publication repetition was not assumed to mean independent verification.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Documented Opportunities for Situated Learning in Maying Village

The records vary considerably in educational specificity. A December 2021 university announcement describes more than thirty paintings by a professor exhibited in the village. The university situates the exhibition in a practical-education-base relationship, but names no learners, lesson objectives, or assessed artwork. It therefore documents artistic provision and educational infrastructure rather than demonstrated teaching (Anhui Xinhua University, 2021). The report of a heritage-practice base established on 26 September 2024 names university representatives, a village tourism cooperative leader, and a craft-workshop representative. It states that heritage teaching and practice were discussed. It does not document a completed teaching sequence, who selected the curriculum, or any learner portfolio (Anhui Xinhua University, 2024a). The public-art assessment study of Zhu, Shen, and Li (2025) similarly illustrates that documented displays and claims of audience benefit demand different kinds of evidence.

The 25 April 2024 intercultural visit provides a different form of educational encounter. People's Daily reported that nineteen international students from five countries visited the village's history exhibition and cultural workshops, including craft demonstrations. The report quoted a participant's positive impression and described planned future exhibitions; that testimony is one publisher-selected observation, not a tested intercultural learning outcome (People's Daily, Anhui, 2024). On 25 October 2024, a university representative and seven students met the tourism cooperative and toured facilities including a pottery workshop, discussing study tours and online promotion. The report describes visits, exchange of views, and the educational purpose of the site. It does not establish that proposed programmes were delivered or assessed (Anhui Xinhua University, School of Culture and Media, 2024b).

A performance report dated 2 April 2025 names nine broadcasting and hosting students, a supervising university teacher, and an original theatre work presented at a rural theatre week on 29 March. Those details provide stronger evidence of organised artistic practice than an exhibition alone, though neither rehearsals nor the evaluation of students' performance appears in the report (Anhui Xinhua University, School of Culture and Media, 2025a). The clearest pedagogical sequence appears in the report dated 1 December 2025 about a Depth Reporting course visit on 17 November. It identifies teachers, a curricular goal, student interview groups, three kinds of interviewees, field note-taking, an excerpt attributed to a student practice journal, and a plan for drafted reports to receive teachers' feedback. The published evidence therefore extends to reported guided practice and one selected reflection, but not to completed grades, observed improvement, or later learning retention (Anhui Xinhua University, School of Culture and Media, 2025b).

Table 1. Seven Public Documentary Reports and the Educational Claims They Support

Documented episode	Educational interpretation permitted	Evidence not available in the reviewed corpus
9 Dec 2021 – exhibition	Professor-led visual-art exhibition (30+ paintings); cultural provision	No student task, teacher feedback, resident learning outcome
25 Apr 2024 – intercultural visit	19 international students visited village heritage sites and workshops; guided cultural encounter reported	No formal goals, assessment, or repeated learning observation
26 Sep 2024 – heritage base	University and local cooperative/craft actors established a practice base; heritage teaching discussed	No completed teaching plan, apprenticeship log, or learner work
25 Oct 2024 – village consultation	Seven students accompanied a university representative, met local partners and visited workshops	No documented course rubric, resident teaching authority, or completed assessment

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Documented episode	Educational interpretation permitted	Evidence not available in the reviewed corpus
29 Mar 2025 – theatre week	Nine students staged original theatre work under a named lecturer	Rehearsal process, learner feedback and outcomes not documented
17 Nov 2025 – reporting course	Named course and teachers; field interview tasks; published reflection excerpt; future review of drafts announced	Drafts, completed marking, baseline and subsequent competence not available
Oct 2026 – other-university design	43 institutions in a separate contest, cited as wider case context only	Not an Anhui Xinhua University learning outcome

Table 1 makes the distinction visible: among the reported episodes, only the 2025 course article offers a named course, pedagogical tasks, a student reflection extract, and an announced assessment step. The other accounts are informative about settings, roles, and cultural activity but much less specific about how teaching proceeded. This contrast matters because the term 'university–village education' otherwise risks being applied equally to exhibiting thirty paintings and to supervising students through field interviews. Studies with learner work, teaching records or participant-level measures (Su & Maulan, 2026; Luo & Guan, 2023; Luo & Xie, 2025) illustrate stronger evidential possibilities without supplying missing Maying data.

3.1.2. Uneven Visibility of Students, Educators, and Residents

A second pattern concerns how different participants become visible in organisational news. In the 2024 heritage-base account, university staff and local cooperative and workshop representatives are explicitly named, while the intended teaching arrangement is not described. The October 2024 consultation reports exchange between the university representative and a cooperative manager, followed by student visits to local facilities. These details support contact and preliminary discussion. They do not specify whether community practitioners could choose learning goals, refuse a depiction, evaluate student work, or determine how cultural knowledge would later be circulated (Anhui Xinhua University, 2024a; Anhui Xinhua University, School of Culture and Media, 2024b).

The November 2025 field-reporting article makes a distinction between the students as learners and villagers as reported interview partners. The reporters interviewed a village leader, returning entrepreneurs and volunteers about local change. This gives local knowledge a place in the students' learning environment, but the article does not show that those contributors set the course objectives, approved the final reports, or acted as assessors. The publisher's chosen reflection excerpt gives a view into one student's immediate interpretation, not a distribution of community attitudes. Educational research should therefore avoid treating residents' participation as informants as evidence that the village received or co-governed arts instruction.

Participatory design research shows ways in which local actors can become initiators rather than subjects (Lin & Wu, 2024; Xu, 2024). Community-based art educators and university–community partnerships face similar questions of reciprocity and sustainability (Luo, 2025; Cooke et al., 2024; Li et al., 2026). The Maying records illustrate where such questions should be asked but do not themselves answer how pedagogical authority was distributed. A reported meeting or a photograph with local partners is not a substitute for dated decisions about content and responsibility.

There is an additional issue of author position and source dependence. The university's 2024 reports name a representative written in Chinese as 翟春翔, which corresponds to the first author's romanised name, Zhai Chunxiang. The documents therefore warrant a potential insider-position disclosure, subject to confirmation by the authors before submission. Because these reports were generated by an organisation participating in the activities, the analysis treats their educational benefit statements as institutional interpretations, not independent impact observations. This approach follows the documentary-source critique advanced by Sankofa (2023) and the attention to relationships in university engagement research (Lang et al., 2024).

3.1.3. From Artistic Activities to Evidence of Learning

The third finding concerns the threshold between a described process and an educational outcome. The Depth Reporting article quotes a passage attributed to a student's practice journal, including the student's change in perception about face-to-face reporting. This is evidence that a reflection was selected and publicly reported. The underlying journal has not been inspected, no comparative pre-task account is available, and the article states that teachers would later review written assignments. The intended feedback cannot be recorded here as completed assessment, and the reflection cannot represent the entire class (Anhui Xinhua University, School of Culture and Media, 2025b).

The heritage-base announcement similarly invokes cultural transmission as a purpose but provides no apprenticeship sequence, practice frequency, learner-produced work, or later follow-up. The theatre report displays an artistic product yet offers no baseline of student skill or rubric for performance appraisal. Even if

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positive effects are plausible, these sources do not support a measured improvement claim. Comparative studies using direct participant evidence are methodologically distinct: Cai et al. (2024) examine rural cultural spaces and well-being, while Luo and Xie (2025) analyse arts participation and children's socio-emotional competence. Findings from those settings cannot be transferred to Maying without comparable data.

The same boundary applies to cultural continuity. Digitising heritage or announcing a practice base may facilitate future teaching, but continuation depends on people, opportunities for repeated practice, and decisions about cultural material (Cui et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2021). The education-specific claim supported here is that the village offered some reported artistic and curricular encounters. The available public sources cannot establish sustainable transmission to local learners. The reported existence of further university activity in Maying also makes single-institution attribution unsafe: China Youth Daily (2026) describes a separate design initiative involving 43 higher-education institutions, including site-specific work with village artisans. That is context and a rival explanation for village-wide artistic visibility, not an output of Anhui Xinhua University.

3.2. Discussion

Table 2. Four-domain Evidence-concordance Framework Applied to the Maying Corpus

Domain	Guiding audit question	Appropriate evidence	Status in Maying corpus
1. Learning access	Was a dated opportunity or resource provided?	Date, location, actors, named activity	Exhibition, visits, heritage base and performances reported
2. Participatory learning	Which learner tasks, mentors, reflections or feedback are described?	Task brief, observed work, teacher comments, participant account	2025 reporting course detailed; theatre and visits partially specified
3. Pedagogical authority	Who sets topics and can correct, veto, or revise cultural representation?	Co-authored plan, documented resident decisions, editorial or consent trail	Local representatives named; binding curricular decisions unreported
4. Learning and continuity	What learning gains or continuing practice can be evidenced?	Marked work, repeated observations, authentic assessment, follow-up	No evaluated competence gains or sustained community learning established

Table 2 sets out the article's conceptual contribution as an evidence-concordance rule for community-based arts education. The four domains are separate, not rungs on a universally necessary sequence: activity access, participation in an identifiable learning task, authority over instructional or representational choices, and observed learning with continuation. The rule prohibits a common substitution in programme narratives—for example, using an exhibition count to claim skills acquisition or a signed agreement to claim shared pedagogy. On the present corpus, documentation is strongest for access and some specified tasks; a bounded extract of immediate reflection appears in one report; negotiated curricular authority and assessed learning remain unestablished. The framework responds to participatory governance work (Durrer & Davey, 2024), culturally situated arts education (Luo & Guan, 2023), and calls for reciprocal university engagement (Lang et al., 2024; Li et al., 2026). It is an analytic classification, not a validated scale, and no reliability or impact coefficient is claimed.

3.3. Implications

3.3.1. Implications for Designing and Evaluating Community Arts Education

A practical implication is that partnerships should report education at the unit for which evidence is available. If a university claims student learning, it should document learning objectives, learner-produced work, feedback, and criteria for progress. If it claims community arts education, it should document what residents chose to learn, who taught, what opportunities were repeated, and how community members assessed relevance. The same event can serve both aims, but one aim cannot stand in for the other. Research on contextual arts education and rural community learning underscores the need to make learners and teaching processes visible (Hayat et al., 2024; Zeng et al., 2024; Su & Maulan, 2026).

For a reporting assignment, an audit trail could include a written brief, interview permissions, an anonymised draft, residents' opportunities to correct factual misrepresentation, a lecturer's formative comments, and a later revision. The November 2025 report identifies the fieldwork task and a planned marking stage; it does not supply these records. For theatre, a comparable audit would include rehearsal notes, teachers' comments, community responses, and a performance rubric; the March 2025 announcement reports the production but not such evaluation. These are recommendations derived from the documentary gaps, not procedures claimed to have occurred.

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For heritage learning, an appropriate design would distinguish the roles of local artisans as experts, mentors, learners, or contributors to cultural materials. Residents might retain the authority to decide which techniques can be demonstrated, filmed or published, and learners might be assessed through successive attempts at a practice rather than a one-time visit. Research in art education and participatory design provides relevant models (Luo, 2025; Lin & Wu, 2024; Xu, 2024). The material also cautions against assuming that an institutional base agreement produces sustained community learning by itself (Fu et al., 2026; Zeng & Mu, 2024).

Educational continuity should be evidenced beyond repeated press releases. A programme may remain active institutionally without documenting how learner competence develops across visits. Follow-up would require accessible teaching materials, consent over continued reuse, a local point of responsibility, and evidence that participants can maintain or extend practices. Such mechanisms are analytically different from the continued presence of new public artworks. The institutionalisation questions raised by Tijsma et al. (2023), the community-partner perspectives explored by Cooke et al. (2024), and the partnership practices studied by Lang et al. (2024) are pertinent comparisons. Artistic intervention work by Tan (2024) further suggests that local initiative and continuity must be examined beyond the installation of new cultural objects.

Finally, the 2026 multi-university design initiative demonstrates why actor attribution matters. Its organisers, projects, and participant teams are described separately from the focal institution (China Youth Daily, 2026). Even when the same village appears in the title of a study, public artworks, student engagement, or tourism visibility may result from multiple parties. The Maying documentary record permits separate descriptions of several interventions; it does not permit a causal allocation of village-wide change. This is consistent with broader evidence of multi-actor rural cultural change (Qian et al., 2025; Dai et al., 2026; Luo, 2025; Wang, Vanclay, & Hanna, 2026).

Table 3. Documentary Records Needed for Future Evaluation of Community-based Arts Education

Evaluation dimension	Suggested minimum documentation	Inference potentially supported
Educational design	Objectives, activity plan and agreement on lecturers' and residents' roles	Alignment of local needs with opportunities
Process and participation	Attendance, teaching notes, portfolios and participant reflection	Traceable forms of engagement and experience
Authority over cultural material	Permissions, resident review, recorded changes to representation	Distribution of pedagogical and representational decisions
Assessment and continuity	Rubrics, assessed work, feedback and later follow-up	Observed progress and continuation of practice

Table 3 translates the four-domain audit into possible future documentation without presenting it as fieldwork completed. A rigorous extension could select a university-led performance and a resident-led heritage lesson, observe negotiations over content, collect successive learner products and local mentor feedback, and follow up after the university's visit. Cases where community participants decline or redirect a proposed cultural representation would be especially informative tests of pedagogical authority. This could determine whether the domains usefully distinguish different partnership arrangements. Such a study is not part of the present analysis.

3.4. Limitations

The study is limited to seven purposively selected public news accounts and to the forms of activity that institutions or newsrooms chose to publish. A report may be factually accurate about a visit while selective about disagreement, non-participation, or unfinished work. The People's Daily case was consulted through indexed text rather than a fresh full webpage retrieval. A published student reflection excerpt was not verified against its original journal, and no participant consent files, artwork portfolios, course marks, repeated observations, or residents' assessment of the partnership were available. This study therefore cannot establish actual gains in educational competence, the distribution of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, or the effectiveness of long-term nonformal teaching. Studies centring villagers' perspectives and unequal participation (Xue & Cao, 2025; Zhang, 2026; Wang, Wu, & Zhang, 2025) indicate why these absences matter. It does not follow that educational effects were absent in practice.

4. Conclusion

The Maying public documentary record supports a differentiated account of university–village learning. It documents a teacher-produced art exhibition, an intercultural field visit, the creation of a heritage-practice facility, a village consultation, a supervised student theatre performance, and a curriculum-linked reporting visit. The November 2025 reporting article offers the clearest evidence of pedagogical process: a stated course, supervised interview tasks, one published reflection excerpt, and a planned feedback stage. These are reported educational activities; they are not observations of measurable or sustained competence gains. The data also do not show that local residents directed the teaching content or received systematic arts instruction. Art communication can be an educational resource, but visibility alone is not educational effectiveness.

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The conceptual contribution is an evidence-concordance framework that separates access, participation, pedagogical authority, and demonstrated learning and continuity. It is applied to specific publicly reported episodes to distinguish what can be claimed from what requires further evidence. This is a modest but falsifiable methodological contribution: direct lesson plans, residents' decisions, marked work, and follow-up observations could revise the provisional classifications. The present study does not claim to validate the framework or evaluate a population of learners. Its implication is that institutions should make educational goals, feedback and community decision rights more transparent when communicating arts programmes.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this paper. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Ethics and Consent Declarations

This article uses only already published institutional and news reports and does not reproduce their photographs or personal interview transcripts. No new participant recruitment, direct observation, interview, or experiment was undertaken for this documentary analysis. Publicly reported speech is paraphrased and assessed as publisher-selected evidence; original private material has not been inspected. Institutional ethics-review requirements for analysis of public documents should be checked under the authors' affiliations and journal policy rather than presumed satisfied by a fabricated approval number. The named roles of all authors and any institutional programme involvement require confirmation in the submission system.

Data Availability

All analysed public reports are listed with URLs in the References section. One named representative in 2024 university reports has the same romanised name as the first author; the team should confirm whether this reflects direct involvement and disclose it in the final author contribution or competing-interests form. Source statements about educational achievements are treated as claims by their publishers, not as independently measured participant results. A reproducible extraction table and source-access decisions accompany the manuscript as an editorial appendix. No unpublished programme account is used as evidentiary input, and no confidential resident data are reproduced.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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