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Cultural Representation and Modern Visual Identity in Paris 2024 Olympic Pictograms

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE INFO
<p>Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms illustrate features of French culture and are presented with a contemporary visual appearance; however, in some instances, they do not accurately depict the sport that they illustrate. The purpose of this research is to analyze the visual identity of Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms to assess how French culture is illustrated and whether they can be applied for visual design and issues of the contemporary global society. The study employs a visual culture approach with particular focus on the examination of prevailing visual themes—form, color, and symbols—and how they are entwined with the cultural politics of France. The study points to the effect of Art Deco themes, symbolic representation of city heritage, and narrative quality of sustainability present in the pictograms. Moreover, the study demonstrates a departure from the traditional application of human images using abstract and non-human objects so that it is possible to pursue a more abstract visual language. The practice reflects France's modern identity and commitment to progress at the cost of diminishing universal readability of the pictograms to the international community. The findings shed light on what has been established regarding the representation of culture's influence on visual communication in international events.</p> <p>© 2025 Educational Technology UPI</p>	<p>Article History: <i>Submitted/Received 9 Jan 2025</i> <i>First Revised 5 Feb 2024</i> <i>Accepted 16 Feb 2025</i> <i>First Available online 20 Feb 2025</i> <i>Publication Date 20 Feb 2025</i></p> <p>Keyword: <i>Pictograms, Paris Olympics 2024, Cultural Representation, Modern Visual Identity</i></p>

1. INTRODUCTION

The Summer Olympics ranks as one of the world's biggest sporting festivals, taking place every four years and intricately connected with host country power, individuality, and national traditions (Gold & Gold, 2024). One of the characteristics that constantly receives attention on every Summer Olympics is the diversification of the pictogram styles. Pictograms are also visual means for communication used in representing various sporting events (Gungor, 2024). Essentially, pictograms of the Summer Olympics constitute an international visual language that can be comprehended simply without needing to be translated. Since their initial identification as Olympic symbols at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, pictograms have undergone numerous transformations in appearance and social interpretation.

Though most pictogram designs utilize shapes, colors, and ornaments, the symbols also depict how countries attempt to present their image both overseas and locally (Lee et al, 2022). Yet the approach in some cases becomes counterintuitive to the universal goal of pictograms as an understandable visual language. Following Choi et al. (2022), the pictograms used for sport activities tend to include cultural attributes of the host nation that are not easily distinguishable, which causes observers to find it difficult to identify the intended sport. Olympic pictograms need to fulfill international standards in clarity and recognizability (Schaeffer & Fischer, 2022).

For the Paris 2024 Olympics, many people think that the pictograms represent France's culture and convey a contemporary appearance but are not effectively illustrating the sport they are representing. Viraporn (2023) thinks that Paris 2024 pictograms can't really be called pictograms because there is no indication of human elements that symbolize different sports and because they are not very readable when in small sizes. Ables (2023) continues to show that these pictograms resemble works of art in the Pompidou rather than clear directional signs that would cause the misperception of the subjects by the public. This research therefore aims to study the visual aspects of the 2024 Paris Olympic pictograms as a way of ascertaining their depiction of French culture and relevance to visual design and global contemporary social issues.

This research is rooted on two theoretical models which shall be applied in directing the visual meaning of the 2024 Paris Olympics pictograms: Stuart Hall's cultural representation theory and Susan Sontag's theory of visual identity. Stuart Hall (Xie et al., 2022) explains how symbols, images, and language are employed to build, depict, and express social and cultural realities, in the instance of the 2024 Paris Olympics pictograms representing parts of French culture and sometimes creating mismatches in meaning among global spectators. Meanwhile, Susan Sontag's visual identity theory (Chen, 2023) accounts for the work done by visual symbols to create, reinforce, or symbolize national identity—here, the national and cultural identity intrinsic in the 2024 Paris Olympics pictograms. To investigate this, therefore, the following questions will be considered.

Research questions are

- (i) How do the 2024 Paris Olympic pictograms reflect French cultural identity and contemporary visual design principles?
- (ii) To what extent do they maintain clarity and recognizability as a universal visual language?

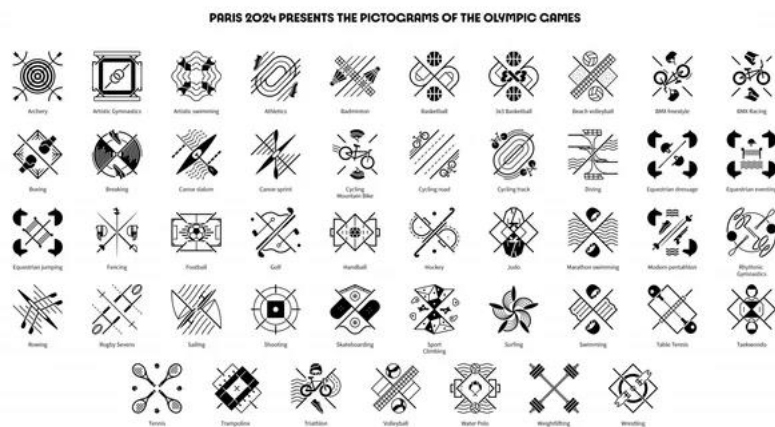
2. METHODS

This study adopts a visual culture approach (Al-Rawe & Omar, 2024) whereby pictograms of Paris 2024 Olympics are interpreted through their key visual elements, i.e., shape, color, and symbols, and linking these with the background French culture. The study discusses how French culture as the hosting country of 2024 Olympics is represented via these pictograms. Visual recording, textual visual recording, and literature review are data collection tools employed. Visual documentation involves the collection of images of Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms from the Paris 2024 official website and online media that publish pictogram designs. Text-based visual documentation is conducted by collecting various design articles that critique the Paris 2024 Olympics pictogram design. Literature review synthesizes theories, previous studies on Olympic pictograms in general, other host nation pictograms, and cultural backgrounds of the Paris 2024 pictogram design. Local cultural context analysis is conducted by the researcher through understanding French culture values influencing the pictogram design, such as impacts of Art Deco design style, as well as design innovation and sustainability concerns.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. RESULTS

Paris 2024 Summer Olympics is an international multi-sport event to be hosted by Paris, France, as the 30th Olympic Games. All the games are explained via pictograms, which are easily accessible to the global community. There are 62 symbols (see **Picture 1**) depicting the respective sport available.



Picture 1. 62 Pictograms from the Paris 2024 Olympics

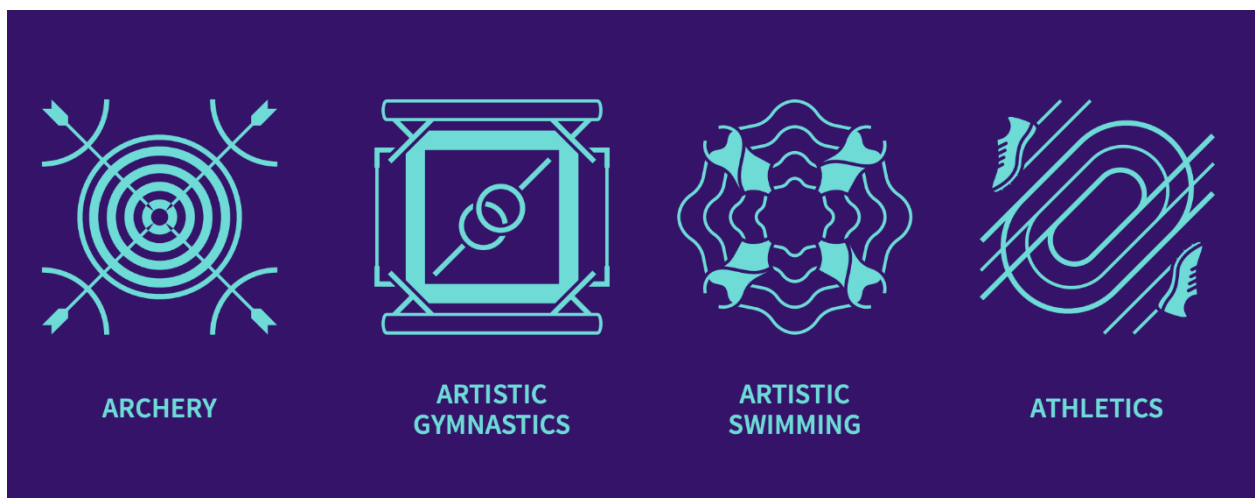
[Source: <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/paris-2024-reveals-look-of-games-62-pictograms>]

These pictograms are not only sport symbols but also symbols for the blending of French culture with modern elements and non-human orientations. The modern element in the Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms is borrowed from the Art Deco movement (Paris 2024 Olympic Family Guide, 2024) and features Paris cobblestone streets as a signature French element (International Olympic Committee, 2024), which creates a strong visual connection with the heritage and identity of the city.

The use of purple and blue shades in the Paris 2024 pictograms represents the dynamic cultural richness of France (International Olympic Committee, 2024). Symmetry, visual equilibrium, and simplicity are also characteristics of the pictograms, and three significant visual characteristics are: depiction of the floor, axes of symmetry, and thin-line depiction of sports, all with the use of non-human agents (International Olympic Committee, 2024). The absence of human figures in these pictograms symbolizes the interconnectivity of humans, nature, and modern visual culture in France (Chalmers, 2023).

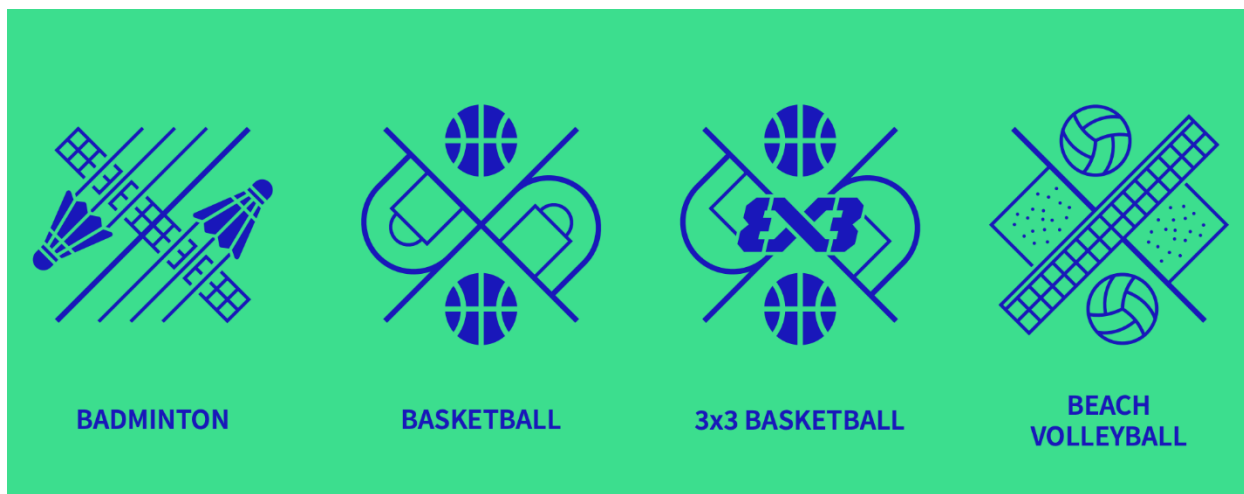
1. Cultural Representation and Modernity in Paris 2024 Olympic Pictograms

Visual and symbolic depiction of Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms is France's cultural construction of its identity and values, as evidenced by the utilization of the Marianne symbol to represent freedom, equality, and fraternity (Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité) (Ortiz, 2023). The three symbols were meant to narrate the story of French culture today founded upon the concord of tradition and innovation. Furthermore, **Picture 2**'s geometric forms, symmetrical lines, and simple motifs replicating the Art Deco style (Gumulya et al., 2020) embody France's identity and values that are an integral part of France's visual arts heritage in the early 20th century.



Picture 2. The Art Deco Aesthetic of the Paris 2024 Olympic Pictograms
[Source: <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/paris-2024-reveals-look-of-games-62-pictograms>]

Cobblestone roads in the Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms in **Picture 3** connect with the cultural heritage of Parisian urban life (Appendino, 2022). It's represented by the arena designs of the competition or the floor patterns of the sporting icons for basketball, badminton, 3x3 basketball, beach volleyball, handball, breaking, road cycling, track cycling, football, and others. Representing the competition arena through the texture of crossed lines or diagonal geometrics, as with roads that have cobblestone applied within areas like the Seine River district in Paris or the Montmartre neighborhood, creates the icon for these sporting events.



Picture 3. The Games Arena in the Paris 2024 Olympics Pictogram
 [Source: <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/paris-2024-reveals-look-of-games-62-pictograms>]

Additionally, the existence of a message of sustainability that demonstrates France's commitment to preserving the environment can be seen through some of the Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms from nature. They not only serve as information media in representing sports during the event but also convey a visual message of the relationship between man and nature being harmonious (Paris 2024 Organising Committee, 2024). This is also seen in the simple visual representations that imitate nature, such as wavy lines to represent waves in water, which can be applied to a river in **Picture 4**, and leaf patterns to represent a connection with nature. Such incorporation is one of France's attempts to get the audience environmentally aware and fit into Paris 2024's vision for sustainability.



Picture 4. Sustainability Message in Paris 2024 Pictograms
 [Source: <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/paris-2024-reveals-look-of-games-62-pictograms>]

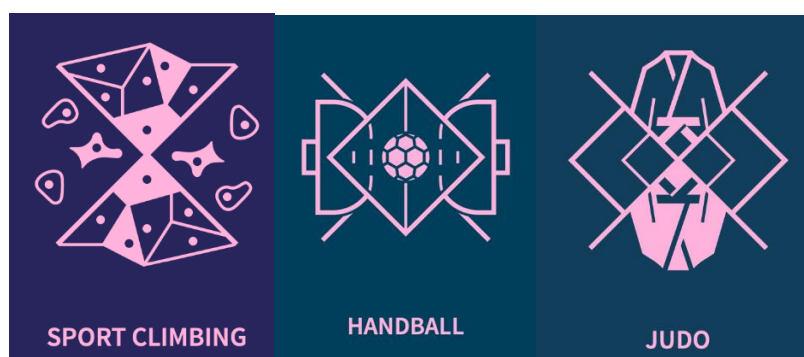
The absence of human bodies in the Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms, which are otherwise universal symbols in sport emblems, creates different impressions with international audiences, making them appear less relevant and giving an impression of

inconsistency with previous pictograms. The omission of human figures may, however, indicate a shift towards a more symbolic and abstract visual representation, representing modern humanist principles and interpretability. Lin (Lin, 2020) explains that cultural representation is always open to various interpretations, based on the social and cultural background of the audience. In the case of Paris 2024 pictograms, the strong local cultural representation can do less well globally as it sacrifices universal readability in the interest of more symbolic and abstract cultural representation.

2. Modern Visual Identity of France in the Paris 2024 Olympics

Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms can be understood as a manifestation of French visual identity today, and not only as an informative sign but also as a mode of cultural communication and as signs of national identity (Heimbürger et al., 2016). Each visual element within the pictograms is a response to make French identity of the present time more robust using an innovative and authentic design language. The Paris 2024 pictograms are both abstract and symbolic in design, characterized by the absence of human figures that in the past were characteristic of Olympic pictograms. The absence of human figures adds a touch of modernity drawing from the aesthetics of modern art and minimalist graphic design. Internationally, in the visual world, this move demonstrates France's readiness to unveil its artistic and creative side.

Apart from symbolism, the pictograms of the Paris 2024 Olympics also narrate a social tale of sustainability, one of the most frequent issues that France always raises. The pictograms symbolically talk about the commitment of France towards a sustainable and inclusive world. This is not only the new visual face but also tells a bigger message about sustainability and the values for which France, as the host of the 2024 Olympics, stands. Besides, there is also an interconnection between the visual signs of the pictogram and French culture in the designs that stem from daily activity and France's natural landscape, such as Parisian cobblestone streets, urban life, and the forces of nature. These aspects work towards creating a solid emotional connection with local consumers, particularly the French people. The design presents the French market with a deeper visual experience that is replete with symbolism based on France's history, society, and urban culture.

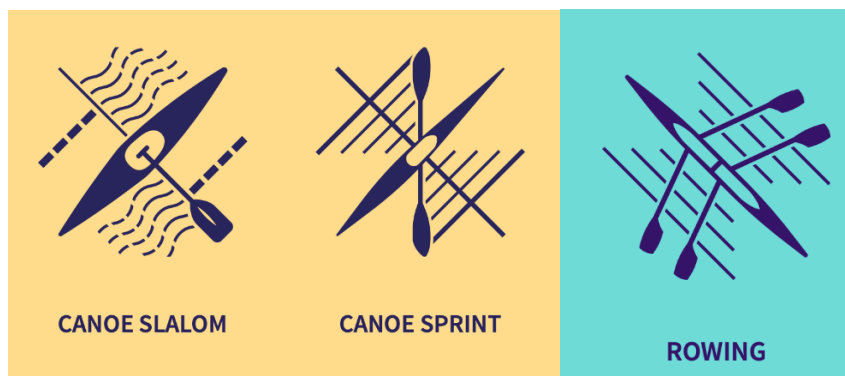


Picture 5. Coat of Arms Pictogram in Paris 2024 Pictograms

[Source: <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/paris-2024-reveals-look-of-games-62-pictograms>]

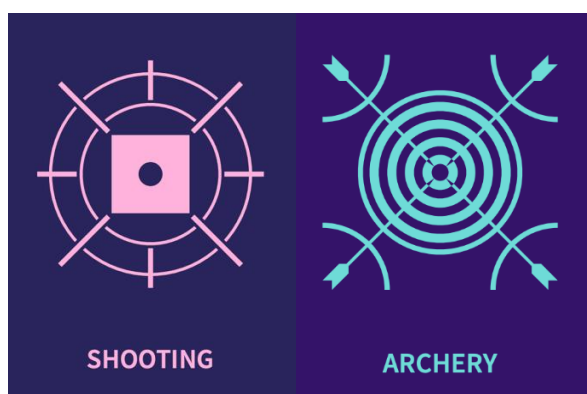
In **Picture 5**, the pictogram represents a coat of arms-type image, from the visual symbolism of European, and therefore French, history. This is fitting in being part of an

exploration of France's visual heritage. On the other hand, **Picture 6** is derived from everyday life of French society along Seine River, which constitutes Paris Plages and is mirrored in the look of water sports symbols such as canoeing or rowing. It creates a strong emotional connection by presenting the urban scenery of Paris. The purple and blue color indicate the vibrant daily life of the French, ranging from simple sports in the park to the urban way of life.



Picture 6. Daily Activities of French Pictogram in Paris 2024 Pictograms
 [Source: <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/paris-2024-reveals-look-of-games-62-pictograms>]

Besides portraying the history, culture, and city life of French society, the pictograms of Paris 2024 Olympics in **Picture 7** acquire an abstract visual presentation that is more artistic in nature than being ordinary symbols. Ables (2023) finds that the pictograms resemble art works at the Pompidou Museum more than regular informative symbols. Abstraction could lead to misunderstanding and lack of interpretation for world viewers, particularly where it pertains to the use of a pictogram to make it easy for viewers to recognize different sports.



Picture 7. Pictogram Abstract Visual Style in Paris 2024 Pictograms
 [Source: <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/paris-2024-reveals-look-of-games-62-pictograms>]

B. DISCUSSIONS

Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms are a cutting-edge confluence of cultural expression, artistic design, and global communication challenges. The pictograms are a union of

France's cultural past and modern visual identity, blending the old and new principles of design. In this section, why such visual representation conveys cultural stories and poses challenges to universal communication is described.

1. Cultural Representation through Art Deco and Urban Heritage

Art Deco-styled design employed in the pictograms of Paris 2024 symbolize French art heritage through geometric shapes, symmetry, and simplicity. They are a visual nod towards French visual arts in the first half of the 20th century without sacrificing a contemporary appearance. Besides, the addition of cobblestone streets characteristic of Montmartre and the Seine River represents urban cultural heritage, which can be leveraged in creating a history story embedded in the sports pictograms. The process enhances local culture identity and enhances the visual appeal to French communities. While the application of local symbolic abstractions and cultural symbols will tend to undermine the universal applicability of the pictograms as an international medium of communication, particularly for global users who may not understand these types of cultural symbols.

2. Modernity and Symbolic Abstraction

The exclusion of human figures in the Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms is a departure from traditional Olympic pictogram design. Instead, the pictograms are more symbolic and abstract in their visual depiction, dealing with non-human entities such as sporting equipment and competition venues. Although this is in line with France's modern identity and artwork depiction, it is presentational. It poses interpretational difficulties to global audiences, as concluded by Lin [18]. The pictograms are more prone to ambiguity, and the audience finds it hard to identify the involved sports instantly. This approach is part of the now prevalent design ethos, which focuses on minimalism and abstract photography. But abandoning the universal readability of previous Olympic pictograms creates miscommunication and confusion.

3. Sustainability as a Visual Narrative

Sustainability is a resilient story in Paris 2024 pictograms as it aligns with France's green consciousness and conservation policy. The incorporation of nature elements, like the use of wavy lines to signify water and the leaf patterns to signify the environment, introduces the idea of sustainability in the pictures. This upholds the vision of Paris 2024 on sustainability, posing the question to the audience on how humans and nature can be harmonious together. The incorporation of sustainability over its identification characteristic in the pictograms makes them advocacy and educative tools of global environmental principles. This creative solution adds another layer of meaning to the pictograms, yet perhaps once more obscuring their original recognizability.

4. Emotional Resonance and Audience Interpretation

The pictograms attempt to create a deep emotional resonance among Parisian audiences by being grounded in everyday Parisian life and the natural environment. Visual allusions introduced in these pictograms remind French audience members of widespread cultural signs and commonalities that maximize their identification with pictograms. Blue and purple coloring, for instance, is introduced to mark the vibrant everyday lives of the French, ranging from recreation in the parks to urban cosmopolitan lifestyle. To the rest of the world, though, the very idea and abstractions of such pictograms make them hard to decipher, as hypothesized by Ables [20]. The drawings

have the look of contemporary art rather than communicative signs, concealing their utility function in showing viewers what to anticipate during the Olympic Games.

5. Local Identity and Global Communication

Paris 2024 pictograms illustrate France's bold move towards expressing its artistic and cultural uniqueness. Whereas this is a testimony to national identity, it emphasizes the difficulty in finding a balance between local representation and international communication. Stuart Hall's cultural representation theory would argue that symbols are always anchored in meaning by the social and cultural context within which they are being used. In this instance, perhaps, there is extremely strong local cultural direction at the cost of universal intelligibility and availability to a worldwide audience. The pictograms signify a conflict between tradition and contemporary times, between global and local communication, and between beauty of representation and functional design. The secret to the successful integration of both visual communication and cultural authenticity in an event as cosmopolitan as the Olympics is balance.

4. CONCLUSION

Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms are a fusion of national identity, cultural expression, art design, and modern visual identity. The union of Art Deco design motifs, Parisian urban heritage, and sustainability represents the French national identity and cultural heritage. The designs go beyond the functional signs because they are instruments of cultural communication that balance the local heritage and the global populations. But the absence of human subjects and employment of non-human, abstract objects pose difficulties to international communication. Though the new style captures France's contemporary art identity, it lowers the legibility and intelligibility of the pictograms to the international community. This may lead to different meanings and potential misinterpretation of the sport being represented.

Their history of sustainability also makes the pictograms more appropriate culturally, thus turning them into campaign tools for the environment. The innovation follows France's policy of environmental protection and openness, pushing the power of visual design to transform society. Paris 2024 Olympic pictograms are good representations of French national cultural heritage and modern sensibilities but at the cost of not representing the underlying tension between local and global dimensions of communication. They are symbols of culture and pride, demonstrating the potential of design in representing national identity in the subtlety of cross-cultural communication in the era of globalization.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors include a statement that there is no conflict of interest in publishing this paper. The authors confirm that the content of this paper is plagiarism-free and original. In addition, the authors appreciate all the references and sources for their input in this research and value colleagues' contributions in preparing the manuscript.

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