

Robust Hand Detection Based on Convolutional Neural Network and Attention Module

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Abstract—The hands are essential parts, helping people to contact and communicate with the surrounding environment. Hand gesture and position detection is an interesting topic in computer vision field, it was applied in the areas such as action recognition, Human-Computer Interaction, Human-Robot Interaction, control systems, etc. With the strong emergence of artificial neural networks and computer hardware devices, it becomes easier to apply hand detection in practice. Based on the benefits of convolutional neural network (CNN) and bottleneck attention module, this paper proposes a robust CNN for hand detection. The proposed network achieved 95.52% of average precision (AP) on the Egohands test set and 59.07 frames per second (FPS) on the Intel Core I7-4770 @ 3.40 GHz CPU in real-time testing.

Index Terms—Bottleneck attention module, convolutional neural network, hand detection.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the process of evolution, humans have been known to use their hands to hunt and gather to maintain life. On the other hand, they also use the hands to communicate with each other and with the environment [1]. Thus, the hands become an extremely important sensory organ. Most actions and postures of the hand can be considered by its position and motion [2]. Decades ago, researchers focused on detecting hand position and shape based on traditional machine learning techniques. Recently, the advantage of convolutional neural networks in modern machine learning has attracted much attention from scientists to develop many artificial neural networks and novel techniques to improve accuracy. However, the hand has flexible joints and can take on many different shapes. This requires the detector to have a deep enough structure to accurately detect the hand while still ensuring the speed of the system when deployed in practice. From that observation, this paper proposes a robust CNN network for hand detection. This CNN is trained on a combination of the Hand and EgoHands datasets and then tested on the EgoHands test set. In addition, this work also implements real-time testing with a camera connected to a CPU-based personal computer.

The paper's contributions are shown as:

1 - Proposed a robust and compact CNN architecture for hand detection task which consists of feature extraction and detection head modules.

2 - Develop simple real-time hand detection system that can run on the CPU with high accuracy.

The remain part of paper is organized: Section II reviews the related works to hand detection and its advantage and disadvantage. Section III details the proposed method. Section IV evaluate and analyze the experiment. Finally, Section V present the conclusion and works in the future.

II. RELATED WORK

A. The traditional machine learning approach

Traditional machine learning approach are mainly based on skin color analysis [3] and hand shape characteristics [4] to detect hand position relative to the background. The Haar-like feature detection is applied in [5] to locate the hand. [6] proposes a multi-proposal detector based on a combination of the hand shape, skin color, and context. In another approach, [7] uses an attention map to extract the hand position in the complex background. These techniques are easy to deploy with low computational costs. However, they are limited by environmental conditions such as illumination, contrast, and color similarity between foreground and background. In addition, to achieve the desired accuracy, traditional methods also require careful preprocessing steps for feature extraction.

B. The CNN-based approach

Nowadays, convolutional neural networks are widely applied in object detection topics including hand detection. [8] proposes a one-stage CNN network that detects hand position and hand orientation. The Faster-RCNN network was applied in [9] to detect the position of the driver's hand on the steering wheel and combines with the hand skin segmentation technique in [10] to locate the hand position in unconstrained scenarios. The ability to detect the hand of these methods is quite weak due to the lack of benchmark datasets and it is not covering the contexts of the hand in the natural environment. [2] proposes a hand mask and hand orientation detection based on the Mask-CNN network and new attention techniques. These methods achieve high performance but require complex computational techniques and is unsuitable for low computing devices.

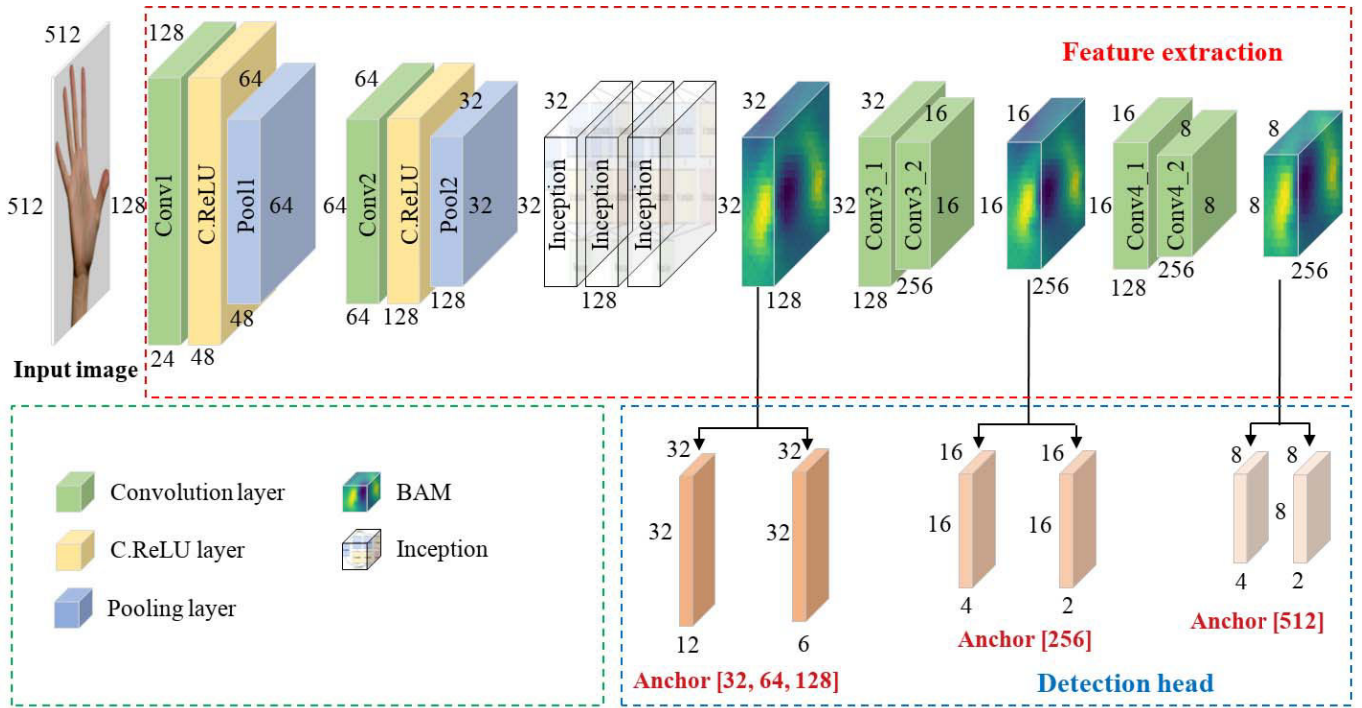


Fig. 1. The proposed hand detection network. The network includes feature extraction and detection head modules.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The proposed hand detection network is shown in Fig. 1. The network consists two modules: feature extraction and detection head.

A. Feature extraction

The feature extraction is a combination of convolutional layer groups, inception module [11], and bottleneck attention module (BAM) [12]. First, two groups of convolution layers are used. Each group consists of a convolution layer with kernel size 3×3 , a concatenated rectified linear unit (C.ReLU) [13], and a pooling layer. The input image, when going through these two convolutional groups, will extract basic context information about the object and reduce the size to 32×32 with 128 channels. The use of C.ReLU is to ensure full object information extraction during the training. In the next phase, the inception block with three inception modules is used immediately after the first two groups of convolutional layers. Each inception consists of convolution layer branches according to the width of the network with kernels of different sizes. This structure makes it possible for the network to capture object information with different receptive fields. These streams of information are then concatenated together to enrich the object information. The architecture of the inception module is described in Fig. 2.

At the end of the feature extraction are the BAMs combined with the remaining convolution groups. The attention mechanism in each BAM helps the network to attend on the strong features of the object to distinguish them with the background.

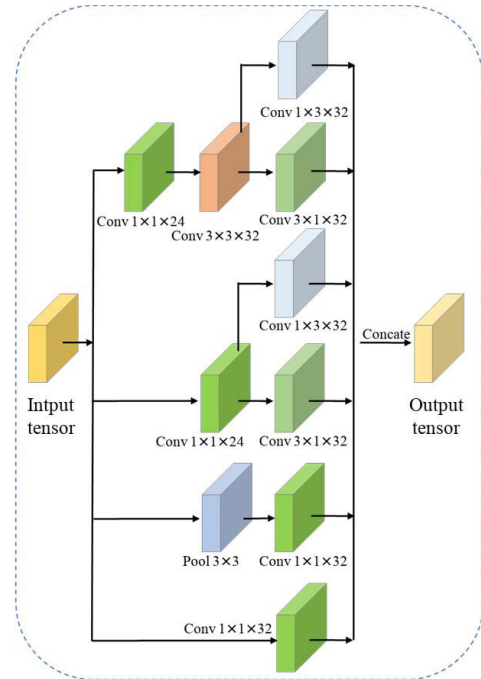


Fig. 2. The architecture of the inception module.

Fig. 3 shown the architecture of bottle attention module. This module is divided into two sub-modules: channel attention and spatial attention. Given the input feature map $F \in \mathbb{R}^{H \times W \times C}$ is the input of BAM. The output feature map $F' \in \mathbb{R}^{H \times W \times C}$

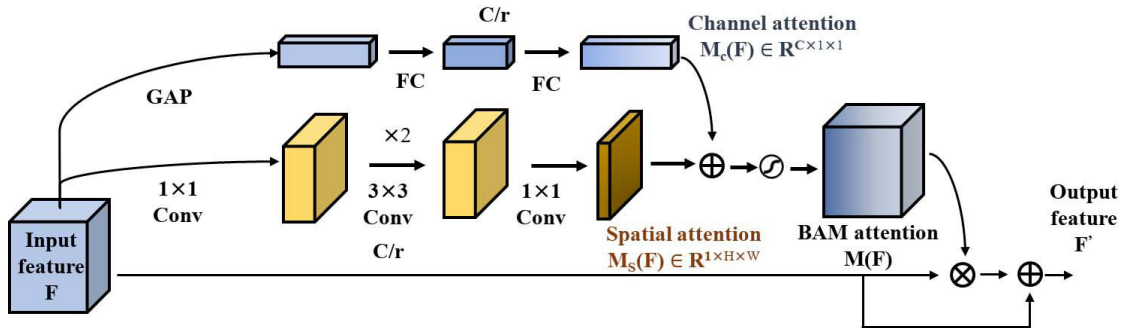


Fig. 3. The architecture of bottleneck attention module. This module includes the channel attention module and spatial attention module.

is described as follows:

$$F' = F + F \otimes M(F), \quad (1)$$

where \otimes presents the element-wise multiplication. $M(F)$ is the attention map from BAM and it is computed as:

$$M(F) = \sigma(M_c(F) + M_s(F)), \quad (2)$$

with σ denotes the sigmoid function, M_c denotes the channel attention module, and M_s denotes the spatial attention module. M_c and M_s are defined as:

$$\begin{aligned} M_c(F) &= BN(MLP(GAP(F))) \\ &= BN(W_1(W_0 GAP(F) + b_0) + b_1), \\ M_s(F) &= BN(f_3^{1 \times 1}(f_2^{3 \times 3}(f_1^{3 \times 3}(f_0^{1 \times 1}(F))))), \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

in which, $W_0 \in \mathbb{R}^{C/r \times C}$, $b_0 \in \mathbb{R}^{C/r}$, $W_1 \in \mathbb{R}^{C \times C/r}$, $b_1 \in \mathbb{R}^C$, $f_i^{1 \times 1}$ is 1×1 convolution layer, $f_i^{3 \times 3}$ is 3×3 dilated convolution layer with dilation rate = 4, BN is batch normalization, MLP is multi-layer perceptron, GAP is global average pooling.

The last convolutional layers continue the feature extraction process to generate the feature maps to a suitable size as input for the detectors with 32×32 , 16×16 , and 8×8 feature map sizes, respectively.

B. Detection head

This work uses three detection layers on different feature map level. Each detection applies two 3×3 sibling convolutions for bounding box regression and classification. These layers captures the feature maps from 32×32 , 16×16 , and 8×8 . Those are output feature maps from the feature extraction. The detection head uses square anchors with sizes 32, 64, 128 for small size hands, 256 for medium size hand and 512 for large size hand. Each detector generates a location offset with four-dimensional vector (x, y, w, h) and a label classification with two-dimensional vector (*hand* or *not - hand*).

C. Loss function

The loss function is the sum of the 2-classes softmax loss for classification and the smooth $L1$ loss for regression. This loss function is shown as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} L(\{pro_i\}, \{co_i\}) &= \frac{1}{N_{cls}} \sum_i L_{cls}(pro_i, pro_i^*) + \\ &\lambda \frac{1}{N_{reg}} \sum_i pro_i^* L_{reg}(co_i, co_i^*), \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

Where i is an anchor index. pro_i and pro_i^* are the predicted probability of i -th anchor being an object and ground truth label (0 or 1), respectively. co_i and co_i^* are the center point coordinates (x, y) and dimension (w, h) of the predicted and ground truth bounding box, respectively. The classification loss $L_{cls}(pro_i, pro_i^*)$ using the softmax-loss in Eq. (5). The classification loss $L_{reg}(co_i, co_i^*) = \sum_{i \in \{x, y, w, h\}} Smooth(co_i - co_i^*)$ with $Smooth$ is the Smooth $L1$ loss in Eq. (6). N_{cls} (mini-batch size) and N_{reg} (number of anchor location) are two normalized terms, and λ is a balancing parameter.

$$L_{cls}(pro_i, pro_i^*) = - \sum_{i \in Pos} x_i^{pro} \log(pro_i) - \sum_{i \in Neg} \log(pro_i^0), \quad (5)$$

Where $x_i^{pro} = \{0, 1\}$ is indicator for matching the i -th anchor bounding box to ground-truth bounding box of object i , pro_i and pro_i^0 are the probabilities for object and non-object classification, respectively.

$$Smooth(x) = \begin{cases} 0.5x^2 & \text{if } |x| < 1 \\ |x| - 0.5 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (6)$$

IV. EXPERIMENT

A. Dataset

The Hand [14] and Egohands [15] datasets are combined and used for training and the Egohands test set is used in the testing phase. The Hand dataset contains 4,069 images collected from various public image sources on the internet. The Egohands dataset has 4,782 images taken with Google glass through indoor and outdoor environments and various activities such as solving puzzles, playing Jenga, cards, and chess. All image annotations in the training set are converted

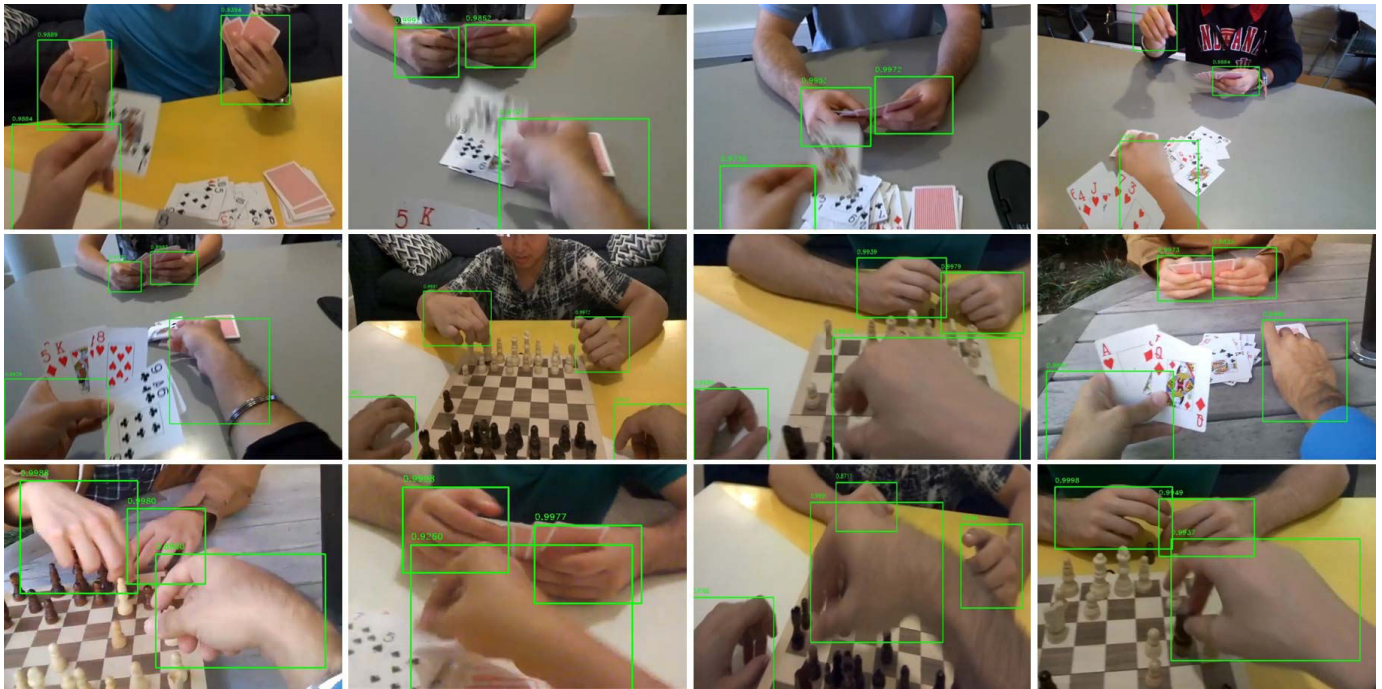


Fig. 4. The qualitative results on EgoHands test set. The number on each bounding box presents the confidence score.

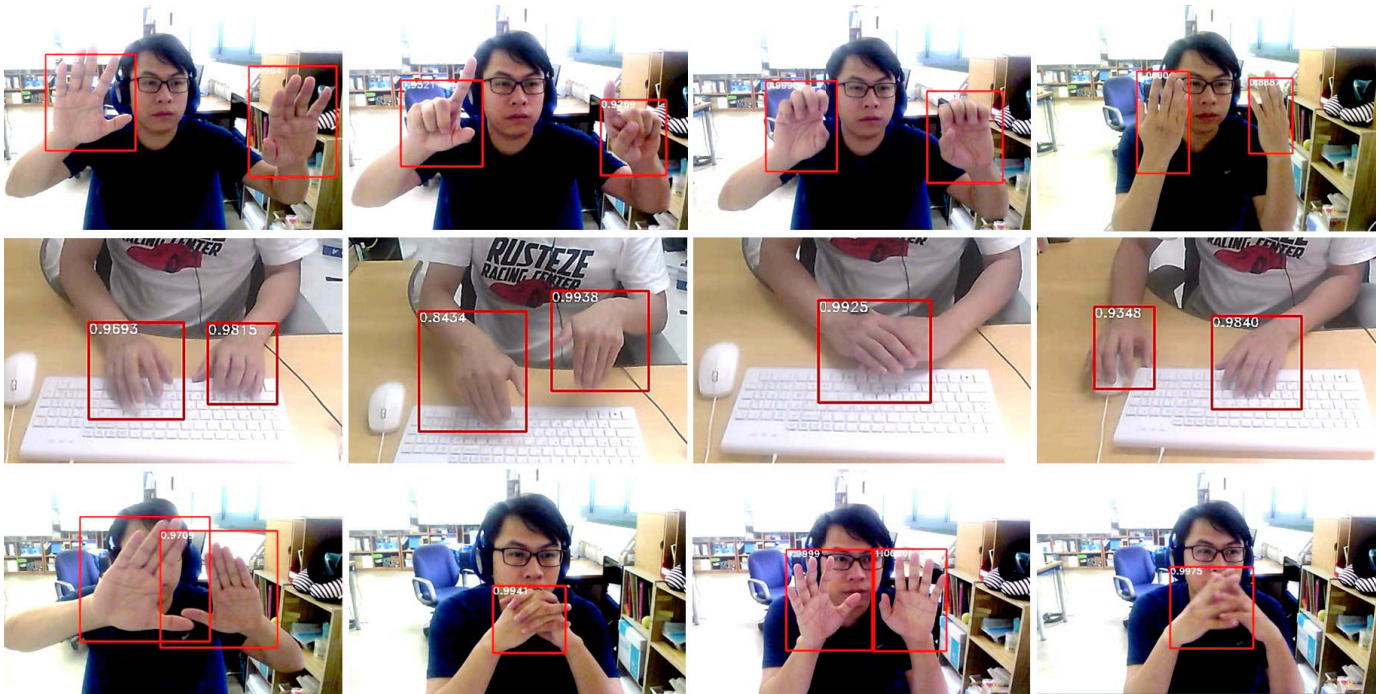


Fig. 5. The result testing in real-time on a camera connect to a CPU-Based personal computer. The number in each bounding box presents the confidence score.

to PASCAL VOC format by Python code. In total, the entire train set consists of 8,373 images, and the test set consists of 478 images.

B. Experimental setup

The proposed network are trained on Tesla-V100 GPU and tested on Intel Core I7-4770 CPU @ 3.40 GHz, 8GB of RAM. The training phase applies several basic configurations

in training object detection networks. Specifically, the network is trained with 300 epochs, batch size 32, weight decay of 5×10^{-4} , momentum of 0.9, a learning rate of 10^{-3} , and set $\lambda=10$. In order to optimize the weight updating process, the stochastic gradient descent optimization method is used. The non-maximum suppression (NMS) with an IoU threshold of 0.5 is also used to generate the best-fit bounding box.

C. Experimental results

The proposed network is trained and tested on the image dataset as mentioned above. It was also tested in real-time with a conventional camera connected to a CPU-based personal computer. As a result, the network achieved 95.52 % of AP on the test set of the EgoHands dataset. This result can be compared with other mobile networks in the object detection topic such as SSD, FaceBoxes, and the YOLO network family.

TABLE I
COMPARISON RESULT OF HAND DETECTION NETWORK ON THE EGOHANDS TEST SET. THE RED COLOR INDICATES THE BEST COMPETITOR.

Network	Parameters	Average Precision (%)
Proposed	1,107,198	95.52
Network in [16]	944,150	93.32
SSD512 [16]	24,358,668	90.30
SSD300 [16]	23,745,908	90.23
FaceBoxes [16]	1,007,330	78.39
YOLOv3-Tiny [17]	8,669,876	98.50
YOLOv4-Tiny [17]	3,061,636	98.30
YOLOv5s [17]	7,063,542	98.60

Table I proves that the proposed network outperforms the networks implemented in [16] and is only 113,048 parameters larger than the best detector. Besides, this experiment also compared the results obtained with tiny networks in the YOLO family including YOLOv3-Tiny, YOLOv4-Tiny, and YOLOv5s. The comparison proves that the proposed network is more compact than YOLOv3-Tiny, YOLOv4-Tiny, and YOLOv5s, but only less than 2.98, 2.78, and 3.08 of AP, respectively. The network can detect hands in different poses, sizes, and shapes, even in overlap and blur conditions. Fig. 4 shows the qualitative results on the EgoHands test set.

The real-time system testing under the same conditions as the experiments in [16] also shows that the proposed network achieved a speed of 59.07 frames per second (FPS). This result is dominant when compared to the best performing network (FaceBoxes network) with a difference of 24.62 FPS. The results presented in Fig. 5 demonstrate that the proposed network detects hands well in different contexts, postures on the front and back of the hand, and interlaced hands. However, with bad conditions such as low light or overexposure, fast hand movement speed, and camera angle greatly affect the detection accuracy and processing speed of the system.

D. Ablation study

This work conducted several experiments with different attention mechanisms. To do that, the BAM module in the

proposed network is replaced by the squeeze-and-excitation (SE) attention module [18] and convolutional block attention module (CBAM) [19], respectively. The evaluation results on the EgoHands test set shown in Table II present that when the network uses SE and CBAM, the AP only reaches 92.16% and 94.13%, respectively. In contrast, when using BAM, the network increases by about 1K parameters but reaches the highest AP at 95.52%. Therefore, BAM is chosen to design the hand detection network in this paper.

TABLE II
ABLATION STUDY WITH DIFFERENT ATTENTION MODULE ON EGOHANDS TEST SET. THE RED COLOR INDICATES THE BEST RESULT.

Attention module	Proposed network		
SE	✓		
CBAM		✓	
BAM			✓
Parameters (Million)	1.088	1.107	1.108
AP (%)	92.16	94.13	95.52

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This research proposed a compact and robust convolutional neural network for hand detection including two sub-modules, feature extraction and detection head. The network is built based on the advantages of convolutional layers, CReLU module, inception module, and BAM attention mechanism. The proposed network is trained and evaluated on image datasets with high accuracy and with negligible latency when testing in a real-time system. For future work, this network will be further developed to be deployed in systems such as hand tracking, hand control, and game control.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by “Region Innovation Strategy (RIS)” through the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE)(2021RIS-003).

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