



CHINESE ACADEMY
OF SCIENCES

Dr. Matthew K. Lau, PhD.

Dr. Matthew K. Lau
PIFI Research Fellow
Institute of Applied Ecology
Chinese Academy of Sciences
Shenyang 110016, China
and
External Research Fellow
Harvard Forest
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138

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Dear Editor of Nature Ecology and Evolution,

My co-authors and I are pleased to submit our manuscript, *Genotypic variation in a foundation tree results in heritable ecological network structure*. The article examines the variation of interaction networks of lichen communities growing on the bark of genotyped cottonwood trees in a long-term common garden experiment. Although there have been studies over the last decade that explored the impact of genetic variation on interaction networks, we are not aware of a study that has quantified the heritability of these effects, which is a key component for evolution by natural selection. Given the difficulty of obtaining ecological interaction network data, let alone replicated in space, this is not surprising, and we are confident that our work is unique in its combination of a genetics-based experiment with replicated network observations. We report that we found detectable broad-sense heritability of lichen interaction network similarity ($H^2 = 0.41$), which was strongly correlated with one tree trait, bark roughness, but not bark chemistry traits (pH, tannin concentration and C/N ratio). As this study provides important insights at the interface of ecological and evolutionary dynamics, we believe that it is within the scope of *Nature Ecology and Evolution* and hope that you will consider it for publication. We look forward to your response and reviewer comments on this work.

Sincerely,

Dr. Matthew K. Lau, PhD.