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Cultural Industry in the Digital Age: Human-Machine Co-Creation Reshaping Cultural Subjectivity

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ABSTRACT

Digital media is deeply integrated into all aspects of cultural production, and human-machine co-creation has become a reality in the cultural industry. Technology has lowered the production threshold for cultural products and revolutionized industrial production efficiency, but the intervention of algorithms in content generation has also made the maintenance of cultural subjectivity an issue that urgently needs to be addressed. Cultural subjectivity is rooted in human life experience, value stance, and cultural memory, and is the core of cultural creation. Algorithms, based on existing data, complete symbolic recombination and imitation, lacking original emotional experience and value reflection. Over-reliance on algorithms can easily weaken creators' independent thinking and bring the risk of the erosion of cultural subjectivity. The essence of human-machine co-creation is not that machines replace humans, but that humans take the lead in driving technology. Creators should assume the roles of creative setting, content selection, and meaning interpretation, with humans controlling the cultural narrative, and AI completing auxiliary tasks such as material generation. The cultural industry takes the transmission of cultural values and the carrying of collective memory as its fundamental mission. Technology is merely a creative tool and cannot replace human empathy and creativity. Faced with the irreversible industry trend of human-machine co-creation, it is necessary to cultivate cultural awareness, adhere to the guidance of humanistic values, make good use of digital technology, safeguard the foundation of human cultural subjectivity, and promote the production of high-quality cultural products with warmth, stance, and local core.

Digital media has fully penetrated the entire cultural production chain. Human-machine co-creation is no longer a distant technological concept but has become a daily practice in the cultural industry. The Smart Internet Blue Book released by the People's Daily Research Institute in 2026 pointed out that AIGC is driving the cultural industry to accelerate its transformation from a labor-intensive mode to an algorithm-driven one and that human-machine collaborative creators will become the core productive unit of the cultural industry [1]. With the empowerment of technology, the production threshold of cultural products continues to decrease, but new questions arise: when algorithms participate in content generation, how should cultural subjectivity be anchored?

For a long time, cultural subjectivity has been rooted in people's unique life experiences, value positions, and cultural memories, and is the core of cultural production. In traditional cultural creation, from material collection and conceptualization to interpretation, the subject is always human. Just as some scholars have pointed out, any creative effort relies on the experience and cultural background of its author or creator; no work can exist outside the soul and spirit that gave birth to it [2]. However, the human-machine co-creation model changes the production process: algorithms can quickly generate cultural materials such as text, images, and audio-visual materials, reducing the cost of realizing creative ideas, expanding the boundaries of cultural expression, and bringing about an innovation in production efficiency for the cultural industry.But technology itself does not inherently carry value judgments. Algorithm models, trained on existing cultural data, essentially reorganize and imitate existing cultural symbols, lacking original emotional experience, local cultural perception, and value reflection. A study analyzing generative AI models as "social and cultural actors" has shown that the content generated by AI tends to simplify identities into limited categorical variables rather than dynamic cultural practices, and its output shows a clear tendency towards homogeneity [3]. Over-reliance on algorithms can easily trap creators in the inertia of "algorithm feeding," passively catering to traffic preferences, weakening independent thinking, and causing cultural works to lose their unique spiritual core, risking the erosion of cultural subjectivity.

The core of human-machine co-creation is never about machines replacing humans, but about humans mastering technology. In an article published in China Literature and Art Criticism, Wei pointed out that the distributed hybrid subject form brought about by human – machine collaboration is not a suppression of "mass subjectivity," but rather calls for the construction of a "responsible subject" characterized by human–machine symbiotic coexistence, diffuse and open form, a solid humanistic core, and clear boundaries of rights and responsibilities [4]. The role of cultural creators is no longer just that of simple content producers, but also that of setters of creative direction, selectors of algorithmic output, and interpreters of cultural meaning. In the cultural industry scenario, humans are responsible for establishing value themes and grasping cultural stances, while AI undertakes auxiliary tasks such as material generation and repetitive production. The collaboration of the two can unleash creative potential, but humans always maintain the leading role in cultural narrative.

The fundamental mission of the cultural industry is to transmit cultural values and carry collective memory. Technology is merely a medium and tool; it cannot replace human

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understanding, empathy, and creation of culture. When discussing the dialectical relationship between AI-generated micro-dramas and human-generated micro-dramas, a scholar pointed out that human creators can use AI as a tool to enhance quality and efficiency, while the creators of AI-generated dramas are always humans, and what they convey ultimately is human thoughts, values, and emotional demands; human creation has an irreplaceable role in the core of humanistic spirit, deep expression of emotions, delicate transmission of empathy, and social value guidance [5]. In the human-machine collaborative creative paradigm, preserving cultural subjectivity means that creators must maintain cultural awareness, actively control the core of the narrative, and prevent algorithmic logic from dominating cultural expression. The ideal state of human-machine co-creation is to amplify humanistic creativity through digital media, rather than allowing technology to dilute the spiritual power of culture itself.

Under the digital wave, human-machine co-creation is an irreversible trend in the cultural industry. Technology can expand the boundaries of creation, but the foundation of cultural subjectivity always lies with people. Only by adhering to humanistic values and making good use of digital tools can we ensure that new technologies serve cultural innovation and continuously produce cultural products that are warm, principled, and rooted in local culture.

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