

The Impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence on Cultural Agency and Strategies for Addressing It

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Abstract

Cultural autonomy reflects the degree of confidence a nation has in its own culture and is a key indicator of a country's cultural influence. In recent years, generative artificial intelligence has developed rapidly, profoundly reshaping the landscape of digital culture production and dissemination. While it powerfully empowers cultural innovation, it also harbors risks and challenges that cannot be ignored: issues such as "information silos" caused by algorithmic bias, lagging regulations on digital intellectual property rights, and the absence of collaborative governance mechanisms are posing multidimensional challenges to the autonomous expression of Chinese culture. In light of this, it is essential to adopt a dialectical approach to understanding the dual effects of technological change. There is an urgent need to reshape cultural perceptions by optimizing algorithmic governance, stimulate the vitality of cultural actors by improving intellectual property regulations, and prevent technological alienation by strengthening risk control systems—all while relying on domestically developed large language models to enhance autonomous dissemination capabilities. By establishing a systematic response strategy in this manner, we can firmly defend and consolidate the cultural autonomy of Chinese culture in the digital age.

Keywords

Generative Artificial Intelligence; Cultural Agency; Outstanding Traditional Chinese Culture; Response Strategies.

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of rapid advancements in digital technology and the accelerating pace of intelligent transformation, generative artificial intelligence is reshaping the fundamental modes of knowledge production, information dissemination, cultural creation, and value expression at an unprecedented rate. Unlike previous forms of artificial intelligence, which primarily served as tools for computational support and data analysis, generative artificial intelligence is now capable of directly participating in the production of cultural content across multiple domains—including text, images, audio, and video—through large-scale model training, semantic understanding, and content generation. This has not only significantly enhanced the efficiency of cultural production but has also profoundly transformed the mechanisms of cultural expression and the landscape of cultural dissemination. Consequently, the relationship between generative AI and cultural development has evolved from a mere issue of technological tools into a comprehensive topic involving value stances, the construction of subjectivity, normative order, and the transmission of civilization.

Cultural subjectivity is the core manifestation of a nation, ethnic group, or society's ability to maintain autonomous consciousness, value judgments, and expressive capacity throughout its cultural development. It implies not only an identification with one's own historical traditions, spiritual lineage, and value systems, but also the ability to narrate, shape, and develop one's identity in an autonomous manner amid global information flows and multicultural

competition. Currently, generative AI, with its powerful content-generation capabilities, offers new opportunities for cultural innovation, the revitalization and utilization of cultural resources, and the enhancement of cultural dissemination. At the same time, however, issues such as bias in training corpora, the embedding of values in algorithms, and the templated production of culture may undermine the stable formation and autonomous expression of cultural subjectivity. Particularly in a context where technology platforms dominate content distribution, algorithmic logic influences aesthetic preferences, and data resources shape knowledge construction, how to prevent cultural expression from being eroded by technological logic and how to ensure that cultural subjectivity is not replaced by “low-quality homogenization” in the name of “high-efficiency generation” have become critical practical issues that must be addressed.

I. Introduction

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2. The Challenges Posed by Generative Artificial Intelligence to Cultural Agency

2.1. Algorithmic Catering and “Information Echo Chambers” Weaken Cultural Agency

A comprehensive and holistic understanding of Chinese culture is a necessary prerequisite for establishing cultural agency. Currently, the algorithmic recommendations and deep learning mechanisms underlying generative AI are often geared toward catering to users’ individual interests and browsing habits. This “precise distribution,” optimized based on data, essentially results in a one-sided and fragmented cultural landscape. Audiences, having long been immersed in specific cultural contexts, are highly susceptible to becoming trapped in “information silos.” These technological mechanisms undermine the public’s ability to engage in rational thinking and reflection through comparisons of diverse cultures, and further hinder audiences from developing a systematic and comprehensive understanding of their indigenous cultural system. As a tool for online information retrieval and generation, generative AI provides only indirect information verification and virtual feedback. It makes it difficult for people to experience their own essential labor practices in objective reality and can easily lead users to feel confused by the contradiction between the virtual and the real. This does not help users enhance their cultural confidence and self-reliance through practical cognition and emotional experiences.

2.2. Inadequate protection of creators’ rights and interests stifles the enthusiasm of cultural actors to participate

The integration of generative artificial intelligence into cultural production and dissemination is blurring the traditional boundaries between the subject and object of human cultural practice, as well as between cultural creators and their intellectual products. On the one hand, generative AI can improve production efficiency and expand the boundaries of creativity; on the other hand, however, its training process may involve the use of large amounts of creative works

without proper authorization, and the content it generates may have a substitution effect on original works, thereby infringing upon the legitimate rights and interests of cultural creators. If creators are unable to reasonably share in the benefits of technological innovation but instead face the risk of being replaced or imitated, this will also dampen their motivation for continued innovation. At the same time, current frameworks regarding the determination of ownership, allocation of responsibility, attribution standards, and revenue-sharing mechanisms for AI-generated content remain unclear. The development of cultural autonomy relies on the broad and active participation of cultural actors. If creators cannot obtain appropriate safeguards, generative AI may evolve into a tool through which a handful of technology platforms monopolize cultural production resources, thereby undermining the diversity of the cultural ecosystem.

2.3. Lagging Governance Regulations and Lack of Prevention and Control Measures Exacerbate the Risk of Eroding Cultural Autonomy

The rapid evolution and widespread adoption of generative artificial intelligence are profoundly reshaping the logic of digital content production and dissemination, while also posing serious challenges to the governance and regulation of digital culture. From an institutional perspective, accountability and ethical review mechanisms designed to address the implications of technology-enabled content are clearly lagging behind; a comprehensive risk prevention and control system—linking pre-release approval, real-time monitoring, and post-incident accountability—remains underdeveloped. At the practical level, abuses of technology—such as deepfakes, fake composites, and malicious tampering—continue to proliferate. Generated content is characterized by high realism, strong concealment, and ease of dissemination, leading to persistent governance challenges such as difficulty in tracing origins and gathering evidence, as well as excessively low costs of non-compliance. At the same time, current governance lacks a scientific and precise classification and grading framework; it has failed to implement differentiated, mandatory risk identification and accountability measures based on application scenarios and the scale of dissemination. The “black box” nature of algorithms exacerbates the dilemma of assigning responsibility, which also puts the distinctiveness of Chinese culture at high risk of being diluted and eroded within an open digital communication ecosystem.

2.4. Restrictions on Digital Cultural Discourse Hinder the Development of Cultural Autonomy

Cultural sovereignty is the core power of a nation to independently determine its own path of cultural development and resist external cultural interference. At a time when generative AI is reshaping the global landscape of cultural dissemination, cultural autonomy also faces severe challenges. Some developed Western countries, by controlling technology and data resources, have established the Western civilizational paradigm embedded within these systems as the default standard for AI-generated content. This has also led to problems for Chinese culture in international exchanges, as its systematic narrative logic is often filtered, blocked, or manipulated by underlying Western models. This not only hinders in-depth interaction between Chinese civilization and other world civilizations but also puts China at risk of being silenced in the formulation of global digital cultural rules. This directly hinders China’s ability to establish international discourse power in jointly addressing human cultural challenges, thereby severely constraining the consolidation and development of Chinese cultural autonomy.

3. Strategies for Consolidating Cultural Autonomy in the Era of Generative Artificial Intelligence

3.1. Enhancing the Supply of High-Quality Cultural Content

To address the narrowing of cultural perspectives caused by algorithmic recommendations, we should reshape the public's cultural perception mechanisms by optimizing algorithms and improving digital literacy. First, at the levels of technological regulation and platform governance, we should regulate the recommendation logic of generative artificial intelligence and require relevant platforms to balance social benefits with economic gains. Specifically, "mandatory elements" reflecting China's outstanding traditional culture and the core socialist values should be embedded in algorithmic recommendation models to expand the scale and diversity of mainstream value-based content, break down information silos, and provide users with a diverse, multifaceted supply of high-quality cultural content. Second, in terms of fostering public cultural literacy, we should vigorously strengthen digital literacy education for all citizens to enhance the public's ability to discern AI-generated content and alienating cultural phenomena, as well as their critical thinking skills. At the same time, we should guide audiences to actively participate in authentic offline sociocultural practices, enabling them to deeply grasp the essence of Chinese culture through real-world experiences that integrate knowledge and action, thereby advancing the consolidation of Chinese cultural agency in the context of generative AI.

3.2. Improving Digital Intellectual Property Regulations and Profit-Sharing Mechanisms

To safeguard the rights and interests of cultural creators in the era of generative AI, there is an urgent need to establish a comprehensive system of digital intellectual property protection regulations and profit-sharing mechanisms. First, at the legal regulatory level, efforts should be accelerated to refine the intellectual property system to accommodate generative AI. The boundaries of fair use for AI training data and the criteria for determining infringement should be clearly defined, and ownership, attribution standards, and liability allocation for AI-generated content should be distinctly delineated to prevent unauthorized data misuse and covert infringement at the source. Second, in terms of antitrust regulation and revenue distribution, we should explore the establishment of a multi-party benefit-sharing mechanism encompassing data providers, algorithm platforms, and original creators. This will effectively ensure that creators derive legitimate benefits from technological change and mitigate the real risk of being replaced by technology. Finally, in terms of building a cultural ecosystem, we must consistently adhere to a people-centered approach to creation and clearly define artificial intelligence's role as an auxiliary tool. By implementing institutional measures that incentivize participation from a wide range of cultural actors, we can guard against the impact of a singular technological logic on cultural diversity and thereby strengthen the foundational autonomy necessary for the continued prosperity of Chinese culture.

3.3. Improving the Risk Prevention and Collaborative Governance System

Against the backdrop of cultural content generation becoming increasingly large-scale, automated, and platform-based, issues such as the proliferation of false cultural information, the arbitrary deconstruction of historical narratives, and the inappropriate appropriation of ethnic cultural symbols have become frequent. However, the corresponding mechanisms for risk identification, accountability, and collaborative response remain weak. Therefore, we must continuously improve the governance system for generative AI, establish an integrated ethical framework covering algorithmic transparency, data usage boundaries, and model monitoring and management, and properly handle culturally sensitive information involved in generative

AI to prevent technological alienation and the tool from taking precedence over the user. This will, in turn, strengthen users' ability to exercise independent judgment when using generative AI. At the same time, mechanisms for public feedback and error correction should be established to promptly correct and clarify misinformation as it spreads. Additionally, stricter risk identification and accountability measures should be implemented for platforms, models, and applications that have the potential to influence public opinion or mobilize society.

3.4. Strengthening Technological Autonomy and Overseas Dissemination Capabilities

Domestic large language models, represented by DeepSeek, have reached the cutting edge of the international field, marking China's ability to keep pace with the West in core artificial intelligence technologies. We should seize this opportunity to systematically build a framework for disseminating Chinese culture overseas in the digital age. Specifically, first, relevant national authorities should take the lead in establishing a high-quality "Corpus for the Global Dissemination of Chinese Culture" with global influence. Accurate, authoritative, and vibrant data on Chinese culture should be incorporated as core elements into model training, ensuring—from the foundational data level—that the narrative logic and knowledge system of Chinese culture are fully reflected. Second, at the level of cross-cultural communication, we should actively leverage AI's capabilities in cross-language translation and contextual generation to innovate outward-looking expression paradigms for Chinese culture, using digital narratives that bridge Eastern and Western cultures to break through the West's entrenched cultural filters. Third, at the level of international rules, China should proactively engage in the construction of global frameworks for AI cultural ethics and data governance, effectively safeguarding national cultural security and the diversity of the global digital cultural ecosystem within multilateral governance mechanisms.

4. Conclusion

Generative AI is profoundly transforming the ways in which culture is produced and disseminated, thereby exerting a dual impact on cultural agency. On the one hand, with its powerful content-generation and cross-media dissemination capabilities, it provides new technological support for the revitalization, innovative expression, and widespread dissemination of China's outstanding traditional culture; on the other hand, algorithmic preference matching and the fragmentation of cultural offerings also, to a certain extent, undermine the systematic nature of cultural cognition and challenge the autonomous expression and value transmission of Chinese culture. Therefore, we must objectively grasp the tension between technology and culture and follow the intrinsic laws of technological evolution and cultural development. In the face of the opportunities and challenges brought about by technological transformation, we must uphold the unity of a people-centered approach and innovation grounded in tradition, and coordinate efforts to optimize algorithms, protect intellectual property rights, manage risks, and build technological autonomy—thereby effectively transforming technological advantages into advantages for cultural development. Only by synergistically advancing institutional norms, value-based guidance, and independent innovation can we effectively guard against the risk of technological alienation, continuously enhance the interpretive power, creativity, and communicative reach of Chinese culture, and thereby steadily consolidate and demonstrate the cultural autonomy of Chinese culture in the digital age.

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