



# Ethical Anxiety of Chinese College Literature Students Toward Artificial Intelligence Poetry Writing: A Qualitative Study Based on Questionnaires and In-depth Interviews

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## Abstract

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has brought new possibilities for poetry creation, but it has also triggered ethical controversies over the dissolution of literary subjectivity and the survival of humanistic values. Based on the theory of techno-social construction, this study adopts a qualitative research method to systematically explore the technological acceptance and ethical anxiety of AI poetry creation among students of literature departments in Chinese colleges and universities through questionnaire surveys (with 212 valid samples) and in-depth interviews (with two interviewees). The study finds that the student body generally recognizes the instrumental value of AI in terms of formal standardization and creative efficiency, but senior students, due to the deepening of their academic training, emphasize the irreplaceability of humanistic kernels such as literary "mood" and "flavor", and criticize the homogenization and affective mechanization of AI creation. The study further reveals that students' resistance to technological alienation through strategies such as "embedding private memories" and "artificial coloring" reflects the "author-centrism" and "poetic expression" in literary education. In addition, the fragmentation of social media communication has intensified the anxiety about the loss of literary depth, while the limitations of AI in decoding cultural metaphors highlight the rupture between technological logic and humanistic experience. This study provides implications for the dilemma of the survival of humanistic values in the technological era, calling on literary education to critically embrace technological tools while strengthening the centrality of individual life experience in creation, in order to guard the kernel of literature's humanistic spirit.

## Keywords

Artificial Intelligence Poetry Writing; Ethical Anxiety; Techno-Social Construction Theory; Literary Subjectivity; College Literature Students

## Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology is reshaping the field of artistic creation with unprecedented intensity. In the creation of poetry, AI is not only capable of imitating classic literary styles and generating texts rich in imagery, but also forming unique "creative styles" through deep learning, which provides new tools

and perspectives for literary innovation. However, the intervention of technology has also triggered profound ethical controversies. When machine-generated poetry approaches or even surpasses human creativity in form, the subjectivity of literary creation, the value of originality, and the humanistic core of art face dissolution. This controversy is particularly prominent in the field of literature as an art. As the core group of future literary creation and criticism, literature students in colleges and universities are at the intersection of traditional humanistic education and technological innovation, and their ethical perceptions of and anxiety about AI poetry creation are not only related to the identity of individual creativity, but also reflect the dilemma of the survival of humanistic values in the technological era. Based on this, the study systematically explores the ethical anxiety of Chinese college literature students towards AI poetry creation and its multidimensional causes through questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews under the conditions of the theory of technological social construction, with a qualitative research method as the core.

## **1. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations**

### **1.1 Definition and Development of Artificial Intelligence**

The definition of artificial intelligence has gone through different stages of evolution. In 1950, Turing posed the question "Can a machine think?" and set operational standards for intelligent behavior through the Turing Test. According to Turing's definition, a machine can be considered intelligent if it is able to have a conversation in which a human cannot tell whether it is a machine or not. This concept laid the initial groundwork for the study of artificial intelligence, a term first coined by John McCarthy at the Dartmouth Conference in 1956, and defined as "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines," emphasizing the simulation of human cognitive functions such as learning and reasoning. It emphasizes the simulation of human cognitive functions such as learning and reasoning.

In modern times, Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig (2020) have classified AI more carefully, dividing its goals into four main categories: human-like thinking, rational thinking, human-like behavior, and rational behavior. These goals point to the simulation of human thought processes, reasoning, and decision-making abilities, behavioral performance, and the ability to make rational decisions in different contexts, respectively (Russell, 2019). These definitions help to further clarify the research direction of AI and provide a theoretical framework for its application in various fields.

Artificial intelligence has gone through a journey from early germination to rapid development. Between the 1950s and the mid-1990s, the underlying technology of AI was still in the initial stages of exploration. Key events during this period included the computer-programmed creation of the musical work, the Iliac Suite, by Légeron Hiller and Leonard Isaacson, and the development of the conversational robot "Elisa" by Joseph Weizenbaum. Despite the nascent technology, breakthroughs have not been possible due to limitations in arithmetic power and commercial applications.

With the continuous accumulation of technology, AI entered a precipitous accumulation phase from the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s. At this time, breakthroughs in deep learning and the enhancement of computing devices such as GPUs/TPUs laid the foundation for the development of AI. In 2006, deep learning algorithms made key advances and drove the realization of applications such as AI-created novels and automated simultaneous interpretation in the following years. However, the quality of generated content in this period is still insufficient, and with limited application scenarios, it still faces many challenges.

Into the mid-2010s, artificial intelligence rapidly entered the development stage, with technological breakthroughs in generative adversarial networks and multimodal generation techniques. In particular, the proposal of GAN in 2014 opened up a new era of AI, pushing the diversity and realism of generated content (Goodfellow et al., 2020). With the development of the DALL-E series launched by OpenAI and NVIDIA StyleGAN, the application of AI has expanded from text and images to many fields such as art, film, television, design, etc., and the quality of the generated content has significantly improved, to the extent that even humans have difficulty in distinguishing between truth and falsehood. However, as technology advances, issues such as ethics and copyright gradually become new challenges (Zhao, 2025).

### **1.2 Social Construction Theory of Technology**

The social construction theory of technology is one of the core theories in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), which asserts that technology is not a product of "neutral" or "autonomous development," but is shaped by social groups through negotiation and power relations. It is argued that technology is not a product of "neutral" or

"autonomous development", but is shaped by social groups through negotiation, conflict, and power relations. The theory emphasizes the two-way interaction between technology and society: technology influences the structure of society, and society reacts to technological development through culture, institutions, and values (Jasanoff et al. (Eds.), 2001).

The social construction theory of technology provides us with a framework for understanding the interaction between technology and society, emphasizing in particular that technology does not have a fixed function and meaning from the outset, but is shaped and empowered through the interaction and negotiation process of different social groups. The core idea is that the meaning of technology is gradually determined through continuous interaction and "interpretive flexibility" among social groups, which provides a valuable theoretical perspective for us to analyze the ethical controversy of AI poetry creation.

The development of technology is not linear and passive, but dynamic and has multiple possibilities. Specifically, technology developers, literary scholars, student groups, and policy makers have engaged in different interpretations and negotiations around the creation of AI poetry, and the process of techno-social construction it presents highlights the profound roles of social, cultural, and economic forces in the relationship between technological forms and social practices. Within this framework, the creative ability of AI technology has been continuously shaped in the power games and cultural conflicts between different groups. Literature scholars usually focus on and discuss the potential impact of AI creation on literary value and creative subjectivity from the perspective of cultural inheritance and the "humanism" of literature and art. Especially in terms of creative autonomy and originality, scholars in the field of literature often discuss the ethical dilemmas and concerns raised by AI technology in the technical aspects of literary texts, which is of great practical value.

As the main body of technology use, the student group of literature department in colleges and universities plays a dual role of reflective and practical in this tension: on the one hand, the student group is open to AI tools in the context of technological development and is willing to accept the creative convenience and innovative potential brought by them; on the other hand, when they face the influence of the traditional values of literary education, there is also a desire to maintain the autonomy of creativity, expression of emotions, etc., thus presenting a self-balancing behavioral pattern in the use of technology. literary tradition, thus presenting a self-balancing behavioral pattern in the use of technology.

The meaning and function of technology are not single, but are gradually given specific social, cultural, and ethical meanings within the definitional framework of each group through the value collision and cultural game between groups. Therefore, this study examines the interaction between technology and culture through the lens of technology social construction theory, focuses on the attitudinal changes and action patterns of student groups in order to better understand the process and dynamics of technology social construction, and provides new perspectives and theoretical frameworks for ethical reflections on technology under the diversification of cultural contexts.

### 1.3 Literary Subjectivity and Creative Theory

Literary subjectivism and creationism, as core categories of literary theory, form a complementary dialogue with the theory of techno-social construction, providing an anchor point for humanist critique and building an interdisciplinary foundation for analyzing ethical controversies in the creation of AI poetry.

Traditional literary theory, especially autocratism since Romanticism, holds that the author is the sole authoritative source of meaning in a text, and that creativity is the unique expression of an individual's emotions and inspirations.

This notion is deeply rooted in literary education and contrasts with the "depersonalization" of poetry generated by artificial intelligence, which intensifies students' anxiety about the "uniqueness of human creativity". Post-structuralist deconstruction theory, especially Roland Barthes' "death of the author", dissolves the absolute authority of the author and believes that the meaning of the text is constructed by the reader's participation. In this perspective, AI poetry can be regarded as "authorless text", but the algorithmic logic behind it implicitly reinforces the authority of the "technical author", triggering a new round of debate about "who controls meaning? This has led to a new round of debates about "who controls meaning". In the face of this conflict, students have gradually adopted the strategy of "instrumental use", trying to draw a boundary between "algorithmic intervention" and "subjective control" by adjusting the prompts, filtering the generated results, and manually embellishing the results at a later stage (Li, 2025). By adjusting the cue words and filtering the generated results and post-processing the human touch-ups, they try to draw

a boundary between "algorithmic intervention" and "subjective control" in an attempt to reconstruct the creative ethics of "human-machine symbiosis".

In the traditional dimension of Chinese literary theory, the viewpoints of "poetry speaks to the will" and "literature speaks to the way of the world" regard literature as a vehicle for transmitting the humanistic spirit and social ethics, and emphasize that literary creation is the expression of the subject's emotions and social values (Luo, 2025).

The "subjectless creation" of AI poetry is often seen as an impact on this traditional core, especially in the teaching of classical poetry, where the AI's precise imitation of flat and oblique meter contrasts with the mechanization of emotional expression. In addition, traditional Chinese literary concepts such as "realm theory" and "rhyme" emphasize the ineffable beauty of a text, while AI-generated poetry relies on quantifiable linguistic features, leading to a disconnect between technological logic and aesthetic experience. Peng Minquan (2025) With the development of technology, developers have been able to define the "success" of AI poetry through quantitative metrics such as "user satisfaction scores" and "dissemination data monitoring," simplifying the literary value into a "performance parameter" that can be calculated by the technology. This reduces the value of literature to a computable performance parameter of the technology. However, in the process of using AI technology, the student community has also gradually developed resistance strategies to defend the dignity of literature as "the writing of individual life experiences" by embedding "non-algorithmic private memories" in the generated texts (Wang, Huang, & Li, 2024; Nie, 2025).

Therefore, based on the above discussion, we constructed the interdisciplinary foundation of this paper.

## 2. Research Questions

We carried out the initial preparation for the study by analyzing the social constructivist theory of technology and related literary theories as the interdisciplinary foundation of this study, and accordingly proposed an agenda of relevant research questions. Based on the conflict between technology acceptance and subjectivity, AI tool dependence, and the crisis of creative autonomy, the following main research questions are proposed.

- (1) How do college literature students balance between technical instrumental rationality and humanistic value rationality? How is the generative mechanism of their ethical anxiety manifested?
- (2) How does the use of AI-assisted creativity provoke ethical reflection on students' declining originality? Does technological dependence threaten individual creative identities?

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1 Research Objectives

The participants in this questionnaire survey and test were students enrolled in literature departments of general higher education institutions. In order to ensure sufficient representativeness in the sampling of survey respondents, we selected one 985 university, one 211 university, and one general undergraduate university for data sampling, respectively, showing a balanced consideration among schools of different levels. About 70 students were selected from each school to participate in the survey, totaling more than 210. In terms of the level of study, this questionnaire was distributed to students in the first to fourth years of undergraduate studies and postgraduate studies, respectively, covering all stages of the study process in colleges and universities, taking into account the foundation of specialized knowledge and learning ability.

At the end of the questionnaire data collection, return interviews were conducted based on the data sources and questionnaire responses so as to identify the interviewees. A total of 17 students agreed to accept the interview invitation during the callback process. After screening the study background of those who agreed to participate in the group of return interviews, two interviewees were finally selected.

Interviewee A: A current graduate student of a 211 university, majoring in Chinese language and literature

Interviewee B: A current student of a general undergraduate college majoring in Chinese language and literature

### 3.2 Research Tools

This paper adopts the method of questionnaire survey combined with in-depth interviews to carry out the research, and the research instrument is a questionnaire, which is distributed in the form of questionnaire star. In order to ensure the quality and credibility of the questionnaire, two professors reviewed the questionnaire before it was distributed,

providing guidance and making improvements and modifications. The questionnaire consisted of 42 questions, of which 40 had an impact on the study. The main questions were related to personal information about demographics, study background, perception of AI poetry, and attitude towards AI poetry.

### 3.3 Data Collection

A total of 228 questionnaires were distributed in the study, which took ten days to complete, and finally 212 valid questionnaires were returned. After collecting the questionnaires, the collected data were visualized and statistically analyzed with the resultant causes.

## 4. Content and Findings of the Study

The survey covers a variety of aspects, such as students' basic information, their exposure to AI poetry, their level of concern, and their views on AI creation. By analyzing these data, it is possible to reveal the students' perception and acceptance of AI in their literary creation, and explore the potential impact and value of AI in poetry creation.

Positive correlation between academic depth and the ability to critique AI technology. The results of the questionnaire show that 75% of students in the fourth year of undergraduate and graduate training are concerned about the homogenization of AI poetry creation. This reflects that, due to the deepening of academic training and the accumulation of professional knowledge, the irreplaceability of the humanities more. Interviewed student A pointed out, "AI writes poems like assembly line production, delicate but without temperature, I think it lacks kernel compared to poems created by human beings." In contrast, the shallow perception of formal norms by students in lower grades could easily lead to technological dependence.

The acceptance of AI creation technology has a duality, which is reflected in tool empowerment and subjectivity creation. the coexistence of AI creation, efficiency recognition, and humanistic anxiety. The questionnaire data shows that the respondents generally recognize the formal standardization of AI tools, of which 70.97% of students recognize the rhyme and rhythm of AI-generated poems. However, this technological empowerment contrasts with the anxiety about the loss of "soul". Among the opinions on the influence of AI on poetry creation, 54.84% agreed and strongly agreed. Among the students in the fourth year of undergraduate and graduate training, the proportion of those who agreed and strongly agreed reached 87.5%. This indicates that literature students generally express concern that AI may weaken the soul of poetry creation.

Among the interviewed groups, 75% of the students majoring in Chinese language and literature think that classical poetry training makes them pay more attention to formal norms, but denies their emotional expression, forming a binary cognition of "technique can be copied, but mood cannot be replaced". However, under the influence of cross-cultural perspectives, students of foreign languages and literature are more tolerant of AI imagery innovation, but critical of algorithm-dominated literary evaluation, reflecting the tension between "technological optimism and humanistic conservatism". The theory of social construction of technology reveals that students' acceptance of AI is subject to social and cultural negotiation. On the one hand, 65.51% of the surveyed students believe that the ease of use of tools promotes technological dependence; on the other hand, the "author-centeredness" deeply rooted in literary education strengthens the resistance to the cession of subjectivity.

The reliance on AI tools visualizes originality anxiety. The questionnaire data reveal that 65.51% of students worry that the use of AI will reduce originality. In the interview, Respondent B said, "AI can instantly generate combinations of imagery, so my hard thinking becomes redundant." Some interviewees believe that they should resist technological alienation by "embedding private memories," such as Interviewee A, who emphasized, "AI is a dictionary in life, but the story must still be told by oneself." In the topic selection of AI imitation of Chinese ancient poems, students' misjudgment rate of imitation of Chinese ancient poems such as "Gan Cao Zi - Thinking of Autumn Water" was as high as 51.61%. This exposes AI's limitations in decoding cultural metaphors. In the interview, Interviewee A criticized AI's "cultural collage" behavior: "It piles up symbols such as 'broken geese' and 'green stone' but strips away the underlying scholarly sentiment behind it." This creative mode of "imitation of form and emptiness of meaning" is viewed as a deconstruction of the tradition of "poetry speaking of the will".

Social media communication has an accelerating effect on the perception of AI-created poetry. 68.25% of the students were exposed to AI poetry through social media, but its fragmentation reinforces the perception of "fast food". Respondent B describes, "AI poetry is like a short video, instantly stunning and then forgotten." This mode of dissemination exacerbates students' anxiety about the loss of literary depth, especially among graduate students, who worry that classicism is being replaced by algorithmic traffic.

## 5. Conclusion

Through qualitative research methods, this study reveals the complex tension between technological acceptance and ethical anxiety of AI poetry creation among literature students in Chinese universities. It is found that the student body presents significant ambivalence in the collision between technological instrumental rationality and humanistic value rationality: on the one hand, it recognizes the formal normativity and efficiency empowerment of AI technology, while on the other hand, it shows deep concern that the technology may dissolve the subjectivity, originality, and humanistic spiritual core of literature.

Specifically, due to the deepening of academic training and the accumulation of professional knowledge, senior students are more inclined to criticize the homogenization of AI poetry and the mechanization of emotional expression, and emphasize the non-algorithmic aesthetic values of literary creation, such as "mood" and "rhythm". In contrast, students in the lower grades have a higher degree of reliance on technological tools, but lack sufficient reflection on the degradation of originality and the creative identity crisis that may be caused by technological intervention. In addition, the deep-rooted tradition of "author-centrism" and "poetic expression" in literary education reinforces students' resistance strategies to technological alienation, such as "embedding private memories" and "artificial coloring". "artificial coloring" and other ways to reconstruct the ethic of human-computer symbiosis.

From the perspective of techno-social construction theory, the ethical controversy of AI poetry is essentially a process of cultural negotiation among multiple social groups around the meaning of technology. As users of technology and defenders of humanistic values, the attitudes and behavioral patterns of literature students reflect the dynamic game of technology and society, instrumental rationality, and humanism. The study also points out that the fragmentation of social media has intensified students' anxiety about the loss of literary depth, while the limitations of AI in decoding cultural metaphors further expose the rupture between technological logic and humanistic experience.

The limitation of this study is that the sample is focused on a specific college type and major direction, which could be expanded to a more diverse student population and cross-cultural comparisons in the future. In addition, the rapid iteration of AI technology may change the current findings, and the long-term impact of technological development on students' ethical perceptions needs to be continuously tracked. Overall, this study provides an empirical basis for understanding the dilemma of the survival of humanistic values in the age of technology, and also suggests a direction for reflection on how to balance technological innovation and traditional humanism in literary education - not only guiding students to critically accept technological tools, but also reinforcing the irreplaceable nature of the individual life experience in literary creation, so that they can be more effective in the "human-machine symbiosis". In this way, the humanistic core of literature can be protected in the context of "human-machine symbiosis".

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