

Algorithmic Anxiety and Subject Reshaping: Paradigm Shift of Visual Communication Design Education from the Perspective of AIGC

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This paper aims to explore the ontological crisis and ethical dilemmas faced by visual communication design education in the context of the explosive growth of generative artificial intelligence (AIGC) technology, and to seek an empirical path for the transformation of educational paradigms. **Method:** The article employs the theories of "general organology" and "high consciousness learning" from the field of technology philosophy, combined with a systems thinking perspective, to conduct a critical examination of the deprivation of design skills, the loss of subjectivity, and the ethical risks in education caused by AIGC. At the same time, it conducts a comparative empirical analysis based on the course practice of "Digital Narrative Design of Liao Dynasty Chicken Crown Vessels". **Result:** The research finds that AIGC not only brings about an exponential increase in the efficiency of image production, but also triggers deep-seated "algorithm anxiety" and "knowledge proletarianization". The traditional teaching model centered on "technique training" has become ineffective. Empirical data shows that after the introduction of the AIGC workflow, the breadth of creative divergence has increased by approximately 300%, while students' frustration with detail control has also significantly increased. The identity of designers is undergoing an ontological shift from "creators" to "curators" and "algorithm collaborators". **Conclusion:** Visual communication design education must undergo a paradigm revolution from a "skill-based" approach to "high consciousness generative learning". By establishing a new curriculum system that includes prompt engineering, LoRA model training, systems thinking training, and ethical review, the educational value of "technological humanism" can be established to reshape the dignity and responsibility of design subjects in the intelligent era.

Keywords: AIGC, Visual communication design, Algorithmic anxiety, High-intelligence generative learning, Liao Dynasty culture, Educational paradigm.

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of human design is a dialectical history marked by the interplay between tool evolution and subject adaptation. From the darkroom experiments and mechanical reproduction during the Bauhaus era to the digital revolution triggered by the emergence of desktop publishing systems (DTP) in the 1990s, tools have always existed as "extensions of human beings" to assist designers in visualizing and expressing their ideas. In his book "A History of Modern Design in the World", Wang Shouzhi has provided an exhaustive analysis of the role of technology in

driving design since the Industrial Revolution. However, the transformations he describes mostly remain at the level of "assistive execution", with tools themselves still being passively utilized and not touching upon the core generative mechanism of creativity [1]. However, by 2026, the technological innovation in generative artificial intelligence (AIGC), represented by Midjourney V7, Stable Diffusion XL, and Sora, had undergone exponential iteration. This marked the full outbreak of the "technological singularity" in the design field. This new round of technological transformation will completely break the previous design paradigm - tools are no longer merely objects that execute instructions and passive instruments, but have

evolved into dual identities of "content generators" and "aesthetic decision-makers" with quasi-subjectivity. AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content), as a brand-new content production tool following PGC and UGC, is profoundly reshaping the production and interaction relationship of digital content. According to the latest technical report released by OpenAI, the new generation of AI models has approached or even surpassed the level of human experts in logical reasoning, image generation, and multimodal processing capabilities [2]. Meanwhile, this technological leap in generative AI has also triggered drastic changes in the field of education. Liu San'nvya proposed that AIGC has ushered in a new paradigm of digital transformation in education, innovating multimodal learning experiences while also posing new challenges regarding the essence of education, the prospects of human-machine collaboration, and educational ethics [3]. In its 2024 Strategic Technology Trends report, Gartner also predicts that generative AI will become the most disruptive technological force in the coming years, fundamentally affecting skill requirements across various industries [4].

In the field of visual communication design education, this challenge manifests as a collective "algorithmic anxiety". When designers only need to input a natural language description (Prompt), and algorithms can generate visually perfect images with realistic lighting and even unique styles at a millisecond speed, the modeling skills, color acuity, and software operation techniques that require years of training in traditional design education are suddenly facing a reassessment of their value. Professor Peng Lan astutely pointed out that AIGC has endowed ordinary people with the ability to engage in artistic creation, making "artistic survival" possible. However, this also implies that the unique qualities of professional creators may be continuously eroded in the process of everyday generation [5]. The disappearance of this "hand" not only signifies a rapid increase in production efficiency, but also fundamentally shakes the foundation of the designer profession. If images can be generated through automatic computation, then what is the legitimacy of the existence of humans as "visual creators"?

This article attempts to move beyond a mere discussion of technological application, integrating Stiegler's philosophical views on technology with Professor Zhu Zhiteng's theory of "high-consciousness generative learning". It also introduces an empirical teaching case of "visual

reconstruction of Liao Dynasty history and culture" to analyze the deep logic and transformation path of visual communication design education from the perspective of AIGC.

2. TECHNOLOGICAL SINGULARITY AND ONTOLOGICAL CRISIS: PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS OF ALGORITHMIC ANXIETY

With the introduction of AIGC technology, the production process of visual communication design has undergone a disruptive change. This change is first reflected in the psychological schema of the design subject, namely the spread of "algorithmic anxiety". This is not simply a job panic brought about by technological innovation, but a real existential crisis. To address this issue, it is necessary to first clarify its causes from a philosophical perspective.

2.1 "Proletarianization of Knowledge" from the Perspective of Stiegler

In his book "Technics and Time," the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler introduced the concept of "General Organology," positing that technology is the exosomatization of human organs [6]. Humans can externalize their memories and abilities onto inorganic objects through the invention of tools (technology). However, this process is a double-edged sword: while it expands human capabilities, it also leads to the gradual degradation of human intrinsic abilities. Stiegler further posits that when a certain skill is solidified by machines, humans lose their inherent memory of that skill, leading to the "proletarianization" of knowledge [6].

In the era of traditional craftsmanship, artisans possessed "savoir-faire", a knowledge that was internalized through repeated physical practice (craftsmanship). After the Industrial Revolution, machines standardized the actions of craftsmen, who lost their skills and became mere operators of machines. The emergence of AIGC marks the ultimate stage of "proletarianization" at the cognitive level.

In visual communication design education, students are originally required to acquire visual rules through extensive training in sketching, color composition, and font design, which constitute the "know-how" of designers. However, AIGC's large

models utilize deep learning to parameterize and model all the visual experiences accumulated throughout human history. Zhao Yi's research pointed out that under the impact of AIGC, the simple skill advantages that students rely on in traditional teaching are no longer prominent, and designs lacking innovative thinking are difficult to stand out in the industry [7]. When students discover that the images generated by Midjourney far surpass their own hand-drawn skills in terms of lighting logic and perspective accuracy, they will naturally give up honing their "craftsmanship". This "deskilling" not only vacates the traditional foundation of design education, but also leads to a fundamental loss of design subjectivity.

2.2 *Ambiguity of Teacher-Student Subject Boundaries and the Dissolution of Authority*

Algorithmic anxiety not only exists among students, but also pervades teachers. In traditional teaching processes, teachers serve as the authoritative source of knowledge and the core conduit for imparting skills. However, the widespread adoption of AIGC tools has disrupted this information asymmetry. In his research on packaging design teaching, Zhao Yi found that AIGC can assist students in acquiring material inspiration, creative sketches, and even finished product renderings more rapidly. This significantly challenges the authoritative knowledge position of teachers in teaching, thereby triggering an identity crisis [7].

When students can obtain more perfect and diverse solutions through AI tools than those demonstrated by teachers, the foundation of classroom teaching is shaken. Teachers are no longer the sole "containers of knowledge", and students are no longer mere "receivers". The teacher-student relationship has been forced to evolve from the traditional binary structure of "teacher-student" to a three-dimensional collaborative ecosystem of "teacher-student-machine". In this new ecosystem, teachers who fail to transition from "skill instructors" to "mentors of thinking" will face a severe career crisis. Students may have such a question: Since AI can draw better than teachers, why should I still listen to my teachers? This erosion of authority compels educators to rethink: in an era where knowledge is extremely cheap and skills are easily replaceable, what exactly is the residual value of education?

2.3 *The Blurring Boundaries Between Reality and Illusion: the Paradox of Artistic Existence*

AIGC has not only transformed production methods but also reshaped visual spaces and living conditions. Professor Peng Lan pointed out that the development of AIGC will create highly fictional visual spaces and digital avatars, further blurring the boundaries between reality and illusion [5]. For visual communication design, this means that the design objects are no longer limited to physical entities or screen pixels, but have expanded to include complex virtual interactions and digital life.

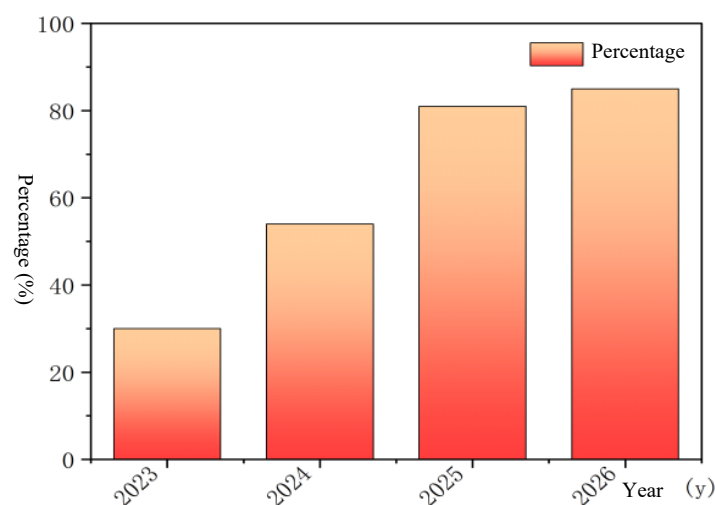


Figure 1 Confusion test between AIGC generated images and real photography (error rate of students in distinguishing "AI Generated Images" from "Real Photography").

As illustrated in the figure above, with the iteration of the model, visual authenticity is no longer the criterion for assessing design quality. AIGC empowers ordinary people with the right to engage in artistic creation, making "artistic survival" possible [5]. Anyone can become an "artist" through Prompt, which poses an ontological challenge to professional designers. When artistic creation becomes readily accessible, the unique artistic temperament of professional creators may be continuously eroded in the process of everyday production [5]. This phenomenon of "pan-artification" poses a challenge for design education in defining "professionalism": when aesthetics becomes a cheap computational resource, where exactly lies the moat for professional designers?

3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION: FROM "SKILL-BASED" TO "HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS GENERATIVE LEARNING"

Faced with the ontological crisis, mere technical repairs are no longer effective. A paradigm revolution at the epistemological level is imperative. There is a must to introduce the "Higher Consciousness Generative Learning" theory proposed by Professor Zhu Zhitin as the core framework to combat algorithmic anxiety and reshape the design subject [8].

3.1 *Awakening of High Consciousness Level: Transcending Instrumental Rationality*

Zhu Zhiting believes that in the face of the ever-advancing artificial intelligence, humans not only need to respond to challenges with a high level of consciousness, but also need to design the human world based on this high level of consciousness [8]. In the era of AIGC, artificial intelligence has surpassed humans in low-level cognitive domains such as computation, reasoning, and generation. However, humans still retain unique advantages in high-level consciousness domains such as intuition, inspiration, insight, and creative thinking. Therefore, teachers shift the focus of educational evaluation from "Result" to "Process".

Therefore, the educational model of visual communication design must undergo a transition from "skill-based" to "thinking-based". Teachers should no longer strive to cultivate "artisans" who can compete with machines in drawing speed, but

instead focus on fostering "visual philosophers" who can master algorithms, gain insight into human nature, and take responsibility for human visual culture. The high-awareness generative learning framework proposed by Zhu Zhiting encompasses five core elements, which have strong guiding significance for designing education:

- 1. Independent learning (intrinsic motivation): Teachers guide students to shift from passive knowledge reception to active exploration of problem spaces, utilizing AIGC to assist in decision-making, rather than completely replacing thinking [8]. Students should be the ones who pose questions, rather than merely serving as carriers of answers.
- 2. Self-supervised learning (guarantee): Teachers cultivate students' ability to monitor and regulate AI-generated content, and strengthen human's dominant position over technology [8]. This requires students to possess extremely high aesthetic judgment and be able to distinguish between the good and the bad among a vast number of generated results.
- 3. Innovation Consciousness (vitality): Despite the vast amount of solutions that AIGC can generate, the original inspiration and thinking from scratch still originate from human life experiences and cultural accumulation [8]. AI can only passively restructure and arrange based on past data, while humans can subjectively create based on future visions.
- 4. Thinking skills (key): These encompass critical thinking, logical thinking, and design thinking. Possessing these skills can enable individuals to utilize AI as a tool more proficiently, serving as a bridge between humans and AI.
- 5 Emotional skills (enhancer): Teachers cultivate students' empathy and endow designs with warmth, which are traits that AI cannot simulate [8].

Based on the above viewpoints, the "AIGC Collaborative Design Evaluation Matrix" (AIGC-CDE Matrix) is proposed. Its core formula and its meaning can be expressed as: $V=Pe*30\% + Lm*30\% + Cr*20\% + Es*20\%$

Among which:

- Pe (Prompt Engineering Logic): The logicity of prompt word engineering. Assess whether students have mastered the structured expression of

"subject+environment+style+parameters", rather than randomly drawing cards.

- Lm (Latent Space Management): Potential space management capability. Assess whether students understand the principles of control plugins such as LoRA and ControlNet, and whether they can accurately control the generated form.
- Cr (Critical Reconstruction): The ability to critically reconstruct. Assess students' ability to filter, combine, and modify massive generated solutions.
- Es (Ethical Sensitivity): Ethical sensitivity. Assess whether the work has passed copyright review and whether there is algorithmic bias.

The transformation of this evaluation system has forced students to shift their focus from "whether they draw like it or not" to "whether they think deeply or not".

3.2 *Design Paradigm Reconstruction from the Perspective of System Thinking*

Chen Jing's research points out that in the AI era, design places more emphasis on data-driven, intelligent collaboration, and automated creation, making the creative process more intelligent, multidimensional, and complex.[9] This requires us to introduce "system thinking" to reconstruct the design paradigm. Systems thinking emphasizes viewing design from a holistic rather than a local perspective, focusing on the dynamic relationships between various elements.

Herbert Simon defined design in "Artificial Science" as "an activity aimed at changing the status quo to achieve the desired state".[10] In the traditional model, the focus of education is on "How to do", which is the implementation of solutions. In the era of AI, the cost of execution is approaching zero, and the path to "reaching the expected state" has been extremely compressed by algorithms. Therefore, the focus of design education based on systems thinking must shift to "how to conceive expected states", that is, the ability of "Problem Definition". In the perspective of AIGC, design is no longer a single visual form creation, but a collaborative evolution of the "human machine environment" system.

- Refactoring the Design Process: The traditional design process is a linear structure of "research-sketch-deepening-final draft"; After the intervention of AIGC, the process transformed into a nonlinear

cyclic structure of "defining problems prompt word engineering algorithm generation iterative screening system integration" [9]. Students need to constantly adjust parameters and engage in dialogue with algorithms in this loop.

- Diversification of Main Roles: The role of designers has shifted from a singular "creator" identity to that of an "evaluator", "guide", and "decision-maker".[9] In design education, it is necessary to focus on cultivating students' ability to call multiple AI tools to solve problems in complex systems, rather than being limited to the operation of a single software.

3.3 *Enhancing Core Competencies: Construction of Prompt Word Engineering, Algorithmic Aesthetics, and Critical Thinking*

At the specific operational level of epistemological transformation, there is a must to first define core competencies, which are manifested in three aspects

- Prompt Engineering: Prompt words are not just simple stacking of English vocabulary, but a combination of logical thinking and visual semantics. In the process of using AI, students need to learn how to use precise natural language to describe abstract visual concepts, so as to master the structured expression of "subject+environment+style+parameters". This is a new form of "sketching" that captures and condenses thoughts in real-time using language, breaking them down into four aspects.
- Algorithmic Aesthetics: By understanding the generation logic behind GAN, Diffusion, and other models, we can comprehend the operational mechanism of Latent Space and achieve the expression of creative diversity. Cai Zifan proposed that the technological evolution of AIGC (from GAN to Diffusion) determines the characteristics and limitations of its generated content [11]. Designers need to understand these technical characteristics during the design process in order to avoid the homogenization trap of algorithms and create works with unique aesthetic value after careful consideration.
- Critical Thinking: Zhu Zhiting emphasized that thinking skills are the key to high consciousness generative learning. When faced with hundreds of solutions generated

by AI, the core competency of designers has shifted from "making" to "choosing" and "criticizing". This choice is not based on personal preferences, but on a deep understanding of the project background, cultural context, and audience psychology, in order to achieve the design goal of targeting the public.

4. EMPIRICAL STUDY: TEACHING EXPERIMENT BASED ON DIGITAL NARRATION OF "LIAO DYNASTY CHICKEN-CROWNED KETTLE"

To verify the effectiveness of the aforementioned theoretical framework, this study conducted an 8-week teaching experiment within the "Comprehensive Design of Visual Communication" course. The experimental topic is "Historical reconstruction and digital narration of

the Liao Dynasty's chicken-crowned kettle". This project requires students to reconstruct the life scenarios and the process of porcelain making of the porcelain craftsmen in the Liao Dynasty based on authentic historical documents, and to create a concept video to showcase their learning.

4.1 Experimental Design and LoRA Model Training

This experiment selected the representative object "Chicken-crowned Kettle" from the Liao Dynasty as the research object. In traditional teaching, restoring such objects requires students to do a lot of hand drawing and high cost 3D modeling. In this experiment, the researchers used LoRA (Low Rank Adaptation) fine-tuning technique.

Table 1. Comparison between LoRA model training set and generated results

| Historical data map of the Liao Dynasty chicken-crowned kettle (Training set) | | Generate results | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

Firstly, students were guided to collect and organize approximately 50 high-definition images of Liao Dynasty ceramics, and the images were labeled with key features such as "white glaze", "skin bag style", and "Khitan patterns". Subsequently, a LoRA model titled "Liao Pot Style" was trained using locally deployed Stable Diffusion.

When calling the model, students found that even with simple prompt words, the generated

images could accurately restore the antique texture unique to Liao Dynasty ceramics. At the same time, the stitching details of the leather bag pot were still accurately processed, which required at least two weeks of training time in traditional modeling teaching. Now, by training the LoRA model, the production time can be shortened to less than 2 hours.

4.2 AI Generation and Identity Construction of Narrative Characters

In the narrative design stage, students constructed three core characters and narrated



Figure 2 Process of Character Design and Construction (Father Yelv Tou).

In this stage, students deeply experienced the importance of the "prompt word project". For example, in order to portray Yelv Tou's characteristics of being "50 years old, with a frosty face and a determined gaze," students went through an average of 15 rounds of prompt word iterations before identifying characters that fit the historical context from the numerous faces generated by AI. This process is not simply "generation", but a

around them: father Yelv Tuo (a traditional Khitan potter), son Yelv An (an innovator who integrates new skills), and a Han Chinese porcelain craftsman from Dingzhou. ("Figure 2")

higher intensity integration of "visual identification" and "historical research".

4.3 The Dual Variation of Efficiency and Innovation

After the course ended, a comparison was made between a questionnaire survey and quantitative analysis of the works of the 30 students who participated in the experiment.

Table 2. Comparison of teaching effectiveness between traditional mode and AIGC collaborative mode

| Dimension | Traditional teaching mode (2024) | AIGC collaborative mode (2025) | Variation range |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Average output of the plan (units) | [3.5.] | [68.0.] | +1842% |
| Time consumption of a single solution (hours) | [4.2.] | [0.15.] | -96% |
| Accuracy of historical research (1-10 points) | [6.8.] | [8.5.] | +25% |
| Degree of creative divergence (1-10 points) | [7.2.] | [9.1.] | +26.3% |
| Satisfaction with detail controllability (1-10 points) | [8.0.] | [5.5.] | -31.2% |

Data Analysis: From the results of the "Table 2", it can be seen that the intervention of AIGC has led to an exponential increase in the output of the plan, greatly expanding the boundaries of students' creative divergence (from 1 to N). The use of custom trained LoRA models has significantly improved the visual accuracy derived from historical research. However, it is worth noting that students' satisfaction with "detail controllability" has also significantly decreased. This indicates that although AI can generate stunning images, the current "gacha" interaction still makes students feel unable to fully control and frustrated when it comes to modifying small details such as "finger posture" and "object specific patterns".

The above experimental results strongly support the viewpoint that the focus of future design education should shift from "how to draw" to "how

to control", and how to solve the technical challenge of precise control of content generation paths (such as ControlNet, Inpainting, etc.).

5. THE BOUNDARY OF VALUE THEORY: INSTITUTIONALIZED NORMS OF DESIGN ETHICS

Heidegger warned in "The Inquiry into Technology": "Where the power of redemption grows, danger grow." [12] While empowering design, AIGC also brings enormous ethical risks, as Liu Sannuya pointed out, AIGC faces new risks including educational ethics, algorithm bias, and data security issues.[3] Design education should not only be about imparting skills, but also about shaping values.

5.1 The Definition of Originality and Copyright Ethics

The underlying logic generated by AIGC is based on randomized probability collage and generation of massive data, which makes the term "originality" begin to blur at the legal and ethical levels. Cai Zifan believes that there is still controversy over whether text data mining violates the "right to copy".[11] In education, it is necessary to clarify the boundaries of AIGC usage to ensure the rigor of education:

- **Reflection on Data Prejudice:** Does the unauthorized use of public works by human artists for training by AI models constitute "data plundering" ethically? Students need to be aware of this controversy before using the tool and maintain clarity and respect for the rights of the original creator during the use of the tool.
- **Standardization of Use:** Before use, the reference parts of AI generated materials should be clearly marked in commercial projects and assignments, and students should be guided to establish a sense of "not only usable, but also useful", and it is strictly prohibited to directly use AI to "clean up" or plagiarize styles. Educators should also establish strict guidelines for academic integrity in AIGC assisted design, requiring students to indicate the proportion and stages of AI participation when submitting their works, in order to achieve the goal of standardizing the use of artificial intelligence.

5.2 Algorithmic Bias

Facing the Risk of Aesthetic Homogenization: Algorithms tend to generate images that conform to the "average value" in statistics, which leads to a tendency towards mediocrity and homogenization in image generation. Peng Lan is concerned that AIGC may lead to the extinction of its unique artistic temperament. Over time, the diversity of human visual culture will be smoothed out by algorithms, and the world will be filled with a "smooth, frictionless, algorithm optimized" generative artificial intelligence aesthetic.

Educational Intervention: Designing education should become a battlefield for "anti-algorithmic bias". By encouraging students to use unique cue and negation strategies to induce AI to generate images with local cultural characteristics, such as the perspective of marginalized groups or anti-

mainstream aesthetics, it can counter the algorithm's tendency towards "visual colonization" and "average face".

In addition, algorithms and models are not purely neutral. They not only inherit universal models and data, but also faithfully inherit social biases in training data. For example, if there are gender, race, or cultural stereotypes in the training data, the images generated by AIGC will inevitably amplify these biases. In the design project of the "Liao Dynasty Chicken Crown Pot", the images of Khitan characters generated using general models (such as Midjourney V6) in the early stages often had obvious Western facial features and Middle Eastern facial features, or had rigid "Orientalist" aesthetic phenomena (such as squinting eyes). To address this phenomenon, students can be guided to train in "anti-bias prompt words". Students need to actively add negative prompts to generative text prompts during the design process, and use positive prompts to enhance localized facial feature descriptions. Through this process of practice, students have gained a profound understanding that designers are not only creators of beauty, but also correctors of algorithmic biases and defenders of cultural diversity.

5.3 Emotional Skills and Technological Humanism

Zhu Zhiting emphasized that emotional skills are an enhancer of high consciousness generative learning and an irreplaceable advantage of humans in human-machine collaboration. AI lacks emotions and cannot understand the problems that humans solve using high-level consciousness and emotional perception. In future design, how to convey empathy, care, and warmth through visual language is the core competitiveness that distinguishes human designers from cold algorithms. Education should guide students to pay attention to social issues and cultivate an ethical consciousness of "designing for goodness". For example, when designing for vulnerable groups, the empathy and social responsibility of designers cannot be simulated by algorithms. It is necessary to establish an educational philosophy of 'Techno Humanism'. It acknowledges the powerful computing power of technology, but firmly believes that human emotions, ethical judgments, cultural consciousness, and the ability to define problems cannot be calculated by algorithms. In the chain of human-machine collaboration, humans should always be the goal, while technology is just a means.

6. CONCLUSION

This article comprehensively examines the philosophy of technology, systems thinking, and high consciousness learning theory, and clearly depicts the path of design education transformation from the perspective of AIGC. The essence of algorithm anxiety is the temporary loss of subjectivity in technological iteration. To overcome this dilemma, the educational paradigm must shift from "hands" to "brains", from "single skills" to "systematic thinking", and from "instrumental rationality" to "value rationality".

The arrival of the AIGC wave is not only a cruel elimination competition for visual communication design education, but also a catalyst for new beginnings. Through the empirical teaching of the "Liao Dynasty Chicken Crown Kettle", we see the enormous potential of "high consciousness generative learning": it is not about eliminating designers, but about eliminating mediocre, repetitive, and thoughtless labor.

The future design education is no longer about cultivating craftsmen who can compete with machines in drawing speed, but about cultivating "visual philosophers" and "social curators" who can master algorithms, perceive human nature, and be responsible for human visual culture. By building a collaborative ecosystem of "teacher-student-intelligence", implementing a modular and progressive curriculum system, and building a strong ethical defense, we have reason to believe that design education can preserve a poetic visual territory for humanity in the tide of the intelligent age, and achieve the reshaping and sublimation of the subject. As Professor Zhu Zhiting has said, people should face the new future bestowed upon by AIGC with a mindset of "not fearing clouds to cover our eyes, but being at the highest level".[8]

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