

## **The Intersection of Artificial Intelligence and Contemporary Aesthetics: An Exploration of Human Aesthetic Perception and Cultural Ecology**

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### **Abstract**

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly impacted creative communities such as illustration, manga, and painting, particularly driving a surge in AI-driven image generation. However, the application of AI technology has also sparked debates regarding creators' rights, aesthetic standards, and its influence on creative community culture, leading to both supportive and opposing perspectives. This study collects and analyzes information and trends from selected Asian illustration communities on platforms such as Facebook groups in Taiwan, Pixiv in Japan, and X (Twitter) to explore how AI-generated art affects creators' work processes and aesthetic values. It also examines the acceptance and controversy surrounding AI-generated art within these creative circles. The key research focuses include: (1) discussing the supportive and opposing viewpoints on AI within creative communities, (2) examining the challenges AI-generated art poses to aesthetic standards and creative expression, and (3) exploring how creators adapt to or resist AI technology. This paper aims to investigate how AI-generated technology influences the adaptation and transformation of these creative communities, its potential long-term impact, and possible approaches to achieving a balanced perspective.

*Keywords:* generative AI art, illustrators community, creator

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## **When AI Meets Aesthetics: Opportunities and Contradictions**

Since 2022, generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI) has rapidly proliferated in the field of image generation. Technologies such as Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, and DALL·E have significantly lowered the barriers to image creation, making a substantial impact on fields like illustration, manga, and commercial design. AI not only learns and mimics human creators' styles but is also capable of producing near-professional visual outcomes in an extremely short amount of time. These technological breakthroughs have opened up new possibilities for artistic creation, bringing about an unprecedented transformation for practices traditionally rooted in hand-drawing and visual training.

However, this rapid technological advancement has also sparked considerable controversy. The training data for AI-generated works often include vast amounts of content from creators without authorization, leading to strong backlash from original artists over issues of “plagiarism” and “infringement.” Moreover, the competitive edge AI provides in the market poses tangible pressure on professional illustrators. Social media has become a central arena for these debates: from Taiwan's Facebook illustration groups, to Japan's Pixiv platform, and the global stage of X (formerly Twitter), intense discussions have emerged over the acceptance of AI-generated images, labeling standards, ethical concerns, and the definition of authorship.

This study focuses on a central question: As AI becomes deeply integrated into the realm of image creation, how are Asian illustration communities responding to this technological shift, and how are they redefining their creative identity in cultural and aesthetic terms?

## **Responses and Transformations Within Illustration Communities**

### **Discussions and Shifts in Public Opinion on Social Platforms**

The rapid proliferation of AI-generated art—particularly in the field of illustration—has sparked a series of cultural frictions and value debates within Asian illustration communities. Social media platforms such as Taiwan's Facebook illustration groups, Japan's Pixiv, and the global platform X (formerly Twitter) have become crucial arenas for creative exchange, showcasing works, and ideological clashes. These spaces reveal the polarized public discourse surrounding AI technologies.

The integration of generative AI is not merely an individual technical choice—it is deeply embedded in the dynamics of online discourse and participatory cultures on these platforms. As Henry Jenkins has articulated in his concept of “Participatory Culture,” contemporary creative communities are no longer passive content recipients but are active producers, critics, and norm-setters. Within such platform ecosystems, the legitimacy and aesthetic value of AI-generated images are not determined solely by the technology itself, but are shaped through ongoing negotiation, debate, and collective interpretation among users.

On platforms such as Taiwan's Facebook and Plurk communities, as well as X, discussion threads on AI-generated works have emerged. Users are not only concerned with whether a work is labeled as AI-generated but also whether it infringes on the rights of human creators. Debates have even arisen over whether AI works should be eligible to compete or be exhibited alongside human-created works. These discursive actions reveal the platforms' role in what might be called “cultural governance.”

Some creators have adopted hybrid workflows—using AI tools to generate initial sketches, then refining them through hand-drawn techniques—and have shared these processes publicly, gaining partial recognition from audiences for their “half-human, half-AI” creative approach. Meanwhile, subcultural groups within these communities have begun to form, such as “pure hand-drawn circles” or “AI research sharing circles,” creating their own cultural filters through tagging, reposting, and recommendation behaviors. These practices help shape the direction of discourse and include protest actions, such as organized tag campaigns to boycott certain AI tools—exemplified by the global campaign on ArtStation labeled “No to AI-Generated Images.” Such actions express opposition to copyright infringement, aesthetic homogenization, and the reduced visibility of human illustrators. These are not only declarations of stance but also the ethical boundaries being established by community members through mediated action.

### **Creators’ Adaptation Strategies and Shifting Roles**

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (Generative AI) has significantly impacted illustrators’ perceptions of their roles and creative strategies. AI tools such as Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, DALL·E, and NovelAI not only have the capability to rapidly generate images but are also increasingly able to simulate stylized brushstrokes and visual vocabularies. As a result, the creative threshold—once grounded in technical mastery—has been dramatically lowered. In response to these shifts, creators on several Asian illustration platforms, such as Taiwan’s Facebook groups and Japan’s Pixiv, have demonstrated a range of attitudes:

- (1) Integrating AI as an assistive tool for creation
- (2) Strongly opposing and resisting AI-generated art
- (3) Emphasizing personal style and humanistic narratives as a form of artistic expression
- (4) Withholding comment or choosing not to respond
- (5) Fully embracing AI as the primary mode of creation

The first group of creators regards AI as a tool to enhance productivity—using it for sketch composition, conceptual references, or mass-generating materials for selection and refinement. In this strategy, AI does not replace the agency of the artist but is incorporated as part of the creative workflow, allowing creators to dedicate more energy to refining style, shaping details, and deepening narrative dimensions.

The second group approaches the rise of AI with caution or resistance, particularly in light of concerns that AI training often involves large-scale, unauthorized use of existing artists’ works. This raises feelings of “being infringed upon” and market anxiety. Some illustrators respond by articulating their creative philosophy and emphasizing the irreplaceable value in their works—qualities that AI cannot replicate.

The third and fourth groups may choose not to comment on AI at all. Instead, they focus on strengthening the output and expressive content of their work, often because they already enjoy a degree of recognition in the field.

The final group consists of creators who treat AI as a new medium for artistic production, generating a substantial volume of AI-based works.

This study is also interested in a broader question: Does the advent of AI actively prompt creators to redefine their own roles? Are they becoming more conscious of their transition

from image-makers to contextual designers, emotional communicators, or even cultural interpreters? In this process of transformation, illustration ceases to be merely about image generation—it becomes a cultural practice where aesthetics and authorship are continuously renegotiated in dialogue with technology.

## **Cultural Ecology and the Spiritual Turn: Rediscovering the “Human” Beyond Technological Limits**

### **Shifts in the Interaction Between AI and Cultural Ecology**

In Taiwan’s creative communities, the initial appearance of AI-generated illustrations was often mistaken for human-made works, sparking concerns and questions among some artists about the “authenticity of creation” and “authorship.” In response, original creators began explicitly labeling their works with phrases such as “hand-drawn” or “non-AI” to distinguish them from AI-generated content. In certain discussion threads, AI-generated images were even referred to as “cheap imitations,” revealing a deep-rooted anxiety within parts of the community regarding AI’s intrusion into creative ethics.

By contrast, Japan’s Pixiv platform has demonstrated a more nuanced approach to categorization and moderation. In October 2022, it introduced a dedicated tagging system for AI-generated works, and users were given the option to hide AI images from their feed—an attempt to balance platform openness with creators’ concerns about copyright and visibility. Nevertheless, despite these technical adjustments, there remains no consensus within the community on whether AI-generated works should be allowed to “compete fairly” with human-made creations.

These shifting currents within creative communities not only reflect the tensions between artistic ethics and technological application, but also reveal that contemporary illustration circles are undergoing a reorganization of aesthetic standards and cultural practices. As the boundaries between AI and creative authorship become increasingly blurred, communities are transforming from mere spaces of opinion exchange into testing grounds for the reconstruction of value systems and the future trajectory of cultural ecologies.

The rise of generative AI has significantly impacted how illustrators understand their roles and develop creative strategies. Once these technologies entered creative communities, they began reshaping not only production processes but also the legitimacy and position of artists within the artistic field. According to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1993) theory, every cultural field involves the contestation of symbolic capital—the style, technique, manual training, and aesthetic judgment that illustrators possess serve as cultural capital, forming the basis of their influence within the field. The advent of AI technologies has destabilized the effectiveness of this capital. As visual outcomes can now be simulated or replicated through machine computation, creators are compelled to reposition their roles and values.

Some illustrators have chosen to incorporate AI into their creative process, emphasizing their irreplaceable aesthetic judgment, post-production skills, and narrative ability. This can be understood as a strategy of “rearticulating cultural capital,” shifting the focus of creation from mere image production to creative intent and human discernment. Others emphasize their “non-AI” methods, deliberately turning their distance from technology into a symbolic advantage of style. Such resistance can be seen as a form of “boundary-making” within the field, aimed at preserving the status of handmade creation within the cultural hierarchy.

Whether they choose to adopt or reject AI, creators are engaged in a process of renegotiating their cultural position and redistributing capital within a new technological context.

### **How Technological Innovation Reshapes the Cultural Creative Environment**

The rapid penetration of AI into the realm of illustration, coupled with its technological advancement, enables users to quickly absorb and build upon the work of predecessors—an intrinsic characteristic of AI-generated content (AICG). While this accelerates the creative process, it also destabilizes the identity of the creator and exerts pressure on the rhythm of creation, aesthetic standards, and the psychological states within contemporary cultural ecologies. In *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han (2015) argues that modern society is no longer governed by external, repressive structures of power, but by an internalized, self-accelerating “violence of positivity,” where individuals are locked in perpetual competition with themselves, striving for continuous production and self-optimization.

When AI can generate hundreds of stylized illustrations within seconds and instantly satisfy market demand, human creators are inevitably drawn into a hyper-efficient field of acceleration. They begin to ask: If AI can produce “visually perfect” works, what value remains in human-made creations? This echoes Han’s diagnosis of cultural exhaustion and creative nihilism born from “excessive transparency” and “performance pressure.”

As generative AI gains mastery over image style, visual language, and even the creative process itself, the position of human creators within the image production system becomes increasingly unstable. In *AI-Aesthetics and the Anthropocentric Myth of Creativity*, Arielli and Manovich (2022) argue that AI continually challenges the boundaries of human art and creativity—concepts already difficult to define. As AI encroaches upon what was once considered uniquely human territory, it forces a reexamination of creativity itself. This disruption is not merely a market challenge; it raises a fundamental question: Why does creation exist? This shift may reflect a deeper yearning among creators for irreplaceability. Rather than compete with AI on efficiency or output, some creators are returning to the original intention of creation—as a condensation of personal life experience, and as a vessel for emotion, memory, and belief.

Michel Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, suggested that the concept of “man” only emerged in the modern era and is inherently fluid, constantly being redefined. Likewise, our understanding of creativity and aesthetics is also in continuous flux. While AI increasingly accomplishes what was once believed to be possible only through human effort—creating unease about the authenticity of human creativity—it also pushes humans to reevaluate their own definitions and values. In this context, creators emphasize the importance of personal life narratives in their work. Creation becomes a ritualistic act of dialogue with the world and the self. Here, the artwork is no longer merely a vehicle for technical display but becomes a representation of the soul’s condition.

Henry Jenkins’ theory reminds us that although AI has sparked controversy among illustration artists, the power of communities lies not merely in emotional reactions. The acceptance or rejection of AI-generated art often hinges not on the image itself, but on the cultural identity, ethical participation, and sense of belonging that it represents. Technology compels people to constantly redefine and rethink, while public discourse continues to evolve. Within this shifting landscape, some illustrators are moving toward a spiritualization

of creation—seeing artistic practice not just as the production of visual commodities but as a pathway to inner self and transcendental realms.

## **Conclusion and Future Outlook: Reconstructing the Meaning of Creation at the Edge of Technology**

### **Conclusion**

As AI capabilities grow increasingly powerful and its generated outputs become ever more realistic, we are witnessing a surprising response from creators: a renewed search for what is uniquely human and irreplaceable. This search is not only expressed through tactile techniques or personal visual styles but also manifests in the framing of creation as a spiritual practice, an emotional offering, and a transcendental dialogue. While AI expands the possibilities of image production through efficiency and mimicry, it also inadvertently opens up a fundamental reflection on why creation exists at all. Generative AI art has, perhaps unintentionally, catalyzed a shift—from creators being visual producers to becoming seekers of meaning. Their work is no longer simply about responding to markets or gaining social exposure, but about deeper internal exploration and cultural interpretation.

In the face of AI-induced hyper-efficiency and overproduction, creators confront more than just industrial competition or anxieties over stylistic imitation. They also encounter the existential fatigue described by Byung-Chul Han in *The Burnout Society*, in which creation loses its spirit and presence, becoming infinitely replaceable.

Thus, rather than rendering human creation obsolete, AI-generated art has revealed the essential, unquantifiable aspects of artistic labor: pain, belief, a sense of history, ethical choice, and the sensitivity to the “unknown” or even the “transcendental.” The future of artistic practice and cultural thought may very well emerge from these very gaps. The creative culture ahead is unlikely to revert to the pre-AI paradigm; nor can we simply categorize AI as either a “threat” or a “tool.” What truly warrants attention is how AI compels us to rethink the human-machine boundary—and how, within the language, practices, and institutions of creation, we might reassert a distinctively human aesthetic experience and spiritual depth.

In summary, AI has not ended art; rather, it has returned creation to its most fundamental questions—for humans, what does it mean to create, to be a subject, to be irreplaceable? As this dialogue continues, this paper argues that the very moment technology pushes humanity to its limits is also the moment we are called back to our human essence. The discussions unfolding among artists, illustrators, and creative communities affirm this: people will not cease to explore, and will persist in their efforts to discover new definitions and new paths forward.

### **Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study**

This study focuses on Asian illustration communities, examining the impact of generative AI on creative practices and cultural ecology. Due to limitations in research duration and data sources, most of the sample is concentrated on specific platforms between 2022 and 2024, and does not yet encompass a broader range of creator experiences and cultural contexts. Additionally, individual differences in attitudes and approaches toward AI among creators

are significant, suggesting the need for further empirical research to supplement these findings.

This study hopes to serve as a foundation for future exploration, and proposes the following directions for further research:

- (1) Investigate how spiritual aesthetics are redefined and practiced within AI-dominated creative environments.
- (2) Analyze how AI-generated works interact with creators' narratives, embodied experiences, and cultural memories—while further exploring the possibility of establishing a creative paradigm that transcends productivity-driven logic and affirms the notion of creation as existence. Such inquiry could provide a spiritual and philosophical foundation for imagining a future in which AI and human creativity coexist.

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