

Academic Integrity in the Age of Generative AI: Challenges to University Students' Academic Norms and Practices

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Abstract : Generative AI tools represented by ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini are profoundly reshaping the learning landscape of higher education. In particular, they pose comprehensive challenges to academic integrity within humanities disciplines such as Chinese Language and Literature, where writing is the core training method. Adopting a Digital Humanities research perspective, this paper reviews the current state of research on generative AI, academic integrity, and Digital Humanities education. Based on a questionnaire survey of 40 undergraduate students majoring in Chinese Language and Literature, this paper analyzes the current usage scenarios of AI tools among university students and the cognitive discrepancies regarding AI-assisted writing and academic integrity. Finally, integrating the core concepts of Digital Humanities, the paper explores pathways for reconstructing the connotation of academic integrity in the era of human-machine collaboration, providing a reference for universities to formulate academic norms in the AI era and cultivate students' digital humanities literacy.

Keywords: academic integrity; digital Humanities; generative artificial intelligence; human-machine collaboration; Language and Literature.

1. Introduction

The rapid iteration of generative artificial intelligence technology is fundamentally altering the underlying logic of knowledge production and dissemination, deeply permeating the daily learning scenarios on university campuses [1,2]. For students majoring in Chinese Language and Literature, course papers, literary reviews, book reports, and close textual analysis constitute the core forms of academic assessment. Generative AI tools can swiftly accomplish tasks such as text generation, language polishing, literature review, idea extraction, and even complete essay writing, significantly lowering the barrier to textual production.

This technological transformation presents acute practical dilemmas: When AI can substitute students in completing core writing tasks, is the traditional academic integrity system centered on "originality" still applicable? Where does the boundary lie for students' use of AI-assisted writing? How should university academic policy respond to these technological shifts? Digital Humanities, as an interdisciplinary field bridging

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digital technology and the humanities, fundamentally explores how digital technology reshapes and empowers humanistic research and education [3]. It provides a crucial theoretical lens for understanding the challenges to academic integrity in the AI era and for reconstructing the boundaries of academic ethics. Based on this context, this paper focuses on the current state of AI usage among undergraduate students in Chinese Language and Literature, investigates the profound impact of generative AI on academic integrity, and proposes corresponding reflections and recommendations from a Digital Humanities perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Humanities and the Transformation of Humanities Education

The development of Digital Humanities has always been intertwined with the transformation of humanities education. The core value of Digital Humanities lies in using digital technology to break down the traditional research and teaching boundaries of the humanities, offering new research methods and cognitive perspectives for disciplines like literature and history. In educational practice, digital technology has long been deeply integrated into the teaching of Chinese Language and Literature: databases of ancient texts, text mining tools, and corpus analysis platforms have become routine auxiliary instruments for student textual research and essay writing [3]. The application of such tools essentially liberates students from repetitive data compilation tasks, allowing them to focus on the core processes of critical thinking and interpretation. This also provides an important reference for understanding the instrumental attributes of generative AI. Furthermore, the convergence of digital technology and humanistic research methods is becoming a "global, trans-historical, and trans-media pathway for creating knowledge and meaning" [4]. These studies collectively indicate that Digital Humanities is not merely the application of technical tools but a paradigm shift in thinking, propelling humanities education from "singular textual interpretation" towards "multidimensional digital hermeneutics" and imposing new demands on students' digital literacy.

2.2 Applications and Controversies of Generative AI in Higher Education

Current academic research on the application of generative AI in higher education primarily revolves around two core dimensions: "empowerment" and "risk" [5,6]. On the positive value front, most studies acknowledge the auxiliary learning functions of generative AI: it can assist students in swiftly organizing literature contexts, expanding writing ideas, optimizing linguistic expression, and providing personalized teaching support schemes for educators to facilitate tailored instruction. Particularly for humanities students, generative AI can aid in fundamental tasks such as textual collation, corpus statistics, and multi-version text comparison, thereby enhancing research efficiency [3].

Conversely, the primary focus of research on risks lies precisely in the impact of generative AI on academic integrity. Relevant surveys indicate a year-on-year increase in the proportion of undergraduate students globally using generative AI to complete course assignments and papers [7,8]. The covert nature of AI-generated text threatens to render traditional academic oversight systems ineffective [9]. Research has

systematically analyzed the current application of GAI in university students' academic research and the challenges it poses to academic integrity, highlighting deficiencies in current governance models regarding technology misuse prevention and ethical norm construction [10]. It proposes establishing a synergistic governance framework for academic integrity underpinned by institutional safeguards, technological empowerment, and educational guidance [11]. Scholars have examined, from the perspectives of technological instrumentality and academic ecology evolution, the intrinsic mechanisms through which GAI impacts university students' academic integrity via three core pathways: "black box" algorithmic obfuscation, capacity substitution effects, and normative cognitive biases [1,12]. This analysis reveals real-world challenges such as the concealment of academic misconduct and the atrophy of original thinking capacity. Simultaneously, academia has noted that over-reliance on AI writing may lead to the deterioration of students' close reading abilities, logical reasoning skills, and capacity for original expression—the very core objectives of talent cultivation in humanities disciplines like Chinese Language and Literature [4,13].

2.3 The Predicament of the Academic Integrity System in the AI Era

The core tenets of academic integrity are originality, authenticity, and normativity in scholarly research. The traditional academic integrity oversight system has always centered on "preventing textual plagiarism." Mainstream plagiarism detection systems like CNKI and Turnitin operate on the core mechanism of textual comparison, identifying the repetition rate between a student's paper and existing literature to determine potential plagiarism.

However, the advent of generative AI fundamentally disrupts this oversight logic. AI-generated text constitutes entirely new creations based on large models, exhibiting no substantial repetition with existing literature, rendering traditional plagiarism detection tools nearly ineffective [9]. Current mainstream AI text detection tools generally suffer from insufficient accuracy and high false-positive rates, making them unreliable as a basis for adjudicating academic misconduct [14]. Scholars point out that the boundary between AI-generated content and human writing is increasingly blurred. Coupled with the complexity and covert nature of AI tool application scenarios, this leads to a sharp escalation in the complexity of governance within the educational sphere [13]. A more fundamental dilemma lies in the fact that the traditional academic integrity system's definition of "originality" is being subverted by human-machine collaborative writing models [11]. When a paper's conceptualization, framework, and language involve significant AI participation, defining the boundary between "original work" and "cheating" has become a critical issue urgently requiring resolution by academia and higher education institutions [1,15].

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a questionnaire survey method targeting undergraduate students majoring in Chinese Language and Literature at universities. A total of 42 questionnaires were distributed, with 40 valid responses collected, yielding an effective response rate of 95.2%. The respondents spanned sophomores to seniors, comprising 21 sophomores, 13 juniors, and 6 seniors, aligning with the writing-intensive learning and assessment demands of the Chinese Language and Literature undergraduate

curriculum.

The questionnaire design encompassed four core dimensions and comprised 10 questions, focusing on: (1) the usage frequency and scenarios of generative AI tools; (2) students' cognitive boundaries regarding AI-assisted writing and academic misconduct; (3) students' awareness of their university's academic integrity policies; and (4) students' attitudes and suggestions regarding university regulations on AI usage.

This study utilized descriptive statistical methods to analyze the frequency and percentage distribution of the collected questionnaire data, thereby illustrating the current state of AI tool usage among Chinese Language and Literature undergraduates and their cognitive characteristics regarding academic integrity in the AI era.

4. Research Findings

4.1 High Penetration Rate and Scenario-Specific Usage of Generative AI Tools

Survey results indicate that among the 40 respondents, 37 students (92.5%) had utilized generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Doubao to assist their academic studies, while only 7.5% reported never having used such tools. This high penetration rate is consistent with global trends observed in recent systematic reviews [7,8].

Analysis of usage scenarios revealed a distinct "gradient" pattern: 78.4% of students used AI for language polishing and refining sentence fluency; 62.2% used AI to organize literature reviews and expand writing ideas; 48.6% used AI to assist with textual interpretation, such as obtaining relevant research perspectives or core arguments on literary works. Only 18.9% admitted to having used AI to fully generate course papers, book reports, or similar assignments. These findings suggest that the vast majority of students perceive AI as an "auxiliary writing tool" rather than a "ghostwriting tool," with usage predominantly concentrated on supplementary writing tasks rather than core creative processes.

4.2 Significant Stratification in Students' Perceptions of AI Writing and Academic Integrity

Regarding the boundary between AI usage and academic misconduct, student attitudes exhibited notable stratification. For the behavior of "using AI to fully generate a course paper and submitting it directly," 95% of respondents unequivocally identified it as academic misconduct, while only 5% considered it "not academic misconduct" or were "unsure."

However, perceptions diverged significantly concerning auxiliary AI usage: 72.5% believed that using AI for language polishing and grammatical corrections does not constitute academic misconduct; 85% considered using AI to review literature and expand writing ideas as legitimate learning assistance. Only 20% believed that any use of AI in assignment writing, regardless of extent, violates the principles of academic integrity. These results demonstrate that while a clear majority recognize "full AI ghostwriting" as academic misconduct, a unified standard regarding the boundaries of AI-assisted writing has yet to emerge, reflecting the cognitive ambiguity noted in prior research [1].

4.3 Generally Low Awareness of University Academic Integrity Policies

Survey results revealed a significant lack of awareness regarding university academic integrity policies. Only 22.5% of respondents reported a comprehensive understanding of their university's specific academic norms and policies concerning generative AI usage. A majority (65%) indicated familiarity solely with traditional academic integrity regulations related to plagiarism and fabrication, with complete unawareness of AI-specific requirements. An additional 12.5% stated they were entirely unfamiliar with their university's academic integrity policies.

Concurrently, 80% of respondents reported that instructors in their courses had never explicitly clarified the boundaries for AI tool usage nor addressed the requirements of academic integrity in the AI era. These findings underscore that current academic integrity education at universities significantly lags behind the development of generative AI technology, failing to provide students with clear behavioral guidelines and direction [11].

4.4 Student Attitudes Favor "Regulated Guidance" Over Outright Prohibition

Regarding university AI management policies, only 10% of respondents believed universities should completely prohibit students from using any generative AI tools in assignments and papers. In contrast, 80% favored that universities should not impose a blanket ban but rather establish clear policies defining the permissible scope of AI usage and guide students toward compliant use. Another 10% felt universities should impose no restrictions on AI usage. This indicates that the overwhelming majority of students acknowledge the auxiliary value of AI tools and anticipate clear usage guidelines from their institutions rather than an indiscriminate total prohibition [15].

5. Discussion

5.1 Reconstructing Knowledge Production and Re-cognizing the Essence of Writing from a Digital Humanities Perspective

The essence of Digital Humanities lies in dismantling the binary opposition between "technology" and "humanities," confronting directly the reshaping of humanistic knowledge production by digital technology. From inscription and printing to digital media, the carriers and tools of humanistic writing have perpetually evolved. The emergence of generative AI fundamentally represents another innovation in writing tools within the trajectory of Digital Humanities development [3]. Scholars observe that the penetration of digital technology into the humanities has triggered significant methodological transformations, engendering the Digital Humanities paradigm. This paradigm advocates a holistic and novel perspective in research vision, champions humanities computing in methodology, and emphasizes interdisciplinary integration in research modes [4]. Generative AI, as an extension of this paradigmatic shift, is profoundly reshaping the modes of writing and learning within humanities disciplines.

In traditional humanities education, writing constitutes an "individualized closed-loop process": students form personal viewpoints through close reading, refine argumentative logic through literature review, and ultimately present their thoughts through textual expression. The core of writing is "originality of thought," not "singularity of text." From a Digital Humanities perspective, generative AI is essentially analogous to databases of ancient texts or corpus analysis tools—an instrument for

writing assistance. It can undertake repetitive and technical tasks such as language polishing and literature organization, enabling students to concentrate more intently on the core aspects of humanistic inquiry: close reading, critical reflection, and argument construction. This necessitates a redefinition of the essence of academic writing: The crux of academic integrity has never been that "every word must be handwritten by the student," but rather that "the core arguments, logical framework, and intellectual substance of the paper must originate from the student's own original thinking" [12].

5.2 Reconstructing the Connotation of Academic Integrity and Defining Boundaries in the Era of Human-Machine Collaboration

The cognitive stratification regarding AI usage identified in this survey fundamentally reflects the conflict between the traditional academic integrity system and the human-machine collaborative writing model. The traditional system prioritizes "textual originality" as the core evaluative criterion. Under a Digital Humanities lens, the core of academic integrity must transition from "textual originality" to "intellectual originality" [11].

In this regard, relevant normative documents in China and internationally have already provided important references. The Guidelines for the Use of AIGC Boundaries in Academic Publishing 2.0 [16] further refines guidance and norms for using AI tools in thesis writing assistance. While recognizing AIGC-assisted writing within certain limits, it emphasizes that all users of such functions should understand and clearly disclose the extent of AIGC utilization in their work. Similarly, international bodies have proposed recommendations for ethical AI use in education [15]. Based on the concepts of Digital Humanities and the guidance of such normative documents, we can delineate a clear boundary between "compliant use" and "academic misconduct" in AI-assisted writing. Compliant AI use involves leveraging AI as a tool for technical aspects of writing—such as language polishing, literature organization, data statistics, and formatting—which do not involve the paper's core arguments or intellectual substance. Much like using dictionaries or grammar guides in traditional writing, this does not violate academic integrity. Conversely, academic misconduct involving AI entails using AI to supplant the student's core critical and creative processes—for instance, using AI to generate the paper's central thesis, argumentative framework, main content, or even submitting a fully AI-ghostwritten text [1,13]. Such behavior entirely negates the student's original thinking and is fundamentally indistinguishable from the academic misconduct of hiring a ghostwriter.

5.3 Cultivating Digital Humanities Literacy: The Foundational Safeguard for Academic Integrity in the AI Era

The survey findings regarding students' ambiguous understanding of AI usage boundaries and unfamiliarity with academic integrity policies essentially reflect a deficiency in Digital Humanities literacy education at universities. Digital Humanities literacy encompasses not only the ability to use digital tools but also the capacity to uphold academic ethics and utilize technology normatively in the digital age—a cornerstone for maintaining academic integrity in the AI era [4].

From a macro-policy perspective, the Ministry of Education's Expert Steering

Committee for Teacher Development in China has officially issued the Guidelines for Teacher Application of Generative Artificial Intelligence (First Edition) [17], guiding teachers to apply generative AI scientifically, safely, compliantly, and rationally. It mandates that teachers clarify usage boundaries, purposes, and norms when guiding students' use of generative AI and foster students' awareness of annotating AI-generated content. Similarly, Tsinghua University's Guiding Principles for the Application of Artificial Intelligence in Education [18] articulates five core principles—including "primary responsibility," "compliance and integrity," and "data security"—recommending that instructors autonomously define the mode and extent of AI application based on teaching objectives and clearly communicate usage norms to students at the course outset. It explicitly prohibits students from submitting AI-generated text directly copied or minimally paraphrased as their own academic work. These policy documents provide institutional reference frameworks for establishing university AI usage norms.

For the discipline of Chinese Language and Literature, cultivating Digital Humanities literacy necessitates integrating AI tool usage into routine teaching practices. Instructors should not evade AI but rather explicitly delineate its usage boundaries within the classroom [3]. They should teach students how to use AI compliantly to assist literary research—for example, using AI for dialogue corpus statistics in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, mapping research trajectories of a specific author, or refining linguistic expression in papers—while unequivocally stipulating that the core arguments, textual interpretations, and reasoning processes must be independently completed by the student. Through such pedagogical guidance, students can acquire proficiency in AI tool usage while simultaneously developing a clear ethical awareness of academic integrity. This shifts the paradigm from passive "prohibition" to active "normative use," thereby mitigating the risks of academic misconduct associated with AI at their source [6,19].

6. Conclusion

The advancement of generative AI technology is profoundly reshaping learning and writing paradigms in higher education and posing comprehensive challenges to the traditional academic integrity system. For undergraduate students in Chinese Language and Literature, AI tools have become ubiquitous auxiliary instruments in daily learning. While the vast majority clearly recognize the academic misconduct inherent in full AI ghostwriting, a unified standard regarding the boundaries of AI-assisted writing remains absent. Furthermore, university academic integrity education and policy norms significantly lag behind technological developments.

Viewed through the lens of Digital Humanities, generative AI is not an inherent adversary of academic integrity but rather a novel tool for humanistic research and writing. Constructing academic integrity in the AI era should not pursue the outdated path of blanket prohibition. Instead, it requires reconstructing the core connotation of academic integrity, shifting the evaluative criterion from "textual originality" to "intellectual originality," and clearly defining the compliant boundaries of AI tool usage [11,12]. Concurrently, universities must integrate the cultivation of Digital Humanities literacy into routine teaching, guiding students toward normative and rational utilization of AI tools. This approach enables technology to serve as an empowering instrument for humanistic learning rather than a shortcut that undermines original

thought. Ultimately, amidst technological transformation, the fundamental bottom line of academic integrity can be upheld, achieving synergistic development between humanities education and digital technology.

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