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The Dragon of Algorithm: Forging "Synergistic Qiyun" in the Age of Computational Art

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) art and the classical Chinese aesthetic category "Qiyun Shengdong," proposed by Xie He as the highest standard of painting. It brings this concept of cosmic vitality into dialogue with computational creativity theory and human AI co-creation. Using a triangulated method—classical philosophy, contemporary theory, and art psychology—the study first situates AI's strength in Boden's "exploratory creativity" and its structural limits in "transformational creativity." Audience reception studies further reveal a "perception gap": experts detect the absence of embodied, processual traces that constitute "qiyun," while general viewers are more accepting. Building on posthumanist thought, the paper repositions AI not as an autonomous creator but as a synergistic partner. It proposes the construct of "Synergistic Qiyun," where vitality emerges from networks of human intention, algorithmic generation, data heritage, and audience perception, and outlines an MVP framework linking philosophical argument with empirical evidence.

Keywords AI Art; Qiyun; Synergistic Qiyun; Human AI Co-creation; Computational Creativity

1 Introduction: A Symbiotic Inquiry

The core issue of this paper stems from a profound confrontation: on one side is the supreme principle of classical Chinese aesthetics, "Qiyun Shengdong"—an ancient concept rooted in the artist's life force and cosmic harmony; on the other is generative artificial intelligence—a non-living, non-embodied, modern technological subject operating on statistical patterns. However, instead of initially viewing this as an "impossible encounter", this study aims to reshape this confrontation into a constructive, symbiotic inquiry. In biology, "symbiosis" is defined as a close and long-term interaction between different biological species. Using this as an analogy, this paper no longer places AI and "qiyun" in a zero-sum game framework but sees their interaction as a catalyst, forcing us to re-examine and expand these two concepts themselves. This perspective resonates with posthumanist thinker Donna Haraway's concept of the "cyborg", which advocates breaking the boundaries between humans and machines, viewing the hybrid as a creative form of existence[2].

Consequently, the central research question of this paper shifts from "Can an algorithm lacking 'qi' create 'qiyun'?" to a more constructive question: "In the practice of human-AI co-creation, how does

artificial intelligence challenge, reshape, and potentially expand the connotation of the classical aesthetic category of ‘qiyun’?”. This shift in questioning marks a change in research perspective from judging the capabilities of machines to understanding an emerging creative ecosystem. It no longer asks whether machines can become artists, but explores how the combination of humans and machines changes the way art is created and the definition of art itself.

To systematically answer this question, this paper will unfold its argument in sequence. First, it will conduct a deep historical and philosophical analysis of “Qiyun Shengdong”, specifically pointing out its tendency to be reduced to formalism in its Western reception history, and how this tendency preset a conceptual path for later algorithmic simulation. Second, this paper will introduce and critique computational creativity theory, transitioning from individual creativity models to the new paradigm of human-AI co-creation. Next, this paper will open a new chapter on empirical aesthetics, systematically reviewing audience perception studies on AI art, especially the evaluation differences between experts and novices, to provide empirical support for the subsequent philosophical arguments. Then, by analyzing the practices of contemporary artists, this paper will formally propose a theory of “Synergistic Qiyun” that transcends imitation, based on posthumanist thought, and provide an operational assessment framework for it. Finally, in the conclusion, this paper will clearly state its specific contributions to promoting cross-cultural aesthetics, the philosophy of AI art, and future artistic practices.

2 Deconstructing “Qiyun Shengdong”: From Embodied Ontology to Formalist Reduction

2.1 The Philosophical and Somatic Roots of “Qi” and “Yun”

Understanding “Qiyun Shengdong” must begin with its etymology and deep philosophical background. “Qi” is a core concept in Chinese philosophy, referring to the fundamental energy or life breath that constitutes everything in the universe; “Yun” refers to the rhythm, style, and harmonious resonance presented by this life breath through artistic form. These ideas can be traced back to Daoist thought, where the “Dao” as the source of all things gives birth to the primordial qi of the universe. In traditional Chinese thought, “qi” is not only a metaphysical concept but also a perceptible physical reality closely linked to the body. For a painter, wielding a brush is not a purely technical operation but a meditative behavior that integrates physical control, mental concentration, and emotional investment, its essence being the channeling of one’s own “qi” through ink and brush.

It is no coincidence that “Qiyun Shengdong” was placed first among the “Six Laws” proposed by the Six Dynasties painter and theorist Xie He in his work “The Record of the Classification of Old Painters”. The other five laws, such as “Bone Method in the Use of the Brush” and “Correspondence to the Object in Portraying Form”, are all considered means to support the achievement of the supreme goal of “Qiyun Shengdong”. This established the supreme status of “qiyun”: it is not an isolated feature of a work but the vital sign that emerges from the artwork as a whole, the mark of the work gaining “life”. In classical Chinese aesthetics, a painting that lacks qiyun, no matter how exquisite the brushwork or realistic the form, is ultimately a “dead object”.

2.2 Paving the Way for Algorithmic Simulation: The Formalist Turn in Western Reception

When the concept of “Qiyun Shengdong” was introduced to the West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its profound philosophical meaning was often weakened in the process of translation and interpretation. This historical shift in interpretation is not insignificant; it constitutes the epistemological prelude that made the AI simulation of “qiyun” possible. Western formalist aesthetics translated a holistic, process-oriented ontological concept rooted in life philosophy into an aesthetic principle that focused

more on static formal elements such as line, rhythm, and composition. This conceptual "flattening" inadvertently paved the way for later technological simulation. This process can be understood as a form of "pre-digital transcoding", which reconfigured a complex cultural concept into an analyzable, quantifiable formal logic, thus laying the groundwork for future computerization[3].

Laurence Binyon and "Rhythmic Vitality": As a curator in the Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, Binyon was a pioneer in introducing Chinese art to the West[4]. In his influential work, *The Flight of the Dragon*, he translated "Qiyun Shengdong" as "Rhythmic Vitality, or Spiritual Rhythm expressed in the movement of life" [4]. This choice of translation was not accidental. It reflected Binyon's attempt to challenge the then-dominant mimetic traditions in Europe with a concept understandable to Western modernists that emphasized the inner vitality and expressive power of art—"rhythm" [4]. He focused on how art conveys a "cosmic spiritual rhythm" that transcends appearance, rather than how art is ontologically related to the "qi" in the Daoist worldview. This interpretation shifted the focus from the ineffable, ontological "qi" to the perceptible, aesthetic "rhythm".

Roger Fry and "Significant Form": As a central figure of the Bloomsbury Group and a founder of British modernist art criticism, Fry's theoretical explorations further exacerbated this formalist turn[5, 6]. Fry advocated for separating the evaluation of artworks from their underlying cultural, religious, or moral intentions, focusing instead on their pure formal qualities[5]. In his important essay, "An Essay in Aesthetics", he regarded "rhythm", "mass", "light and shade", and "color" as the "emotional elements of design" that constitute an artwork[5]. Although the term "Significant Form" was officially coined by his colleague Clive Bell, its core idea is in line with Fry's theory: the value of art lies in the aesthetic experience evoked by its formal structure itself, not in the content it represents[6]. When Fry analyzed non-Western art, including Chinese art, he was precisely looking for this kind of universal formal beauty that could transcend cultural contexts. He appreciated Chinese art because it embodied a sensitivity to form and an exquisite mastery of materials, not for its deep connotations related to life philosophy[6].

This historical trajectory reveals that AI's predicament in the face of "qiyun" was doomed from the start. According to new media theorist Lev Manovich, one of the core principles of new media is "transcoding", the process by which the cultural layer is reshaped by the computer layer[3]. However, what "qiyun" experienced was a pre-digital era of transcoding. Western modernist aesthetics, with its preference for abstract forms, acted as a conceptual "operating system" that could not directly run the native, embodied "program" of "qiyun". It first had to be "compiled" into a new language understandable by formalist logic— "rhythm", "line", "form". Modern AI art generation models operate precisely by analyzing and reproducing the formal features (such as texture, lines, composition, and color schemes) in massive datasets. The algorithms execute the very logic of early formalist interpreters like Binyon and Fry. AI is not trying to simulate the ineffable "Dao" or the flowing "qi", but rather the "Significant Form" that has already been reduced to formal rules. Therefore, the goal the algorithm pursues is itself a projection of the original concept after dimensional reduction. AI's "failure" is not a technical shortcoming but the inevitable result of perfectly executing a historically simplified task.

3 Mapping the Landscape of Creativity: From Computational Logic to Synergistic Co-creation

3.1 Boden's Framework: A Starting Point for Assessing Individual Creativity

The field of Computational Creativity aims to understand and implement creative behavior through computational models, fundamentally challenging the romantic notion of creativity as a mysterious and extraordinary ability. It seeks to demystify creativity, viewing it as an observable and modelable aspect of general human intelligence. To precisely assess the creativity of AI, this paper adopts the creativity theory

of British philosopher Margaret Boden as its core analytical framework. Boden proposes three forms of creativity[1, 7]:

Combinational Creativity: Combining familiar ideas in unfamiliar ways.

Exploratory Creativity: Generating novel outputs within an existing conceptual space or set of stylistic rules.

Transformational Creativity: Altering the conceptual space itself, making previously "unthinkable" ideas possible.

Boden's theoretical framework reveals a fundamental asymmetry in AI's creative abilities. Generative AI models, whether based on Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) or Diffusion Models, have a core mechanism of learning and internalizing the "rules" or "conceptual space" of a specific style by training on massive datasets of existing artworks. This mechanism is a perfect embodiment of exploratory creativity: AI can generate endless novel variations within a given stylistic framework. However, transformational creativity requires breaking or fundamentally changing these rules. The training mechanism of AI is precisely contrary to this—any output that deviates too far from its training data distribution may be considered an "error" or "failure" by its own mechanism. Thus, AI is locked in a perpetual "exploratory" mode. It can generate a "Van Gogh-style" painting that is convincingly authentic, but it can never become the Van Gogh who broke the aesthetic paradigm of his time. This provides a precise theoretical explanation for the phenomenon where AI artworks are stylistically impeccable yet conceptually somewhat stagnant.

3.2 Beyond the Individual Creator: Introducing Human-AI Co-creation

Although Boden's framework is powerful, its focus of analysis remains on an independent creative agent (whether human or machine). However, this can no longer fully explain the current practice of AI art. We must shift the analytical paradigm from evaluating the autonomous creativity of AI to examining a new creative mode: Human-AI Co-creation.

The Human-AI Co-creation model positions humans and AI as partners in a dynamic interactive process. In this model, creativity arises from a synergy: humans contribute intuition, aesthetic judgment, contextual understanding, and ultimate intention; AI contributes its powerful data processing capabilities, efficiency in rapidly generating diverse solutions, and the potential to explore possibilities beyond the human cognitive scope. This synergy not only accelerates innovation but also expands the boundaries of creative expression. This shift aligns with the philosophy of Generative Art. Theorist Philip Galanter defines generative art as the practice where an artist uses a "system" with a certain degree of autonomy (such as a set of rules or a computer program) to create art[8]. From this perspective, AI is no longer an "artist" trying to imitate humans, but a powerful, autonomous "system" harnessed by the human artist.

This paradigm shift means a fundamental change in the focus of creativity assessment. We no longer ask in isolation, "Is this machine creative?", but begin to ask, "What new creativity can emerge from this system composed of a human and a machine?". The locus of creativity is no longer solely in the human brain or the AI's chip but is distributed in the continuous, cyclical feedback loop between them. AI transforms from a judged, failed artist into a powerful, inspiring creative catalyst and partner. This theoretical turn lays the foundation for our subsequent proposal of the "Synergistic Qiyun" concept, as it shifts the focus from the isolated "object" (the AI artwork) to the dynamic "relationship" (the human-machine interaction process).

4 The Beholder's Share: A Semi-Systematic Review of Empirical Aesthetics in AI-Generated Art

While philosophical debates are profound, they must be supported by empirical evidence to be persuasive. This section aims to provide empirical backing for the paper's philosophical arguments by semi-systematically reviewing contemporary research in psychology and empirical aesthetics on audience perception of AI art. We will explore a central question: even if lay audiences and art experts do not use the term "qiyun", do their aesthetic responses in fact reveal a perceived lack of "vitality" or "process" in AI art?

4.1 The Novice's Gaze and the Allure of Form

For non-professional viewers, the reception of AI art presents a complex and interesting picture. Several studies have surprisingly found that when the authorship of a work is concealed (i.e., under blind conditions), lay audiences not only show no negative bias against AI art but, in some cases, even show a significant preference for AI-generated works[9]. This suggests that for the untrained eye, AI has reached or even surpassed human artists in formal appeal (e.g., composition, color, detail). Researchers speculate that AI may effectively "exploit" certain human cognitive preferences by learning from massive popular image data[9].

Traditional views hold that AI art lacks emotion, but empirical studies paint a more nuanced picture. Research shows that viewers can indeed feel various emotions from AI art and tend to attribute creative intent to the work, regardless of whether the creator is human or AI[10]. However, a key difference lies in the "intensity" of the emotion. When viewers know or believe a work was created by a human, they report a stronger emotional experience, especially positive emotions[10]. Additionally, some research has found that AI seems more effective at depicting positive emotions like "happiness" than conveying negative ones like "sadness", suggesting limitations in its emotional expression range.

4.2 The Expert's Eye and the Perception of Process

In stark contrast to the attitudes of lay audiences, art experts, critics, and practicing artists generally exhibit a significant negative bias towards AI art. This difference constitutes the key empirical evidence supporting the core argument of this paper.

Multiple studies consistently confirm that art experts give significantly lower ratings to AI-generated paintings in terms of likability, purchase intention, and collection intention[11, 12]. This bias is particularly pronounced when the work is explicitly labeled as "AI-created" [11, 12]. A study involving 295 participants (including experts and non-experts) found that after the author's identity was revealed, experts' liking for AI paintings was significantly lower than for human paintings (effect size $F(1,296)=11.53$, $p=0.001$), while non-experts showed no such difference; at the same time, experts' liking for AI paintings was also significantly lower than that of non-experts ($F(1,296)=5.72$, $p=0.017$)[11]. This strong "labeling effect" has been confirmed in multiple studies; even the same piece of work, once labeled as "AI-created", will have its value assessment significantly depreciated[12].

This bias does not stem from simple conservatism. Research in empirical aesthetics shows that experts and novices use fundamentally different cognitive frameworks when evaluating art. According to the aesthetic appreciation model proposed by Leder et al., aesthetic experience is a multi-stage process involving perception, classification, cognitive mastering, and evaluation[13]. Novices' judgments are more based on personalized, immediate aesthetic pleasure ("Do I like it?"), staying at the earlier processing stages. Experts' evaluations, on the other hand, are based on a shared knowledge system acquired through long-term training; they enter a deeper "cognitive mastering" stage, paying more attention to the work's

originality, historical context, conceptual depth, and the creation process itself[13, 14]. Experts can "see" the "artist's hand" behind the work, which is precisely what they perceive to be missing in AI art.

In-depth interviews with digital artists provide vivid qualitative footnotes to the above quantitative data. The artists' core concerns focus on several aspects: they consider AI art to be ethically problematic (mainly referring to copyright disputes over training data); more importantly, they generally believe that AI art lacks true "agency" and "human expression" because AI has no intention and no real understanding of the world[15]. At the level of the creative process, artists complain that AI tools deprive them of a sense of control, space for experimentation, and the possibility of gradual iteration, ultimately resulting in works that, while aesthetically impressive, feel "soulless" [15].

4.3 From Empirical Data to Philosophical Argument: Explaining the Perception Gap

By synthesizing the above empirical findings, we can draw a powerful conclusion that provides a solid empirical basis for the philosophical argument of this paper. The "perception gap" between experts and novices is not accidental; it precisely reflects the dualism of "form-likeness" and "spirit-likeness" in classical Chinese aesthetics. The root of this gap can be understood as a conflict of "temporality".

Novices perceive the "form": The general audience mainly reacts to the final form (the product) of the work. Their aesthetic experience is immediate and atemporal. AI, with its powerful computational capabilities, excels at generating formally novel, pleasing, and complex images, thus winning the favor of novices.

Experts perceive the "spirit": Art experts are trained to see through the surface form of a work to perceive the creative process embedded within it. What they look for are the traces left by the artist's physical, emotional, and intellectual investment in the material medium. This is a temporal perception, where the expert tries to reconstruct the flow of the artist's consciousness in time within the static image—a series of decisions, hesitations, corrections, and moments of inspiration. The generation process of AI art is a near-instantaneous computation, lacking this human temporal signature. Therefore, the artists' complaints of "soullessness" and "process deficits" are modern translations of the absence of "qiyun" from the practitioner's perspective. What they perceive is the absence of a living, embodied, and intentional creative subject in the AI work, and the consequent absence of a perceivable "human time".

Thus, data from contemporary psychological experiments and artist interviews provide strong corroborating evidence for the irreducibility of the ancient philosophical concept of "qiyun". "Qiyun" is not a mysterious, ineffable quality, but a processual attribute that can be verified in expert-level perception, originating from the interaction of a living subject with a material medium in a specific time and space. AI's success in form and its failure in expert judgment both validate this point.

5 Towards "Synergistic Qiyun": A Posthumanist Re-evaluation and Operationalization

At this point in the argument, a crucial shift is needed: from evaluating AI as an autonomous creator to examining its possibilities as a complex tool or collaborator. The practices of artists Chen Qi and Xu Bing are no longer seen merely as examples of using new tools but as pioneers of human-AI co-creation. Chen Qi uses AI to quantitatively explore the uncontrollability of the ink medium, positioning AI as a partner in philosophical inquiry; Xu Bing believes that AI liberates artists from technical labor, allowing them to focus more on conceptual and philosophical dimensions. These practices all point to a common future: the core of creativity is no longer the generation of images itself, but the conceptual depth and clever design of the human-machine interaction process.

5.1 Distributed Agency and the Cyborg Artwork: A Posthumanist Theoretical Proposal

To provide a more solid theoretical framework for this new human-machine relationship, this paper introduces posthumanist thought. Posthumanism fundamentally challenges the traditional human-centered worldview, advocating for the dissolution of dualisms such as human/machine, nature/culture, and subject/object[16, 17]. It argues that our subjectivity itself is a hybrid entity shaped by technology, ecology, and non-human life[16]. Within this framework, AI is no longer a tool external to humans but a "symbiont" that co-constitutes a new creative subject with us.

Based on a posthumanist perspective, this paper formally proposes the theoretical construct of "Synergistic Qiyun". It is defined as: not a property inherent in the individual artist or the AI algorithm, but a new form of life vitality that emerges within the entire human-machine interaction system. This "qiyun" is "distributed"; it is scattered throughout the network of the artist's visionary prompt, the AI's recombination of massive cultural heritage data, the accidental "hallucinations" introduced by the algorithm during generation, and finally, the audience's perception and interpretation of this hybrid product.

Traditional "qiyun" originates from an organic, unified living being. "Synergistic Qiyun", however, originates from a heterogeneous, cyborg-like combination. Its "vividness" is no longer about simulating natural breath but is embodied in the fast, iterative, and sometimes tense "dialogue" between human intuition and machine logic. This vitality is unique to our technological era. It does not seek to be a substitute for classical qiyun but exists as a new aesthetic quality. The root of this aesthetic quality lies in the "cybernetic loop" between human and machine. The artist injects intention into the system through "prompt engineering", which is not a simple command but a structured, culturally coded act. The AI's output provides non-human, unexpected feedback to the artist. The artist then responds by selecting, editing, and re-prompting, forming a continuous feedback loop. Creativity exists in the rhythm and resonance of this loop.

5.2 Operationalizing "Synergistic Qiyun": A Minimum Viable Product (MVP) Assessment Framework

To move the concept of "Synergistic Qiyun" from metaphysical speculation to testable analysis, this section proposes a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) assessment framework with three dimensions, providing observable processual and resultant indicators for each.

Dimension A: Process-Interaction. Definition: This dimension assesses the depth and dynamism of the human-machine interaction process. A high level of "Synergistic Qiyun" is reflected in a deep, iterative, and fruitful "dialogue", rather than a simple "command-execute" relationship. Observable Indicators: Prompt iteration depth: The number of iterative rounds and the degree of refinement of the core prompts needed to complete a work. Human selection ratio: The ratio of accepted versus rejected generations among the many candidate solutions generated by the AI. Human-machine operation ratio: The proportion of time or steps spent by humans on conceptual design and fine-tuning versus AI on batch generation and exploration throughout the creative workflow.

Dimension B: Result-Vivacity. Definition: This dimension assesses the aesthetic qualities presented in the final artwork, especially those that suggest a sense of life, process, and coherence. Observable Indicators: Expert rating of "processual trace": Inviting art experts to rate, under blind conditions, the extent to which a work feels like "the product of a coherent, intentional process" versus "pieced together or random" using a Likert scale. Stylistic consistency of a work series: Using image analysis algorithms to assess the stylistic stability and temporal coherence in aspects like brushwork, color, and composition for a series of works. Complexity of the work: Drawing on Philip Galanter's complexity theory, assessing whether the work achieves a balance of "effective complexity" between high order (simple repetition) and high disorder (pure randomness), similar to the complexity of biological systems[8].

Dimension C: Experience-Reception. Definition: This dimension assesses the work's impact from the perspective of audience reception, particularly the intensity of emotion it evokes and its sensitivity to authorship. Observable Indicators: Expert/novice emotional intensity difference under blind conditions: Measuring the difference in reported emotional intensity between experts and novices without knowledge of the author's identity. A successful synergistic work might narrow this gap. Penalty coefficient of the labeling effect: Quantifying the negative impact of the "AI-created" label on the likability ratings of experts and novices through experimental design. A work with high "Synergistic Qiyun" should have a significantly smaller "penalty" from the AI label.

This MVP framework is intended to provide an initial, operational assessment tool. In specific studies, the reliability and validity of each indicator should be ensured.

5.3 The Challenge of Embodiment: Boundary Conditions and the Primacy of Synergy

A powerful counterargument is: as technology develops, will new embodied AI systems eventually acquire "qiyun" independently, making "synergy" redundant? For example, using robotic arms for calligraphy or simulating physical ink flow diffusion through complex fluid dynamics models can indeed enhance AI's embodiment, making its creation process closer to physical reality.

However, even with the introduction of robotic writing or physical ink flow modeling, while embodiment can be technically enhanced, the distributed structure of agency and the source of conceptual priming still determine that "Synergistic Qiyun" is more achievable and interpretable than "autonomous qiyun". The theoretical reasons are as follows:

Distributed Agency: According to contemporary human-computer interaction theory, creativity does not originate from a single agent but is co-produced and shared within a network of different agents. In a synergistic system, human intention, cultural background, and aesthetic judgment complement AI's computational power and data-driven "imagination". The interaction of these heterogeneous agents is itself a source of creativity, the richness of which is difficult for any single autonomous system (whether embodied or not) to achieve.

Conceptual Priming: Artistic creation is not just a physical operation but a conceptual expression. In human-AI co-creation, humans play the role of "conceptual primers", providing high-level goals, emotional tones, and critical reflections. AI serves as a powerful tool for conceptual exploration and visualization, extending, mutating, and embodying the initial human intentions. This "top-level design" originating from human consciousness is key to ensuring that the work has profound meaning and emotional resonance, which current embodied AI lacks.

Social Context and Relational Intention: Philosophical research indicates that true intentionality and agency are formed in social relationships, relying on "intersubjectivity"—mutual understanding and recognition between subjects. Artworks are ultimately mediums for communication with people. A synergistic system naturally embeds human creators and potential human audiences in its loop, while an autonomous AI, no matter how realistic its physical actions, essentially lacks the real ability to communicate in a shared world of meaning. Its "intention" is simulated, not relational.

Therefore, advances in embodied technology will not diminish the importance of "Synergistic Qiyun" but will instead make it more powerful. A synergistic system guided by a human artist, capable of operating high-fidelity physical simulations or robotic arms, will be more capable of creating works with both technical sophistication and humanistic depth than any autonomous system.

5.4 Reconfiguring the Comparative Framework

To clearly demonstrate the paper's argumentative path from binary opposition to synthetic innovation, the following table compares the three creative paradigms across multiple dimensions.

Table 1: A Comparative Framework of Artistic Creation Paradigms

Feature Dimension	Classical Creation ("Qiyun Shengdong")	Autonomous Computational Creation	Synergistic Co-creation ("Synergistic Qiyun")
Source of Creativity	The artist's embodied "qi", life experience, cosmic resonance	Algorithms, statistical patterns in training data	The interactive feedback loop between human intention and AI's generative potential
Core Principle	Spiritual resonance, life vitality, harmony with the "Dao"	Novelty, surprise (within a given conceptual space)[1]	Emergence, symbiosis, conceptual inquiry, process as product
Embodiment	Core: Requires the holistic engagement of the artist's body and spirit (breath, posture)	Absent: A disembodied, purely computational process	Hybrid: The human's embodied experience guides and interprets a disembodied process. The work is a trace of this hybrid interaction.
Temporality of Process	A continuous, irreversible event unfolding in time (e.g., "in one breath")	Atemporal or instantaneous computation; discrete, reversible steps	Layered: Human experience unfolds in real-time, interacting with near-instantaneous computational generation.
Locus of Agency	The autonomous human artist, cultivated through spiritual practice	The algorithm (as a "black box") or its programmers/users	Distributed: Agency is co-produced and shared among the human, AI, and dataset.
Audience Experience (Novice)	Appreciation of form, subject matter, and immediate aesthetic appeal	High appreciation for novel forms and technical perfection; often preferred when unlabeled[9]	Experience is shaped by the collaborative narrative; fascination with the human-machine process itself.
Audience Experience (Expert)	Perception of the artist's hand, creative process, and infusion of "qi"	Negative bias; perception of "soullessness", lack of process, and formal rigidity[11, 15]	Evaluation based on the conceptual depth and novelty of the synergistic *process*, not just the final product.
Transformational Potential	Transformational breakthroughs achieved through the accumulation of generations of masters (historical creativity)	Limited to exploration within a given style; cannot create new paradigms[1]	Potentially immense; can transform the practice of human artists and even the definition of art forms themselves.

6 Conclusion: The Reflective Dragon—New Horizons for Aesthetics and Practice

The argument of this paper ultimately leads to a conclusion that transcends simple affirmation or negation: at the current level of technology, AI excels in exploratory creativity, capable of simulating the "form" of Chinese painting with astonishing fidelity. However, it cannot independently generate the "spirit" that originates from embodied experience and life consciousness, which is "qiyun" in the classical sense.

But this is not a declaration of the "failure" of AI art, nor a simple "victory" for human-centrism. This dialogue, spanning ancient and modern, East and West, ultimately arrives at a more constructive synthesis by introducing the perspective of empirical aesthetics and the theoretical framework of posthumanism. AI's inability in the face of classical "qiyun" provides us with the clearest definition yet of what "qiyun" is: a processual quality belonging to an embodied consciousness that is alive, breathing, and capable of experiencing the world, which cannot be reduced to formal rules. The significant difference in the perception of AI art between experts and novices provides strong empirical confirmation for this philosophical assertion.

Based on this, the core contribution of this paper is the proposal of the new concept of "Synergistic Qiyun", shifting the focus of discussion from the limits of machine capabilities to the emergent potential of human-machine systems. In a future increasingly permeated by technology, the vitality of the ancient principle of "qiyun" will not depend on waiting for an autonomous AI to finally possess a soul, but on how human artists can harness these powerful new tools to forge a new kind of hybrid vitality, belonging to the cyborg age, between ancient life force and emerging algorithmic capabilities.

Academic Contributions

This research provides three specific contributions to the academic dialogue in related fields:

Enriching the Philosophy of AI Art: By introducing "qiyun", a non-Western, non-anthropocentric aesthetic category, as a critical lens, this study breaks the limitations of current discussions on AI art, which

overly rely on Western philosophical concepts such as intentionality and authorship, providing new cultural resources for the construction of a global AI aesthetics theory.

Promoting Cross-cultural Aesthetics: This study demonstrates how to activate and expand the connotations of classical aesthetic concepts through direct engagement with contemporary technology. It shows that ancient aesthetic wisdom is not just to be enshrined in historical archives but can gain new life and explanatory power through interaction with new media.

Integrating Philosophical Speculation and Empirical Research: This paper combines the ontological discussion of "qiyun" with empirical data from psychology and empirical aesthetics, demonstrating a cross-disciplinary research path that connects humanistic speculation with scientific evidence, thereby enhancing the rigor and persuasiveness of aesthetic arguments.

Practical Value

This research also points to three specific potential paths for future artistic practice and cultural heritage:

For Artists: AI can be more than just an image generator; it can become an analytical partner. Artists can use AI to deconstruct the paradigms of traditional painting or as a "creative sparring partner" to inspire visual solutions beyond their own habits, thus dedicating more energy to conceptual innovation and philosophical reflection.

For Cultural Heritage: AI can be developed into powerful educational tools. By allowing learners to explore formal variations of complex principles like "bone method in brush use" or "compositional arrangement" in a virtual environment, AI can provide a "sandbox" for formal rules before learners master the difficult embodied skills, potentially revolutionizing the inheritance and teaching of Chinese painting.

For Technological Development: The pursuit of "Synergistic Qiyun" sets a challenging new benchmark for the future development of creative AI, pushing it from the pursuit of static image realism to simulating a dynamic sense of life, process, and internal consistency, which has significant implications for the long-term development of AI.

The dragon of algorithm need not have a soul, but it can be taught to dance with the human spirit, together painting an artistic landscape unique to our era, full of hybrid vitality.

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