

# The Essential Boundaries of Generative AI Literary Criticism: An Investigation Centered on Classic Tang Poems

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## Abstract

The large-scale intervention of generative artificial intelligence in the field of literary criticism has sparked sustained academic debates on the essential differences between artificial intelligence (AI) criticism and human criticism. Existing studies have mostly been carried out from the perspectives of technical principles and theoretical speculation, lacking systematic empirical comparison between the two types of critical texts, and failing to anchor discussions on their essential differences at the level of textual details and cognitive mechanisms. To this end, this paper takes five classic Tang poems as analytical samples, conducts a multi-dimensional empirical comparison between the commentary texts generated by the DeepSeek large language model (LLM) and those by renowned human critics across dynasties, systematically sorts out their systematic differences in analytical focus, judgment mode, linguistic style and theoretical depth, and explores the deep-seated roots of the differences from four dimensions: intentionality, embodied experience, value rationality and linguistic expression. The study finds that AI criticism and human criticism are cognitive activities with fundamentally different natures: human criticism is contemplative interpretation and value judgment rooted in intentional aesthetic experience, while AI criticism is computational analysis and descriptive data output based on algorithmic processing. This research not only debunks the myth of technological optimism, but also transcends the simplistic negation of humanistic conservatism, deepens the understanding of the humanistic essence of literary criticism, and provides a theoretical reference for the practice of human-machine collaborative literary criticism in the digital age.

## Keywords

Generative artificial intelligence, Literary criticism, Classical Chinese poetry, Large language model

## Introduction

Since 2024, the intervention of generative artificial intelligence in the field of literary criticism has attracted extensive attention and heated discussion in academic circles [1]. LLMs represented by DeepSeek have been able to deliver relatively systematic commentaries on classical Chinese poetry, and the generated critical texts are quite similar to human criticism in form. They can identify images, analyze rhetorical techniques, summarize themes, and even quote classics and express emotions. Faced with this phenomenon, a fundamental question emerges: What is the essential difference between the literary criticism of artificial intelligence and that of renowned human critics? Are there differences in degree of the same competence, or two fundamentally distinct cognitive activities?

This question is not merely a matter of curiosity at the technical level. It touches the very foundation of literary

criticism: What exactly is criticism? Is it pattern recognition and information integration based on data calculation, or aesthetic experience and value judgment derived from life experience [2]? If AI criticism is indistinguishable from human criticism in form, is this unique spiritual activity of human beings, “literary criticism”, facing the crisis of being replaced by technology? Conversely, if there is an insurmountable gap between AI criticism and human criticism, where exactly does this gap lie?

Regarding these questions, there are two seemingly opposing yet equally prudent positions in current academia. One is technological optimism, which holds that with the continuous advancement of LLM capabilities, AI literary criticism will increasingly approach and even surpass human levels, and the profession of the critic may face the fate of being “laid

off'. The other is humanistic conservatism, which firmly believes that AI can never truly understand literature, and the texts it generates are nothing more than "pseudo-criticism" unworthy of serious attention. However, neither position has developed its argument based on a systematic comparison between AI-generated critical texts and human critical texts. The former overestimates the capabilities of AI, while the latter underestimates the complexity of the issue [3].

This paper argues that to answer the fundamental question of "Whether AI can conduct literary criticism", we must not merely stay at theoretical speculation, nor rely solely on the analysis of AI technical principles. Instead, we must return to the critical texts themselves and reveal the essential differences between the two types of critical subjects through empirical comparison. Only by juxtaposing AI-generated criticism with that of renowned human critics, and comparing their analytical focus, linguistic style, judgment mode and aesthetic characteristics word for word, can we see clearly: Is AI criticism literary "criticism", or merely "imitation" of criticism? What exactly is the distance between such imitation and genuine criticism [4]?

### Literature review

The intervention of generative AI in the field of literary criticism has aroused extensive attention and in-depth discussion in academic circles. Centering on core issues such as "whether AI can conduct literary criticism", "what is the essential difference between AI criticism and human criticism" and "how to realize human-machine collaboration", the academic community has formed several important research topics.

### Technical perspective

Exploring the capabilities and boundaries of AI literary analysis from the technical level is the foundation for understanding how and why AI criticism is possible and limited. Abblitt systematically analyzed the technical principles of AI literary analysis [5]. He pointed out that AI's "understanding" of literary texts is built on natural language processing, with three core links: word segmentation, word embedding transformation, and deep learning-based feature extraction [6]. At the word segmentation level, AI deconstructs continuous text sequences into discrete semantic units. Such mechanical segmentation is prone to semantic dislocation in complex contexts. For example, when processing the Chinese

sentence "Welcome new teachers and students to dine here". The algorithm may split it into "welcome", "new teacher", "dine", exposing the incompatibility of mechanical word segmentation with the paratactic features of the Chinese language.

At the word embedding level, AI converts segmented words into "word vectors" in a high-dimensional space and describes word relationships by quantifying the semantic similarity between words. This process essentially transforms linguistic problems into geometric problems, and the idiosyncrasy of language is lost in mathematical processing. For example, in high-dimensional space, "glass" and "fragile", "diamond" and "shiny" have close coordinates. But the image of the "beetle" in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, which carries existential anxiety, is reduced to a single coordinate point, with all its signified and signifier stripped of meaning [7]. This geometric representation mode causes the poetic nature of literary language to collapse in geometric space. More critically, AI's "understanding" is not based on embodied experience and intuitive knowledge, but on the encoding, deconstruction and feature extraction of natural language. Human "understanding" of language is built on the cognitive process from embodied experience to intuitive knowledge. The individual perceives warmth from a fire, then forms the abstract concept of "warmth", which embodies the hierarchical projection from embodied experience to environmental interaction and then to emotional experience. AI lacks such a foundation of embodied experience, and its "empirical knowledge" is derived from the corpus fed by humans, which is a subset of human knowledge. The so-called "innovation" is only the probabilistic recombination of knowledge in the training data. They thus conclude that the "criticism" of artificial intelligence is essentially the refraction and recombination of the mirror image of the corpus, a replication of human viewpoints [8].

Gou's research provides a supplementary observation from the perspective of technological iteration. Through a test on Mu Dan's *Eight Poems*, he found that AI tools in 2025 presented well-organized, logically rigorous and professionally worded responses, pointing out that the poem "takes love as the carrier and constructs a philosophical labyrinth of life, existence and time" [9]. He believes that general generative artificial intelligence has shown the possibility of approaching the human brain in terms of logical thinking and discourse mode

when facing the field of literary criticism and research. However, such technological iteration has not fundamentally solved the cognitive limitation of AI - it still cannot handle the ambiguity of meaning inherent in literary experience.

### ***Philosophical perspective***

If the technical perspective focuses on “What AI can do”, the philosophical perspective asks, “What is the essence of AI criticism” and “What is the fundamental difference between AI criticism and human criticism”. Relevant research indicates that the essence of intelligent criticism is “algorithmic criticism”. The LLM obtains known conditions and goals from prompts, and then outputs critical texts by simulating human reasoning and expression through a series of mathematical calculations. The ultimate goal of intelligent criticism is to meet user needs; its reasoning line will change with the adjustment of user needs, and so will its attitude towards literature and critical stance. More fundamentally, AI faces the dilemma of “lack of intentionality”: Intentionality is the fundamental characteristic of human intelligence pointing to the external world. It is precisely because of intentionality that humans can independently associate the processed object with the external world, showing initiative, flexibility and consciousness [10]. AI’s intelligence, by contrast, only performs high-speed operations in a closed symbol system, without truly pointing to the outside world, resonating with it, or empathizing with human subjects.

Traditional literary criticism needs to abide by public rationality to realize the basic functions of interpretation and dialogue. Public rationality is a basic rationality shared by human beings, which strictly abides by the principles of justice and emotion commonly observed by humanity. AI, by contrast, follows intelligent rationality or technical rationality, which fulfills the iron law of scientific rationality through technical rules, leaving no room for dialogue and communication [11]. What algorithms pursue is the uniqueness of answers, with no room for polysemy, let alone metaphor. This hegemony of technical rationality ignores multiple humanistic values that cannot be digitally quantified, especially the artistic conception of poetry and the ambiguity of metaphor [12].

Literary criticism is essentially a practice of value rationality, and its fundamental feature that transcends instrumental rationality lies in the continuous inquiry

into the folds of human nature, the texture of culture and the depth of history. AI’s cognitive boundaries are strictly limited by the framework of training data and algorithm models, resulting in limitations in cultural understanding. The fragmentation of training data makes it difficult for AI to form an independent and coherent cultural background and ideology. Its historical cognition is a probabilistic puzzle of static events, lacking both the dynamic endowment of meaning to historical context by life experience and access to the fluidity of cultural texture.

### ***Practical perspective***

Faced with the impact of AI, scholars have begun to explore the human-machine collaborative model of literary criticism [13]. Jain systematically examined the enabling role of AI in literary criticism [14]. He found that LLMs have several significant advantages in literary criticism: First, they open up ideas and provide many possibilities for analyzing works. Second, they provide the framework for critical thinking and papers, with strong systematicness, logic and relevance. Third, they offer referentiality and intertextuality, enabling rapid retrieval and association of relevant texts. Fourth, their natural language processing capabilities far exceed the subjective judgment of humans. At the same time, he also pointed out the shortcomings of LLMs: Their answers have often remained essentially the same despite superficial changes, with a tendency to be standardized and formulated in advance, lacking specific insights tailored to work. Human-machine dialogue is an interactive process, and the mutual activation and selection between subject and object are quite important. Therefore, well-designed questions, as well as the revision and improvement of answers, are particularly essential [15].

From the perspective of reshaping the inherent tensions in literary interpretation, research explores feasible paths for human-machine collaboration. It suggests leveraging AI to fully utilize the strengths of big data and algorithms, thereby expanding the breadth and depth of literary interpretation. At the same time, caution is needed against systematic disruption of traditional interpretive frameworks brought by algorithmic logic. Critical subjects should maintain active subjective awareness in communication and raise the threshold for identifying aesthetic discoveries. Proactive human-machine cooperation can guide AI training and learning to place

greater emphasis on unique aesthetic values.

Broader discussions note that the era of digital intelligence prompts a redefinition of both humanity and literature. Neither simplistic criticism nor passive resistance is appropriate. Instead, the uncertain and transformative potential of AI may bring new freedom, vitality, and value to literary criticism. In this context, contemporary literary criticism should adopt participatory engagement, active imagination and reflection, and collaborative construction toward future forms of humanity and literature [16].

A comprehensive review of existing studies shows that the academic community has formed relatively rich achievements in the discussion of AI literary criticism, but there are still two significant research gaps. First, there is a lack of systematic comparative analysis between AI and human critical texts. Most existing studies discuss the limitations of AI criticism at the theoretical level or examine the boundary of AI capabilities through technical experiments, but rarely juxtapose AI-generated critical texts with those by renowned human critics for systematic textual comparison. The absence of such comparison makes the discussion on the differences between AI criticism and human criticism stay at the abstract theoretical level, and makes it difficult to be implemented in specific dimensions such as critical language, structure and judgment. Second, the discussion on the essential differences between AI criticism and human criticism needs to be further deepened. Although some scholars have pointed out that AI lacks aesthetic perception and intentionality, this assertion needs to be verified in the details of critical texts.

### **Empirical comparison of AI and human commentaries**

To systematically reveal the essential differences between AI criticism and human criticism, this paper selects five classic Tang poems as the research objects: Liu Changqing's *Seeking Shelter in Lotus Hill on a Snowy Night*, Wang Wei's *Autumn Evening in the Mountains*, Wang Changling's *Farewell to Xin Jian at Lotus Tower*, Cui Hao's *Yellow Crane Tower*, and Li Bai's *To Wang Lun*. The selected poems cover different poetic forms and themes, with abundant commentary materials from past dynasties, facilitating the acquisition of comparable critical texts by renowned human critics.

The AI commentaries are represented by texts generated by DeepSeek, obtained with a unified prompt to ensure consistent information acquisition.

### ***Liu Changqing's Seeking Shelter in Lotus Hill on a Snowy Night***

Liu Changqing's *Seeking Shelter in Lotus Hill on a Snowy Night* is a five-character jueju (quatrain), which outlines the scene of seeking shelter at a mountain family on a snowy night with extremely concise line drawing techniques. In its twenty characters, the first two couplets depict the lonely atmosphere of the twilight mountains and the thatched cottage in the freezing weather. The latter two break the silence with the dog barking at the firewood gate and the return of the traveler in the wind and snow, forming a poetic transition from cold loneliness to warmth.

The commentaries on this poem by famous critics of past dynasties mostly point directly to its aesthetic essence with concise language. Gu Lin of the Ming Dynasty called it "a work of true words and genuine feelings, with pure diction and ancient tone", summarizing the inherent quality of the poem in four characters with a clear and powerful judgment. Tang Ruxun of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty further pointed out: "This poem directly narrates real events, yet when read by those who are frustrated and down on their luck, it truly evokes boundless sorrow through the ages." The characteristic of this commentary lies in its focus on the reader's reading experience. The phrase "when read by those who are frustrated and down on their luck" embodies an immersive critical stance - the critic does not stand aloof from the work as an onlooker, but puts himself in the reader's position to feel the emotional resonance that the work may arouse. Huang Shucan of the Qing Dynasty offered an even more subtle commentary: "The first two couplets convey the atmosphere of loneliness; the barking dog and the returning traveler evoke a feeling of both surprise and joy, with the scenery depicted to superb perfection." The four characters "both surprise and joy" accurately capture the complex emotions of the moment of returning home on a snowy night - the unexpectedness of "surprise" and the warmth of "joy". This is an empathetic interpretation that projects the critic's own life experience into the poetic realm. Contemporary scholar Ge Xiaoyin analyzed it from the perspective of contrast: "The beauty lies in the subtle contrast between

the lonely environment of the white cottage on the cold mountain and the warm atmosphere of the dog barking at the firewood gate.” This contrast enables readers to feel the peaceful, relieved and warm mood of the traveler seeking shelter at a mountain family on a snowy twilight night from the extremely desolate and silent artistic conception. This commentary conveys the reading experience in delicate and gentle language, and the words “peaceful, relieved and warm” reflect the critic’s emotional participation, rather than cold technical analysis.

In contrast, the AI commentary generated by DeepSeek presents different characteristics. It first gives an overall qualitative definition of the poem: “With extremely concise brushwork, it outlines a picture of seeking shelter on a cold night, completing the poetic transition from distant view to close hearing, from cold loneliness to warmth in just twenty characters.” This, in turn, fully demonstrates Liu Changqing’s consummate skill in five-character poetry known as “the Great Wall of Five-Character Poetry”. It then conducts a line-by-line analysis: the first two couplets “depict the long journey in the boundless twilight, with the single character ‘far’ fully expressing the exhaustion of the journey”. The latter two “break the silence with sound, the silhouette of the returning traveler stepping through the snow and the barking of the dog at the firewood gate form an audio-visual montage”. It concludes with a summary: “The whole poem does not use a single character for ‘emotion’ yet lays out the life empathy of ‘returning home on a snowy night’ through scenic descriptions. The tension between the cold loneliness of the grey mountains and the cottage, and the warmth of the barking dog and the returning traveler, completes the poetic fixation of human warmth in the most concise words”.

Comparing the differences between the two, we can find that renowned human critics pay more attention to the reader’s experience evoked by the work, and expressions such as “when read by those who are frustrated and down on their luck” and “both surprise and joy” embody an immersive critical stance. AI, by contrast, focuses more on the structural characteristics of the work itself, with terms such as “poetic transition”, “tension” and “montage” pointing to the analysis of the work’s artistic techniques. In terms of linguistic style, human critics are concise, implicit and to the point. Gu Lin completed his commentary in eight characters, Tang Ruxun in sixteen.

AI, by contrast, unfolds the interpretation with a complete structure, forming a full framework from qualitative definition to analysis and then to summary. In terms of judgment mode, human critics make clear value judgments - “true words and genuine feelings”, “boundless sorrow through the ages”, “depicted to superb perfection” - judgments imbued with the critic’s emotional color and value stance. AI tends to make descriptive summaries - “life empathy”, “poetic fixation” - expressions that, although involving emotion, are more descriptions of the work’s effect than expressions of the critic’s own feelings. Most critically, the emotional complexity revealed by Huang Shucan’s four characters “both surprise and joy” is an insight beyond the reach of AI. Although AI can identify the “tension between cold loneliness and warmth”, it fails to capture the subtle experience of mixed surprise and joy, sorrow and delight.

#### ***Wang Wei’s Autumn Evening in the Mountains***

Wang Wei’s *Autumn Evening in the Mountains* is a masterpiece of landscape and pastoral poetry, outlining the tranquil scene of an autumn evening in the mountains with fresh and clear brushwork. The eight lines of the poem start with an overall introduction in the first couplet, depict scenery in the second, describe people in the third, and express aspirations in the final couplet, with a rigorous structure and ethereal artistic conception.

The discussions on this poem by famous critics of past dynasties include not only the analysis of specific techniques, but also the positioning of its artistic style, and even the revelation of the laws of literary creation. Zhou Ting of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty focused on the refinement of words: “The moon shines through the pine trees, the spring flows over the stones, extremely pure and extremely light. The characters ‘xuan (clamor)’ and ‘dong (stir)’ are attributed to ‘bamboo’ and ‘lotus’, which is marvelously ingenious and almost supernatural.” This commentary gives a high evaluation of Wang Wei’s artistic techniques with the words “marvelously ingenious and almost supernatural”. Wang Fuzhi of the same era examined the work in the context of literary history: “Every device used is innovative; this is how Wang Wei resembles Chu Guangxi.” This points out the connection between Wang Wei and Chu Guangxi, reflecting the critic’s historical consciousness. Huang Sheng of the Qing Dynasty offered the most profound commentary. He not only analyzed the work, but also placed it in the context of the evolution of the poet’s

creative career: “Wang Wei originally started with elaborate and ornate style, and added plainness in his later years, thus reaching the state of natural perfection.” This judgment reveals the evolution trajectory of Wang Wei’s artistic style - from elaborate ornateness in his early years to plainness in his later years, a natural result of “growing more mature with age and reaching plainness”. More valuably, Huang Sheng issued a warning: “People today fail to understand that it is through growing maturity that he reached plainness, and try to write such lines as soon as they pick up the brush. The harmful consequences of this are endless!” This is not only appreciation, but also a warning for literary creation, reflecting the critic’s sense of responsibility for later learners.

The AI commentary generated by DeepSeek presents a different analytical path. It first defines the poem as a masterpiece of Wang Wei’s aesthetic of “painting within poetry”, and then conducts a line-by-line analysis in the order of the first, second, third and final couplets: the first couplet uses the character kong (empty) to highlight the tranquility of the mountain residence. The second couplet “achieves the coexistence of motion and stillness fully demonstrating the ethereal Zen meaning”. The third couplet “breaks the tranquility with the characters xuan (clamor) and dong (stir)”. The final couplet “adapts the allusion from *Chu Ci (Songs of Chu)* expressing the poet’s aspiration to abandon the secular world and retreat to the mountains and forests”. It concludes with a summary: “The whole poem integrates the beauty of nature and the joy of life into one, entrusting the poet’s yearning for a transcendental and refined realm among the green pines and bright moon, green bamboos and emerald lotus flowers.”

Comparing the differences between the two, we can find that the analysis of renowned human critics has a stronger historical consciousness. For instance, Wang Fuzhi points out the connection between Wang Wei and Chu Guangxi, and Huang Sheng places the work in the evolution of the poet’s creative stages - perspectives that are difficult for AI to possess. In terms of theoretical intervention, human critics use aesthetic categories with classical Chinese aesthetic connotations such as “plainness” and “natural perfection”, while AI uses common-sense concepts such as “painting within poetry” and “coexistence of motion and stillness”. In terms of judgment mode, Huang Sheng’s commentary contains

both affirmation and warning – “thus reaching the state of natural perfection” is an affirmation of artistic achievement, while “the harmful consequences of this are endless” is a criticism of blind imitators. Such dialectical judgment reflects the critic’s independent thinking. In contrast, the AI commentary is full of affirmation without any critical judgment, showing a tendency to cater to users. In terms of linguistic characteristics, Zhou Ting’s “marvelously ingenious and almost supernatural” is insightful, Huang Sheng’s warning is sincere and earnest, and Ge Xiaoyin’s “lyrical melody” is vivid with synesthesia. AI’s language, by contrast, is plain, fluent and structurally neat, yet lacks impressive and unique expressions.

### *Wang Changling’s Farewell to Xin Jian at Lotus Tower*

Wang Changling’s *Farewell to Xin Jian at Lotus Tower* is a farewell poem. The first two couplets depict the scene of farewell, and the latter two entrust aspirations through a message, using the image of “a jade-like heart in a crystal vase” as a metaphor for the poet’s noble and unsullied character. The poem is imbued with deep emotion and a lofty style.

The commentaries on this poem by famous critics of past dynasties mostly focus on the connection between the image and the poet’s personality. Lu Shiyong of the Ming Dynasty commented: “The refinement of style is supreme. The character ‘gu (lonely)’ stands alone as a statement. The latter two couplets contain profound affection beyond words”, with refined language and clear judgment. Huang Sheng of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty traced the origin of the allusion: “An ancient poem says, ‘pure as ice in a jade vase’. Here the poet uses it to metaphorize the purity of his aspiration and conduct, yet adapts the ancient line with superb skill.” This commentary reveals the inheritance and innovation of the poem, reflecting the critic’s erudition. Huang Shucan of the Qing Dynasty offered the most historically conscious commentary: “The latter two couplets are words of entrustment, in which the poet describes his heart as pure and translucent, free from any earthly defilement. The *Old Book of Tang* records that Wang Changling ‘paid no heed to trivial conduct’; this line may have been written with a specific purpose.” He linked the poem to the record of Wang Changling “paying no heed to trivial conduct” in the *Old Book of Tang*, pointing out

that the poem “may have been written with a specific purpose”, interpreting the work in a specific historical context and enabling criticism to transcend mere textual analysis. Contemporary scholar Ge Xiaoyin further revealed the internal connection between the images: “An intentional or unintentional correspondence is established between the Chu Mountain isolated in the cold river and the metaphor of a jade-like heart in a crystal vase.” This correspondence makes it easy for readers to associate the image of the poet with his pure and noble character, unyielding and aloof from the secular world. This commentary reveals the deep resonance between the “Chu Mountain” and the “jade-like heart” - the “loneliness” of the Chu Mountain is exactly the inevitable situation of a person with a pure and noble heart in the secular world.

The AI commentary generated by DeepSeek presents a different interpretive path. It first depicts the overall atmosphere of the poem: “Starting with the vast night scene of cold rain connecting the river, it outlines the desolate atmosphere of farewell.” It then analyzes the first two couplets: “Seeing off the guest at dawn, facing the lonely shadow of the Chu Mountain alone. The mountain is inherently emotionless, yet the character ‘gu (lonely)’ projects the poet’s emotion onto the scenery, condensing the sorrow of separation into an image of standing alone between heaven and earth.” It goes on to analyze the latter two couplets: “The poet uses the metaphor of ‘a jade-like heart in a crystal vase’ to describe himself, both responding to the concerns of his relatives and friends in Luoyang, and laying bare his innermost feelings with the crystal clear and translucent image.” This metaphor conveys that despite the ups and downs of official career, he still adheres to his noble and unsullied character. It concludes with a summary: “This technique of sublimating the sorrow of separation into a spiritual confession enables the farewell poem to break through the stereotype of sentimental melancholy, erecting a monument of personality in the vastness and loneliness.”

Comparing the differences between the two, we can find that renowned human critics have a stronger awareness of contextual association. Huang Shucan links the poem to the author’s life, pointing out that it “may have been written with a specific purpose”. Huang Sheng traces the origin of the allusion, revealing the inheritance of the poem. Although AI also mentions “the ups and downs of

official career”, it is only a general summary, lacking specific historical association. In terms of image interpretation, Ge Xiaoyin reveals the internal resonance between the “Chu Mountain” and the “jade-like heart”, an insight into the deep structure of the poem. AI interprets “the lonely Chu Mountain” and “the jade-like heart in a crystal vase” separately, failing to establish a connection between the two. In terms of judgment mode, Huang Shucan’s “may have been written with a specific purpose” embodies a historian’s perspective, a prudent inference about the creative background. AI’s “break through the stereotype of sentimental melancholy” and “monument of personality” are poetic evaluations with bold and lyrical overtones. In terms of linguistic characteristics, Lu Shiyong’s “profound affection beyond words” is implicit and reserved, Huang Sheng’s “adapted with superb skill” is plain and pertinent. AI’s language, by contrast, is bolder, even with propagandistic undertones.

#### ***Cui Hao’s Yellow Crane Tower***

Cui Hao’s *Yellow Crane Tower*, hailed as “the best seven-character regulated verse of the Tang Dynasty”, is a masterpiece of nostalgic themes. The first four lines of the poem tell the legend of immortals riding cranes, while the latter four depict the scenery and feelings of climbing the tower, combining emptiness and reality, interweaving time and space, with a vast artistic conception.

The discussions on this poem by famous critics of past dynasties are the most abundant, forming a complete critical tradition from classic positioning to technical analysis. Yan Yu of the Southern Song Dynasty established its classic status in Canglang Shihua (Poetry Talks of Canglang): “Among the seven-character regulated verses of the Tang Dynasty, Cui Hao’s *Yellow Crane Tower* should be ranked first.” This judgment has had a far-reaching influence and become the starting point for discussions in later generations. Wang Fuzhi of the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty conveyed the reading experience with figurative language: “It soars like a roc and strides like an elephant, amazing readers with its breadth and profundity.” Shen Deqian of the Qing Dynasty summarized it from the height of artistic realm: “The conception precedes the image, the spirit travels beyond the words. Written with unrestrained brushwork, it thus claims the marvel of the ages.” Yu Biyun of modern times extracted the core aesthetic

characteristics of the poem: “Its excellence lies in the ethereality of its conception and the loftiness of its entrusted emotion.”

Modern and contemporary scholars have conducted more specific and in-depth analysis. Yuan Xingpei analyzed it from the perspective of phonology: “The lingering emotion is as boundless as the clouds and water. It breaks the tonal and rhythmic rules of regulated verse, abandoning the musical beauty of tonal harmony, yet achieving another musical effect that stirs the soul.” He pointed out that the alliterative word “huang he (yellow crane)” appears three times in a row, creating a new sense of rhythm that appropriately expresses the nostalgic feeling evoked by climbing the *Yellow Crane Tower*. Yu Shucheng analyzed it from the perspective of antithesis: “It is precisely by abandoning antithesis that the poem avoids the flat and slow tone, enabling the conception and spirit to be expressed freely and smoothly.” He pointed out that the first half of the poem does not rigidly adhere to antithesis, and it is precisely this “break with convention” that endows the work with an unrestrained momentum. The analyses of both scholars closely link technical analysis with aesthetic effects, revealing the internal mechanism of how “breaking with convention” achieves the “masterpiece of the ages”.

The AI commentary generated by DeepSeek integrates the above viewpoints: “With a brushwork that combines emptiness and reality, it constructs an artistic conception that interweaves time and space. Yan Yu commented in *Poetry Talks of Canglang* that this poem “should be ranked first among the seven-character regulated verses of the Tang Dynasty.” This is precisely because it breaks the neat constraints of regulated verse, and depicts the life perception of the climber when facing infinite time and space with simple and unsophisticated, integrated brushwork. The AI commentary can quote Yan Yu’s evaluation and summarize characteristics such as “combination of emptiness and reality” and “interweaving of time and space”. However, its analysis of “breaking with convention” stays at the general level of “breaks the neat constraints of regulated verse”, failing to conduct in-depth analysis from specific dimensions such as phonology and antithesis like Yuan Xingpei and Yu Shucheng.

Comparing the differences between the two, we can find that renowned human critics have a clearer positioning of the work in art history - Yan Yu’s “first” and Shen

Deqian’s “marvel of the ages” are independent value judgments. Although AI quotes Yan Yu’s evaluation, it does not form its own independent judgment, which is essentially a replication of human viewpoints. In terms of technical analysis, Yuan Xingpei and Yu Shucheng conduct analysis from specific dimensions and put forward original insights such as “musical effect that stirs the soul” and “free and smooth expression of conception and spirit”. AI’s “breaks the neat constraints of regulated verse” is a general statement lacking specificity. In terms of theoretical contribution, renowned human critics constantly put forward new concepts - “ethereality of conception”, “stirs the soul” - promoting the deepening of the understanding of the work. AI, by contrast, integrates existing viewpoints without putting forward new insights. It can be said that AI commentary is an “integration” rather than a “transcendence” of human criticism.

### ***Li Bai’s To Wang Lun***

Li Bai’s *To Wang Lun* is a farewell poem that expresses profound friendship through simple language. The first two lines narrate the scene where Wang Lun comes to see Li Bai off by singing as Li Bai is about to depart by boat. The last two lines convey emotion, comparing the water of Peach Blossom Pool to Wang Lun’s friendship with the phrase “bu ji (cannot match)”, achieving an artistic leap.

The discussions on this poem by famous critics of past dynasties accurately captured the artistic effect achieved by the two characters “bu ji (cannot match)”. Xie Zhen of the Ming Dynasty incorporated it into traditional poetic categories: “Poetry has four modes: xing (affective image), qu (charm), yi (conception), and li (reason). Li Bai’s *To Wang Lun* says: ‘The Peach Blossom Pool is a thousand feet deep, yet it cannot match the affection Wang Lun has for me in seeing me off.’ This is xing.” Shen Deqian of the Qing Dynasty offered the most incisive commentary: “To say that Wang Lun’s affection is as deep as the thousand feet of the pool water would be a mediocre line. The superb artistic conception lies only in the transition of the two characters.” He pointed out that the “transition” is the key technique - to directly say “the affection is as deep as the pool water” is mediocre; to use “cannot match” to make a progressive turn makes it a masterpiece for the ages. Jiao Yuanxi commented with a strong emotional expression, admiring Li Bai’s genius: “‘The Peach Blossom Pool is

a thousand feet deep' - what would you expect when you cover the next line? Yet it says, 'yet it cannot match the affection Wang Lun has for me in seeing me off'. What momentum, what weight. Moreover, it is just everyday spoken language, never arranged or polished. That is why it is a masterpiece for the ages." This commentary guides readers to experience the artistic effect of the two characters "cannot match" in the form of rhetorical questions, full of admiration for Li Bai's talent. Li Ying analyzed it from the perspective of "foil": "It says that the affection of Wang Lun seeing him off is extremely deep; to say it directly would be tasteless. To use the Peach Blossom Pool as a foil gives it endless layers of meaning." Contemporary scholar Dai Jianye conveyed a profound insight in colloquial language: "The ancients called it 'making a progressive turn'. The line between genius and fool is only those two characters", condensing the complex artistic law into a popular expression.

The AI commentary generated by DeepSeek presents a different analytical path: "The metaphor in the latter two couplets is extraordinary. The poet compares the invisible friendship with the 'thousand feet deep' Peach Blossom Pool water, with the two characters 'cannot match' as the finishing touch, turning the abstract into the concrete, making the profound friendship tangible and perceptible." AI can identify the rhetorical function of the two characters "cannot match", pointing out characteristics such as "extraordinary metaphor" and "turning the abstract into the concrete", but fails to reveal the core technique of "transition" and "making a progressive turn".

Comparing the differences between the two, we can find that renowned human critics have a more accurate grasp of the core technique. Shen Deqian's "transition" and Dai Jianye's "making a progressive turn" are both accurate summaries of the artistic effect of the two characters "cannot match". Although AI points out the two characters "cannot match", it fails to reveal the "progressive" effect they achieve, staying at the level of "metaphor". In terms of linguistic judgment, Jiao Yuanxi's admiration of "what momentum, what weight" and Dai Jianye's sigh of "the line between genius and fool is only those two characters" are imbued with strong emotional color. AI's "simple language" and "extraordinary metaphor" are steady statements, lacking that inspiring admiration. In terms of theoretical classification, Xie Zhen incorporates the work into the

category of "xing", reflecting the theoretical consciousness of traditional poetics. AI, by contrast, makes no theoretical positioning. This case fully demonstrates that AI can identify rhetorical devices, but it is difficult to grasp the subtlety of artistic leaps.

Based on the comparative analysis of the five poems, the core differences between AI and the commentaries of renowned human critics can be summarized in the following aspects.

In terms of analytical focus, renowned human critics pay attention to how the work "touches the reader" and how the techniques "achieve ingenuity". This is reflected in expressions like "when read by those who are frustrated and down on their luck, it truly evokes boundless sorrow through the ages," "both surprise and joy," and "growing more mature with age and reaching plainness". These expressions all point to the emotional effect and artistic achievement of the work. AI, by contrast, focuses on "What the work is" and "How the structure is arranged" - expressions such as "poetic transition", "tension", "montage", and "the first couplet, the second couplet" are descriptions of the work's characteristics and structure.

In terms of judgment mode, renowned human critics make clear value judgments - such as "true words and genuine feelings", "boundless sorrow through the ages", and "the superb artistic conception lies only in the transition of the two characters". These judgments are imbued with the critic's emotional color and value stance. AI tends to make descriptive summaries - "complete the poetic transition", "embody the emotion", "fix in poetry" - expressions that are descriptions of the work's effect rather than expressions of the critic's own feelings.

In terms of linguistic style, renowned human critics have distinct personalities, insightful views, and are concise and comprehensive - Gu Lin's eight characters, Tang Ruxun's sixteen characters, and Huang Shucan's four characters "both surprise and joy" are all highly expressive. AI's language, by contrast, is standardized and procedural, structurally complete, plain and fluent, forming a fixed mode from qualitative definition to analysis and then to summary.

In terms of theoretical depth, renowned human critics put forward aesthetic categories such as "xing", "plainness" and "natural perfection", and link the work to the poet's creative context and the tradition of literary history. AI, by contrast, integrates common-sense concepts such as

“painting within poetry” and “combination of emptiness and reality”, lacking theoretical innovation.

In terms of emotional participation, renowned human critics adopt an immersive and admiring stance - “when read by those who are frustrated and down on their luck”, “what momentum, what weight”. AI, by contrast, adopts an onlooking and declarative stance - “evokes in the reader”, “touches the reader”.

In terms of historical consciousness, renowned human critics link the work to the author’s life, creative stages, and reception history. Examples include Huang Shucan linking it to Wang Changling “paying no heed to trivial conduct” and Huang Sheng pointing out that Wang Wei “originally started with elaborate and ornate style, and added plainness in his later years”. AI, by contrast, only mentions history in general terms, lacking specific association.

These differences are not differences in degree, but fundamental differences in cognitive activities. Human criticism originates from intentional aesthetic experience, grasps the overall artistic conception of the work through contemplative interpretation, makes value judgments, and uses language with distinct personality. AI criticism, by contrast, is based on algorithmic processing, decomposes the elements of the work through computational analysis, outputs descriptive data, and uses language that tends to be procedural.

### Roots of the differences

The aforementioned empirical comparison reveals the systematic differences between AI and renowned human critics in the commentary of ancient Tang poems. Human criticism originates from intentional aesthetic experience, grasps the overall artistic conception of the work through contemplative interpretation, makes value judgments, and uses language with distinct personality. AI criticism is based on algorithmic processing, decomposes the elements of the work through computational analysis, outputs descriptive data, and uses language that tends to be procedural. These differences are not differences in degree, but fundamental differences in the nature of cognitive activities. This chapter will conduct an in-depth analysis of the deep-seated roots of the differences from four dimensions: intentionality, embodied experience, value judgment, and linguistic individuality.

#### *Differences in intentionality*

The starting point of human criticism is the individual’s

aesthetic experience of being “touched” by the work. This touch originates from the critic’s life experience, cultural memory and emotional structure - when facing a work, the critic is first “moved” by the work, and then tries to understand and explain the source of this movement. When Liu Yongji wrote the commentary “depicted as if seen before the eyes” when reading *Seeking Shelter in Lotus Hill on a Snowy Night*, it was backed by the aesthetic accumulation of long-term immersion in classical Chinese poetry. When Dai Jianye sighed that “the line between genius and fool is only those two characters”, it originated from his years of study and perception of poetic language. When Huang Shucan commented “both surprise and joy”, it was an empathetic interpretation that projected his own life experience into the poetic realm. The critical text thus bears the “subjective imprint” of the critic - the individual’s cultural background, aesthetic preference, and life experience all permeate it.

The motivation for criticism lies in the subject’s strong interest in the object of criticism. On the one hand, it stems from the aesthetic pleasure generated by the critic when reading the work; on the other hand, he realizes that the work is of great significance for understanding himself, the times, and cognition. The purpose of criticism is to transform the intuitive experience in the reading process into rational cognition, and then make judgments based on a certain value scale. Literary works are the source of criticism, not the object of criticism, and the impulse of criticism arises from the interaction between the text and the reader. The reader’s joy, hope, shock, fear, and belief may be wavering, and the reader is eager to describe and explain his various artistic reactions when immersed in the aesthetic object. As Zeng Wei pointed out, the motivation for criticism lies in the encounter between the subject and the text, which is sublimated in the interaction between the text, the critical subject and the real world.

AI criticism has no such motivation. When DeepSeek comments on *To Wang Lun*, it can identify the metaphorical technique, but this is not because it is “touched” by the two characters “bu ji (cannot match)”. Rather, it is because the line “The Peach Blossom Pool is a thousand feet deep, yet it cannot match the affection Wang Lun has for me in seeing me off” is labeled with the highest probability of “metaphorical technique” in

the training data. AI criticism is the “processing” of the input text, not the “response” to the work. It imitates the form of criticism, but lacks the motivation for criticism - this lack of motivation is the most fundamental difference between AI criticism and human criticism. As Zeng Wei pointed out, the essence of intelligent criticism is “algorithmic criticism”, whose ultimate goal is to meet user needs, and its reasoning line will change with the adjustment of user needs. The love for literature and professionalism shown by the LLM in criticism is just an act in front of the “employer”, pretending to be active.

This dilemma of lack of intentionality is rooted in the fundamental difference in cognitive mechanisms between AI and humans. Intentionality, semanticity, meaningfulness and contentfulness are the fundamental characteristics of human intelligence pointing to the external world. It is precisely because of intentionality that humans can independently associate the processed object with the external world, showing initiative, flexibility and consciousness. AI’s intelligence, by contrast, only performs high-speed operations in a closed symbol system, without truly pointing to the outside world, resonating with it, or empathizing with human subjects. LLMs read literature in the same way as they read historical documents, news, legal documents, scientific reports, charts and formulas, ignoring the uniqueness of literary texts.

#### ***Differences in experience***

Human criticism is inseparable from embodied cognition - the critic perceives the world through the body as a medium, and brings this perception into reading. When Ge Xiaoyin commented on *Autumn Evening in the Mountains* that it is “just like a quiet and beautiful lyrical melody”, this is a synesthetic expression that mobilizes auditory experience. When Huang Shucan commented on *Seeking Shelter in Lotus Hill on a Snowy Night* as “both surprise and joy”, this is empathy that projects his own life experience into the poetic realm. The critic’s physical experience, emotional memory, and life experience all permeate the critical text, making criticism a “warm” discourse.

Chen Qin and Chen Yali conducted a systematic analysis of the role of embodied cognition in literary understanding. They pointed out that human understanding is essentially a simulated practice of embodied mind, a process built on the interactive experience between the subject and the world.

Understanding is not a simple symbolic operation, but the construction of meaning through mental simulation that activates embodied experience. Taking Li Shangyin’s *North of the Luoyang City on a Rainy Night* as an example, readers resonate with the image world constructed by the poet through multi-modal simulation of vision, hearing, and touch. This understanding relies on the interaction between embodied experience and metaphorical reasoning, completing the cognitive leap from embodied experience to simulation, then to understanding, and finally to aesthetics.

Metaphorical cognition is a typical example of mental simulation. Metaphors make complex and abstract concepts easy to understand by mapping familiar bodily experiences to abstract domains. Wang Wei’s lines “You have come from my hometown; you must know what has happened there. When you left, by the window in front of the cold plum tree, had the flowers bloomed yet?” activate the visual and taste memories of homesickness through the question about the plum blossoms, which is essentially a projective simulation of embodied experience into the textual world. The reason why literary works can be imagined and resonated with is precisely because they are closely related to the reader’s life experience and historical memory. Triggering emotions such as sympathy, compassion or resentment towards the characters through mental simulation. Whether it is literature, painting or music, readers transform it into part of art criticism through the process of embodied experience-simulation-understanding-aesthetics.

AI has no body, no sensory experience, and cannot “experience” the changes of cold and warmth when returning home on a snowy night, nor can it “feel” the clarity of the Peach Blossom Pool water. Its understanding of images stays at the semantic level – “wind and snow” is a symbol of “cold”, “pool water” is a measure of “depth”, rather than perceptible bodily experience. Experiments by Chen Qin and Chen Yali illustrate this phenomenon. AI, when faced with the line “The setting sun spreads across the water, half the river is shimmering green and half is red”, deconstructs it into calculations of spectral wavelength and water surface refractive index. In doing so, the poem’s temporal and spatial artistic conception is reduced to a parameter matrix. Although multimodal LLMs have been able to establish statistical associations between visual symbols

and literary images through the joint embedding space of vision and language, such associations are vastly different from the essence of human conscious activities. When humans gaze at the setting sun, consciousness always points to the life experience at a specific historical moment, while AI's "gaze" is only a de-temporalized and de-contextualized data processing process. In the foreseeable future, the compensatory simulation of embodied experience by AI will ultimately be difficult to break through the ultimate barrier of aesthetic subjectivity.

### ***Differences in value rationality***

Human criticism is not only the interpretation of the work, but also the expression of the critic's literary concepts, aesthetic ideals and even life beliefs. When Huang Sheng commented on Wang Wei's *Autumn Evening in the Mountains*, he warned that "People today fail to understand that it is through growing maturity that he reached plainness, and try to write such lines as soon as they pick up the brush. The harmful consequences of this are endless!" - this is not only appreciation, but also a warning for literary creation. When Huang Shucan commented on Wang Changling, he linked it to the historical fact that Wang Changling "paid no heed to trivial conduct", associating the poem with the author's personality, embodying the critical tradition of "knowing the person and discussing the world". When Shen Deqian commented on *To Wang Lun*, he pointed out that "the superb artistic conception lies only in the transition of the two characters", which is not only analysis, but also the revelation of artistic laws. Jiao Yuanxi's admiration of "what momentum, what weight" and Dai Jianye's sigh of "the line between genius and fool is only those two characters" are all imbued with strong emotional judgment and value stance.

Literary criticism is essentially a practice of value rationality, and its fundamental feature that transcends instrumental rationality lies in the continuous inquiry into the folds of human nature, the texture of culture and the depth of history. This intellectual activity involves not only the dialectical interaction of intersubjectivity but also requires the critic to establish a reflective dialogue mechanism in the dialectical relationship between individual experience and social history. As a "dialogue partner", the critic forms multiple dialogues with the text, others and himself, breaking through the dilemma of "self-circulation", and expanding the

interpretive practice into the examination and reshaping of the subject. It enables criticism to establish true critical independence in the cracks of refusing to collude with the mainstream discourse.

When reflective practice reaches the level of creative thinking, literary criticism has the capacity for paradigm generation. Reconstructing textual meaning to give birth to new critical paradigms and promoting literary production and reproduction is exactly the dialectics of literary criticism from deconstruction to construction. The history of 20th-century literary criticism provides an empirical field for the paradigm generation function of reflective capacity. Formalism subverted traditional empirical criticism and reconstructed the standard of literariness with text-centrism; structuralism broke through the worship of text closure by formalism; deconstruction in turn broke through the certainty of structuralism. This cognitive mode of "creating in reflection, reflecting in creation" enables literary criticism to always maintain the vitality of paradigm renewal.

AI criticism lacks such a value dimension. It will not issue warnings like Huang Sheng, nor will it link the work to the author's life like Huang Shucan, nor will it sigh like Dai Jianye that "the line between genius and fool is only those two characters". AI criticism is "safe" - it only describes, does not judge; it only summarizes, does not warn. As Chen Qin and Chen Yali pointed out, AI's cognitive boundaries are strictly limited by the framework of training data and algorithm models, resulting in limitations in cultural understanding. The fragmentation of training data makes it difficult for AI to form an independent and coherent cultural background and ideology. Although all records of human civilization can be used as training corpuses, these corpuses are only solidified, de-contextualized historical slices. Therefore, AI's historical cognition is a probabilistic puzzle of static events, lacking both the dynamic endowment of meaning to historical context by life experience and access to the fluidity of cultural texture. Its cultural understanding stops at the knowledge level "about" history, and cannot reach the existential level of humans "as" the subject of history.

The optimization orientation of the loss function further dispels the value judgment indispensable in literary criticism. AI's learning mechanism is similar to the reinforcement theory in behavioral psychology, whose

goal is to minimize prediction errors rather than make value judgments. This mechanism tends to cater to the mainstream narrative, which not only aggravates the closure of cognitive boundaries, but also replaces “correctness” with majority recognition in the statistical sense, and reduces moral judgment to a probability game. AI cannot “comprehensively understand itself like a ‘self-conscious entity’”, cannot reconstruct values through reflection, nor can it adjust motivations and goals according to changes in the situation. Its so-called “reflection” is only the technical iteration of optimizing existing paths, rather than true self-examination and value reconstruction.

### ***Differences in linguistic expressions***

The language of human critics has its own unique characteristics: Shen Deqian is concise and comprehensive, Jiao Yuanxi is impassioned, Ge Xiaoyin is delicate and gentle, Yuan Xingpei is elegant and profound. These languages are not only carriers of information, but also the presentation of the critic’s personality. The language of outstanding critics itself is often literary, able to convey aesthetic experience in an infectious way. The critic’s academic background, linguistic style, and emotional tendency all leave traces in the critical text. The reason why people are deeply impressed by the sincerity of Zhu Guangqian, the agility of Li Jianwu, the erudition of Qian Zhongshu, and the precision of T. S. Eliot in criticism is precisely because of the outstanding personal endowment revealed in their criticism.

AI’s language, by contrast, tends to be “standardized”. A comparison of the AI commentaries on the five poems reveals a highly similar structure: first, the opening thesis (“outlines... with the brushwork of...”), then line-by-line analysis (“the first couplet... the second couplet...”), and finally a concluding summary (“the whole poem...”). The sentence patterns are mainly “with the brushwork of...”, “a masterpiece of...”, “the whole poem...”, which are grammatically correct, yet show little individuality. Zhou Xian’s experiments show that the answers provided by LLMs often remain essentially the same despite superficial changes, with a tendency to be standardized and formatted in advance. Zeng Wei pointed out that the critical texts generated by LLMs have obvious “formatted” characteristics, with some obscure and esoteric terms showing traces of coinage.

The root of this linguistic proceduralization lies in the

generation mechanism of AI. AI generates text by predicting the most probable sequence of words, with a natural tendency towards “safe” and “conventional” expressions. In language models, the choice of each word is based on probability calculation - the model will select the word that appears most frequently in the training data and collocates most naturally with the context. This mechanism ensures the fluency and correctness of the output, but also stifles the possibility of linguistic expression. Human critics can create new expressions to convey unique feelings, break conventions for more accurate judgment, and use exaggerated language to convey strong emotions. AI can only choose within established language patterns, and cannot use language creatively like humans.

A deeper problem is that AI’s language has nothing to do with its “inner world”. The reason why the language of human critics is infectious is that it is the externalization of inner feelings - the critic first has a unique experience and judgment, and then looks for appropriate language to express this experience and judgment. The relationship between language and feeling is that of expression and expressed. AI’s language, by contrast, has nothing to do with any inner feeling, it is only a sequence of symbols generated based on probability calculation. As Zeng Wei pointed out, although the critical texts generated by LLMs show emotion, it is calculated emotion, which does not point to the reading process of the LLM, nor to the external world, and has nothing to do with the mind of the critical subject. This separation of emotion and language makes AI’s language, although correct, difficult to truly touch people.

To sum up, the differences between AI and human criticism are rooted in four deep-seated dimensions: At the subject level, AI conducts “criticism without a subject”, while humans conduct “criticism with a subject” - the former originates from algorithmic processing, while the latter originates from intentional aesthetic experience. At the process level, AI conducts “computational” analysis, while humans conduct “contemplative” interpretation - the former decomposes the work into quantifiable features, while the latter activates embodied experience through mental simulation. At the judgment level, AI outputs descriptive data, while humans make value judgments - the former is based on probability statistics, while the latter is based on ethical reflection and historical consciousness. At the

linguistic level, AI produces procedural output, while humans make individualized expressions - the former selects the most probable sequence of words, while the latter uses language creatively.

These differences cannot be easily bridged by technological development. They are rooted in the intentionality, embodied experience, value care and creative potential that humans possess as living beings - these are exactly the fundamental attributes of literary criticism as “the study of man”. AI can simulate the form of criticism, but it is difficult to possess the soul of criticism, it can integrate existing viewpoints, but it is difficult to produce original insights, it can output correct language, but it is difficult to convey true feelings. Recognizing this is not to deny the value of AI in literary criticism, but to better understand its boundaries and lay a foundation for the practice of human-machine collaborative criticism.

## Conclusion

### *Core findings*

Overall, there are essential differences between AI criticism and human criticism in four dimensions:

At the subject dimension, human criticism originates from intentional aesthetic experience. When facing a work, the critic is first “touched” by the work, and thus the critical text bears the “subjective imprint” of the critic. AI criticism, by contrast, is “criticism without a subject”. Its starting point is not aesthetic experience, but the algorithmic “processing” of the input text. The “attitude” shown in the criticism is either the “majority opinion” from data calculation, or externally imposed by the user through prompts. AI imitates the form of criticism, but lacks the motivation for criticism.

At the process dimension, human criticism is “contemplative”. The critic immerses himself in the work, ponders it repeatedly, mobilizes his own knowledge reserve and life experience, and conducts multiple rounds of “dialogue” with the work. AI criticism, by contrast, is “computational”. It decomposes the work into quantifiable features - image density, emotional curve, metrical pattern, etc., and then generates judgments through pattern recognition and statistical inference. Human criticism activates embodied experience through mental simulation, completing the cognitive leap from embodied experience to simulation, then to understanding, and finally to aesthetics. AI’s

“understanding” stays at the semantic level, making it difficult to grasp the “overall artistic conception” of the work.

At the judgment dimension, human criticism is “value-based”. The critic not only analyzes “What the work is”, but also judges “Whether the work is good” and “Why it is good”. Such value judgments are often normative, expressing the critic’s literary concepts and aesthetic ideals. AI criticism, by contrast, is “descriptive”. The scores, classifications and labels it outputs are essentially statistical inferences based on training data, rather than true value judgments. AI cannot conduct ethical judgment and historical reflection, and its “reflection” is only the technical iteration of optimizing existing paths.

At the linguistic dimension, the language of human criticism has distinct “individual characteristics”. The critic’s academic background, linguistic style, and emotional tendency all leave traces in the critical text. The language of AI criticism, by contrast, tends to be “procedural”. Its output has a highly similar structure and sentence pattern, which is grammatically correct, yet shows little individuality. This is because AI generates text by predicting the most probable sequence of words, with a natural tendency towards “safe” and “conventional” expressions.

These differences are not differences in degree, but fundamental differences in the nature of cognitive activities. Human criticism is “contemplation”, while AI criticism is “calculation”; human criticism is “value judgment”, while AI criticism is “data output”; human criticism is “individual expression”, while AI criticism is “procedural output”. They are two cognitive activities of different natures.

This study responds to the core question of “Whether AI can conduct genuine literary criticism”: AI can generate “criticism-like texts”, but its essence is “calculation” rather than “contemplation”, “data output” rather than “value judgment”, “pattern recognition” rather than “aesthetic touch”. AI criticism and human criticism are two cognitive activities of different natures; the former is the “imitation” rather than the “replacement” of the latter. This finding not only responds to the myth of technological optimism - AI is far from replacing human critics; it also transcends the simplistic negation of humanistic conservatism - AI criticism does have its unique value and function. More importantly, this

finding deepens the understanding of the essence of literary criticism. What makes criticism lies not in the integration of information, but in value judgment; not in the completeness of structure, but in the originality of insight; not in the standardization of language, but in the expression of individuality. The core of literary criticism has always been the interpretation of meaning rooted in life experience, and the existential inquiry of the critical subject in the historical context.

#### **Research limitations and prospects**

This study has certain limitations. First, the five Tang poems selected are all classic masterpieces with a high frequency of appearance in the training data, and different findings may be obtained from the comparison of lesser-known works. Second, the AI model selected is only DeepSeek, and the output of different models may vary. Future research can compare the commentary characteristics of multiple AI models. Third, the commentaries by renowned human critics span different dynasties, with profound evolution in critical concepts and methods. This study collectively refers to them as “human criticism” to highlight the overall difference from AI criticism, but at the cost of examining the diversity within human criticism.

Future research can be expanded in the following directions: First, expanding the scope of cases to include literary works of different eras and styles to test the universality of the conclusions of this study. Second, comparing the output of multiple AI models to analyze the differences in literary criticism capabilities of different models. Third, exploring the practical paths of human-machine collaborative criticism, and testing the effects of different collaborative models through experimental research. Fourth, conducting an in-depth discussion on the impact of AI criticism on literary education, and studying how to guide students to use AI tools reasonably in teaching. Today, when artificial intelligence is reshaping the way of knowledge production, literary criticism needs to embrace technological change with an open attitude. At the same time, it must adhere to the core value of humanistic spirit, and open up a new realm in the integration of technology and humanities.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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