

Research on the Paradigm Transformation of Cultivating Historical Thinking in “Outline of Modern Chinese History” Driven by Generative AI

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Abstract: Against the background of digital transformation in education, generative AI has opened up new paths for cultivating historical thinking in the university course *Outline of Modern Chinese History*. Based on the perspective of teaching content and in accordance with relevant educational policies, this paper systematically expounds the functional positioning of generative AI in cultivating college students' historical thinking, and analyzes practical problems in the transformation of teaching paradigms, such as insufficient content adaptation and fragmented presentation of historical facts. Combined with specific chapters of the course, it puts forward targeted transformation strategies from the perspective of teaching methodology, supplemented by corresponding teaching cases. The research aims to solve the problem of insufficient integration between generative AI and the course teaching, improve the effectiveness of historical thinking cultivation, and provide practical references for the teaching innovation of the *Outline* course.

Keywords: Generative AI; College history teaching; Historical thinking; Paradigm transformation

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1. Introduction

The digital transformation of education has become an important breakthrough in building a strong country in education. Nine departments, including the Ministry of Education, have put forward guiding guidelines centered on the deep integration of artificial intelligence and education, as well as the innovative development of ideological and political courses. As a key course to cultivate college students' historical thinking and implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, the *Outline of Modern Chinese History* serves as an important way to enhance students' historical identity and patriotism. Cultivating historical thinking ability is crucial to guiding students to “enter” history rather than merely “memorize” history. Through a series of transferable thinking methods, it naturally nurtures students' judgment, understanding

and values in the analysis of historical phenomena, important figures and major events. At present, generative AI is widely used in the teaching of *Outline of Modern Chinese History*, but its application is plagued by historical errors and content mismatches, which fail to meet the requirements of the reform and innovation of ideological and political courses in the new era. To implement the spirit of digital education policies, resolve practical dilemmas in cultivating historical thinking in the course, and realize the optimization and upgrading of teaching paradigms, this research is theoretically and practically necessary ^[1].

2. Difficulties in the paradigm transformation of cultivating historical thinking in *Outline of Modern Chinese History* driven by generative AI

2.1. Insufficient content adaptation and poor relevance

There is an obvious disconnection between the content supplied by generative AI and the teaching needs of *Outline of Modern Chinese History*. Most of the content generated is a pile of general historical materials, which does not fit well the key and difficult points of the course or the cognitive characteristics of students. AI cannot accurately match the core requirements of each teaching module, nor can it adjust the depth and presentation of content according to teaching progress and knowledge gradients, resulting in a disconnect between the generated content and classroom connection ^[2].

2.2. Fragmented historical facts and an unbalanced system

When processing modern Chinese history content, generative AI easily falls into the trap of fragmented presentation, focusing only on the isolated interpretation of single historical events and figures, lacking the sorting and integration of the overall context of historical development. The content often separates the internal connections between historical events, ignores the continuity and integrity of historical development, and fails to help students form a complete knowledge structure of modern Chinese history ^[3]. Fragmented presentation leads to students' inability to accurately grasp the laws of historical development, resulting in one-sided historical cognition and inhibiting the development of systematic and holistic thinking in historical thinking.

2.3. Insufficient content depth and weak critical thinking

Most content related to the *Outline* course generated by generative AI only provides superficial descriptions of historical facts, lacking in-depth analysis and dialectical interpretation of historical events and phenomena. It cannot dig out the historical background, essential connotation and era value behind historical facts, nor guide students to conduct in-depth thinking and dialectical analysis of historical issues. The shallow teaching content supply cannot meet the needs of cultivating students' historical critical thinking and evaluation abilities, thus limiting the depth and breadth of students' historical thinking ^[4].

2.4. Rigid value integration and insufficient guidance

When generating content for the *Outline* course, generative AI fails to naturally embed values such as patriotism and national spirit into the interpretation of historical facts, but often conveys value orientations through rigid preaching or simple superposition ^[5]. The generated content often separates the internal connection between historical facts and value guidance, with value expression being merely formal, failing to enable students to be naturally influenced by values in the process of understanding historical facts. This rigid

value indoctrination weakens the core function of fostering virtue through education in the *Outline* course, making it difficult to achieve the organic unity of historical thinking cultivation and value guidance^[6].

3. Paths for the paradigm transformation of cultivating historical thinking in *Outline of Modern Chinese History* driven by generative AI

3.1. Optimize content adaptation to meet teaching needs

Teachers should accurately sort out the knowledge gradients of each teaching module and students' cognitive laws according to the teaching objectives, key and difficult points of *Outline of Modern Chinese History*, so as to provide a basis for generative AI content supply. Teachers should take the initiative to identify gaps between AI-generated content and classroom teaching, use precise keyword instructions and content direction presets to prompt AI to produce content that conforms to teaching progress and students' cognitive level, then screen and revise AI-generated content, eliminate redundant information, strengthen the connection between content and historical thinking cultivation goals, ensure accurate matching of AI content supply with teaching needs, and improve the precision of historical thinking cultivation^[7].

When teaching about the invasion of China by capitalist-imperialist powers, teachers should, in accordance with the key and difficult points of the curriculum, accurately grasp the knowledge gradient of the shift in capitalist-imperialist invasion methods from commodity export to capital export, and issue appropriate generative AI content instructions for students of different cognitive levels. For students with weak foundations, teachers should formulate instructions requiring AI to focus on quantitative analysis of specific clauses in key treaties such as the Treaty of Shimonoseki, including the opening of treaty ports, territorial cessions, and indemnities. The AI should present the strategic significance of the geographical distribution of treaty ports opened under the treaty, such as Shashi and Chongqing, demonstrate the heavy fiscal burden imposed on China by the 200 million taels of silver indemnity, and use concrete figures to reduce the difficulty of understanding. For advanced students, teachers should adjust the instructions to require AI to conduct in-depth research into the comprehensive erosion of China's sovereignty by the Boxer Protocol, carefully examine the manifestations of extraterritoriality and consular jurisdiction enjoyed by foreign powers in China, conduct a detailed analysis of their control over economic lifelines such as China's railways and mines, interpret the severe harm caused by the clause that "the Qing government shall guarantee to strictly prohibit its people from participating in anti-imperialist activities", and clarify the historical moment when China was completely reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society.

3.2. Integrate historical facts to build a complete system

Teachers should play a leading role, take the development context of modern Chinese history as a clue, build a systematic knowledge framework, and guide generative AI to integrate historical facts^[8]. Teachers should clarify the general direction of AI content generation, get rid of the mindset of isolated display of single historical facts, sort out the internal connections between historical events and figures, and highlight the continuity and integrity of historical development. Teachers should also re-integrate and logically connect fragmented historical facts generated by AI, and integrate scattered historical facts into a unified knowledge system, so as to help students form a systematic understanding and cultivate their holistic and systematic historical thinking.

Taking *The Rise and Fall of the Westernization Movement* as an example, teachers can fully tap

the historical data integration ability of generative AI and lead students to form a complete historical fact framework covering military, economic, educational and other aspects along the main line of “self-strengthening and wealth-seeking”. Teachers can instruct AI to integrate the introduction of military technology at Jiangnan Manufacturing Bureau, the attempt of civilian enterprises at China Merchants Steamship Company, and the modern education reform at Jingshi Tongwen Guan into a logical chain, detail the process of introducing Western steam engines and gun manufacturing technology at Jiangnan Manufacturing Bureau, explain the role of weapons and equipment in modern national defense, clarify the attempt and effect of China Merchants Steamship Company in resisting the monopoly of China’s shipping industry by foreign shipping companies, and expound the curriculum and historical significance of training foreign language and scientific talents at Jingshi Tongwen Guan, to prevent the fragmented presentation of single events.

3.3. Deepen content levels and strengthen critical thinking guidance

Teachers should make use of the advantages of generative AI in supplying historical materials, take the cultivation of rational analysis and dialectical thinking of historical materials in historical thinking as the main goal, and enable AI to reveal the internal logic of historical development behind historical materials. Teachers should give correct instructions to enable AI to present multi-level and multi-perspective historical events and complex backgrounds, avoid shallow and single narration of historical facts, process AI-generated content according to teaching needs, design critical questions to guide students to dialectically analyze historical issues and rationally evaluate historical phenomena, to improve students’ historical critical thinking and commentary ability^[9].

Taking the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement as examples, generative AI can be used in teaching to guide students to understand the internal connection between the ideological liberation of the New Culture Movement and the patriotic salvation of the May Fourth Movement. Teachers should accurately present AI’s criticism of feudal ethics in the New Culture Movement, interpret the main viewpoints of “democracy” and “science” in Chen Duxiu’s *Call to Youth*, analyze Lu Xun’s *Diary of a Madman* which reveals the “man-eating” essence of feudal ethics, discuss the historical significance of the New Culture Movement in breaking the shackles of feudal ideology and awakening public ideological awareness, and its ideological foundation for the May Fourth Movement. At the same time, AI is required to compare the changes in social thought before and after the May Fourth Movement, clearly showing the transformation from ideological enlightenment starting from the New Culture Movement to political practice after the diplomatic failure at the Paris Peace Conference, when patriotic young students and workers took to the streets. Based on AI output, teachers should deepen content levels and design critical and constructive interpretation directions, so that students can break away from the shallow understanding of the New Culture Movement as “total anti-tradition”, dialectically view its historical role in ideological liberation and social change, grasp the historical fact that the New Culture Movement before the May Fourth Movement had both limitations and progressiveness, and cultivate students’ historical critical thinking and in-depth evaluation ability.

3.4. Integrate value connotation and enhance guidance effectiveness

Teachers should always adhere to the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, infusing value guidance into the whole process of generative AI content application, and avoiding rigid value expression^[10]. Teachers should guide AI to organically integrate values such as patriotism and national spirit with the interpretation of historical facts, and convey value orientation through the inherent connotation of historical

facts rather than simple additional preaching. Meanwhile, teachers should correct and improve the value expression in AI-generated content, ensure that value guidance is naturally integrated into students' process of sorting out historical facts and thinking about history, so that students can be nurtured in the cultivation of historical thinking and value guidance.

In the lesson *The Great Historical Turning Point and the Beginning of Reform and Opening Up*, teachers should adhere to the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and integrate the historical inevitability of reform and opening up and patriotism into the whole process of generative AI content application. Teachers should also make value judgments on AI-generated content, connect the arduous exploration in the early stage of reform and opening up with national development achievements, specify the implementation process of the rural household contract responsibility system, the initial attempt of urban economic system reform, and the establishment and development of special economic zones in the early stage of opening up, and convey the sense of the times and national confidence from the significance contained in historical facts themselves.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of teaching content, this paper analyzes the promoting effect of generative AI on cultivating students' historical thinking, and probes into problems existing in the paradigm transformation of historical thinking cultivation in *Outline of Modern Chinese History*, such as insufficient content matching, fragmented historical facts, shallow content and rigid value integration. On this basis, according to the specific teaching chapters of the college *Outline* course, it puts forward transformation strategies from the perspective of teachers' methodology: optimizing content matching, integrating historical fact system, deepening content levels and integrating value connotation, and provides specific teaching cases to improve the implementation approach of the strategies. Based on the spirit of digital education policies and the actual teaching of the *Outline* course, this paper solves the dilemma of integrating generative AI with the *Outline* course, provides a feasible method to improve the effect of historical thinking cultivation, and is conducive to the implementation of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education in the *Outline* course.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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