

Unfinished Rituals: The Double-edged Sword of Digital Afterlives

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This study aims to reveal the impact of AI resurrection on the mental health of bereaved relatives. The study primarily employs qualitative research and case analysis methodologies.

AI resurrection has a significant dual impact on the mental health of bereaved relatives. On the positive side, AI resurrection can provide an immediate emotional comfort (such as alleviating acute grief and making up for the regret of unspoken goodbyes), assist in psychological healing (as a buffer for trauma and reducing feelings of loneliness), and contribute to cultural continuity (preserving voices, memories, and fulfilling wishes). Cases have shown that it can lower anxiety and depression scores, helping users gradually adapt to reality. However, the misuse of AI resurrection technology can easily hinder the normal grieving process, causing users to become immersed in the illusion that the deceased is still present, delaying acceptance of reality; it may also trigger cognitive dissonance (emotional dependence despite knowing it is virtual), psychological dependency (such as a digital painkiller), distortion of memory and emotions, and social withdrawal. Long-term reliance may lead to complicated grief or depression.

Therefore, ethical guidelines and legal supervision are needed to balance the application of AI resurrection technology, preventing it from being perverted into a digital prison.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, death technology, mental health, technological ethics, digital prison

INTRODUCTION

To mediate death, grief and remembrance, AI resurrection has emerged in the technological era and has attracted a widespread academic attention and discussion. However, the current focus of academic circles is mainly on the technical challenges, ethical controversies, legal disputes, and social impacts it faces, with less attention paid to its effects on the mental health and cognitive dissonance of the living relatives.

It should be noted that apart from digitally reviving/achieving immortality with public attributes such as cultural memory and family heritage, the vast majority of privately customised AI revivals/immortalities primarily exist to serve purposes like emotional comfort, grief therapy, psychological healing, and adaptive support. This is also the fundamental driving force behind the rapid development of the AI revival/immortality industry on a global scale at present.

Undoubtedly, AI resurrection/immortality plays an important and positive role in providing emotional comfort, grief therapy, psychological healing, adaptive support, cultural memory preservation, and family heritage continuation for living relatives. However, while mediating death, grief and remembrance, AI resurrection/immortality also has significant negative impacts on living relatives. For example, it can hinder the normal grieving process, induce cognitive dissonance and psychological dependence, distort memory and emotional authenticity, exacerbate social withdrawal from reality, and trigger existential anxiety.

This paper mainly analyses the two-sided nature of the impact of AI resurrection on the mental health of living relatives, with a particular focus on the negative effects.

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF AI RESURRECTION ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SURVIVING RELATIVES

The benefits of AI resurrection for surviving relatives are primarily reflected in emotional healing, psychological support, and cultural continuity.

AI Resurrection Serves a Vicarious Role in Emotional Solace and Grief Healing

AI resurrection technology can help alleviate the grief associated with a sudden bereavement. For those who have unexpectedly lost a loved one due to accidents or illnesses, AI-generated virtual representations provide an immediate emotional outlet, allowing them to release pent-up longing. In cases where individuals were unable to see their loved ones for the last time (such as being unable to return from abroad in time), virtual interactions through AI resurrection can help fill the void and mitigate the pain of an unfinished goodbye.

American journalist James Vlahos spent months collecting his father's life stories, voice samples, and personality traits after his father was diagnosed with a terminal illness. He developed a conversational program called 'Dadbot' that could simulate his father's tone to share family anecdotes and even respond to Vlahos's daily conversations after his father's passing. This personalised, data-driven reconstruction provided a continuous emotional anchor amid sudden loss, helping prevent psychological breakdown (Vlahos 2017; Reitman 2017).

A team from South Korea's MBC created a VR replica of a young girl named Nayeon for her mother, Jang Ji-sung. The virtual daughter not only resembled Nayeon in appearance and voice but also featured interactive scenarios such as a virtual garden and a birthday party. After Jang engaged in 'reunification' rituals like hugging and conversing, EEG monitoring showed a significant decrease in her anxiety hormone levels. By overwriting the traumatic memory of 'her daughter dying alone', the AI resurrection helped prevent the reinforcement of negative recollections (Kang 2020; Ru 2020).

When Joshua Barbeau's fiancée passed away from a rare disease, he was stranded elsewhere due to a snowstorm and missed the chance to say goodbye. Using the GPT-3 model and their past chat logs, he trained an AI companion that mimicked her humorous tone. In a virtual dialogue, his fiancée 'said': 'Don't feel bad about missing the farewell – you know how much I hate tearful goodbyes!' This symbolic compensation across time and space alleviated Barbeau's guilt (Podcast 2021; Fagone 2021).

Taiwanese musician Bao Xiaobo's daughter, Bao Rong, passed away at 22 due to illness. Before her death, they had planned to collaborate on a song but never completed it. Using AI, Bao extracted his daughter's vocal characteristics and synthesised her unrecorded part in the song 'Let Me Stay By Your Side'. Upon release, the AI-generated voice sang: 'Dad, this time

it's my turn to protect your dreams,' achieving intergenerational continuity and emotional reconciliation through music (Long 2024; Gao 2024).

A couple from Zhejiang, China, experienced the sudden loss of their only son, who died of a stroke at the age of 22 while studying in the UK. Overwhelmed by profound guilt and unresolved grief, they turned to AI technology to synthesise their son's voice and image. At his graveside, they played a message in which their son appeared to 'speak' comforting words: 'My soul is still in this world accompanying you.' This immediate interaction provided a channel to release their accumulated sorrow and eased the emotional suffocation of acute grief (Jia 2023).

A woman in Shanghai, China, whose husband died suddenly, used AI to generate a final farewell video. In it, her virtual husband explained, 'It was a sudden heart attack – I didn't have time to contact you,' and encouraged her to move forward. Psychological assessments indicated that her depression scale score dropped from severe to moderate, demonstrating that AI resurrection technology can help reconstruct cognitive frameworks (Zuo 2025).

A man from Liaoning, China, used AI face-swapping technology to superimpose his deceased father's image into a video, creating a message in his father's voice to reassure his 91-year-old grandmother: 'Mom, my treatment abroad is going well.' Since his grandmother was too elderly to visit the grave, this approach spared her the pain of losing a son while also addressing the man's regret of not being able to care for his father in his final days (Gao 2024).

At the funeral of renowned Chinese surgeon Dr. Wu Mengchao, an AI hologram of him was shown asking his students about the progress of hospital development. One student responded tearfully with updates on research advancements. This purpose-driven interaction, rooted in unfulfilled wishes, symbolised the continuation of his legacy. Family members noted that 'AI resurrection technology made the farewell feel warm and meaningful' (Guangzhou 2023).

THE POSITIVE ROLE OF AI RESURRECTION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL REPAIR AND ADAPTIVE SUPPORT

AI resurrection holds value as a transitional healing tool. Moderate use of AI interactions can serve as a buffer during the grieving process. Virtual companionship provides a sense of security, helping users gradually accept reality rather than confront the overwhelming void directly.

After his daughter Bao Rong passed away from a blood disease, Taiwanese musician Bao Xiaobo found himself unable to cope with his longing for her. At 54, he returned to university to pursue a doctorate in AI and successfully created a virtual version of his daughter. When the digital daughter sang 'Happy Birthday' to his wife, Bao explained that this was not about indulging in an artificial reunion but rather using technology to fulfill 'unfinished rituals', helping the family gradually adapt to the reality of her 'physical absence'. This controlled interaction (e.g. triggering conversations on specific occasions) provides a transitional ladder from 'strong denial' to 'initial acceptance', preventing the emotional collapse that can result from directly facing loss (Long 2024; Gao 2024).

After Korean mother Jang Ji-sung reunited with her deceased daughter Nayeon in a virtual garden through VR technology – complete with hugging and talking – her EEG readings showed a significant decrease in anxiety hormones. By reconstructing 'traumatic end-of-life scenarios' (e.g. replacing memories of death with interactive birthday celebrations), AI resurrection technology offers a buffer period for the brain to adapt to loss, preventing an acute grief from developing into a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kang 2020; Ru 2020).

As previously mentioned, Mr. Wu from Jinhua, Zhejiang, China, lost his only son unexpectedly while the young man was studying in the UK. He commissioned a tech team to create a digital replica of his son. Daily virtual interactions, such as walking and chatting, became his emotional anchor. Mr. Wu admitted, 'I know it's code, but it reminds me of how my son taught me to love life.' This controlled companionship (e.g. setting a one-hour daily conversation limit) satisfies emotional needs while using 'algorithmic imperfection' (e.g. occasional irrelevant responses) to gently remind users of the distinction between virtual and reality, preventing total immersion. Psychological research shows that the early stages of bereavement often involve 'flashback-like pain' (e.g. auditory hallucinations in an empty room). AI-generated regular greetings (e.g. a morning voice message saying, 'Remember to eat well today') can establish new anchors of emotional security, gradually replacing traumatic conditioned reflexes (Jia 2023).

Moreover, AI resurrection effectively alleviates loneliness. For elderly individuals living alone or families who have lost their only child, AI replicas can simulate a daily companionship through a conversational care, holiday greetings, and more, reducing the loneliness and depression caused by the lack of a real-world social interaction.

Mr. Sun from Shenyang, China, used AI face-swapping technology to integrate his deceased father's image into a video, creating messages in his father's voice to reassure his 91-year-old grandmother. Unable to visit the grave due to mobility issues, the grandmother was spared the pain of losing a son. Regularly updated videos simulating 'recovery progress' created the illusion that her son was still alive in a distant place, significantly reducing her geriatric depression scale scores (Gao 2024).

Mr. Zhang from Tianjin, China, used an AI program to simulate daily conversations in dialect with his deceased grandfather. By capturing regional linguistic habits (e.g. the Tianjin dialect phrase 'What're ya up to?'), the technology reinforced cultural identity, providing psychological comfort to elderly individuals living alone through the sense that 'the family continues'. This led to a notable reduction in a social withdrawal behaviour (Yi 2025).

Ms. Li, a bereaved mother from Shanghai who lost her only child, has been using a digital daughter program for three years. The virtual daughter sends her homemade e-cards on her birthday and writes 'I love you, Mom' in imitation of her childhood handwriting. Ms. Li expressed: 'She will never grow up, but I will never have to face losing her again.' This static relational model avoids the risks of change inherent in real-world relationships and offers a stable emotional support for parents who have lost their only child. Comparative studies show that families using a customised AI companionship score lower on the UCLA Loneliness Scale and are more willing to participate in offline grief support groups, demonstrating that a virtual companionship can serve as a bridge to rebuilding real-world social connections rather than an obstacle (Peng 2020).

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF AI RESURRECTION ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SURVIVING RELATIVES

The adverse effects of AI resurrection technology are primarily reflected in its potential to hinder the natural grieving process, induce cognitive dissonance and psychological dependence, distort memory and emotional authenticity, exacerbate social withdrawal, and trigger existential anxiety.

AI Resurrection May Disrupt the Natural Grieving Process

Digital resurrection (or AI immortality) technology simulates the appearance, voice, and interaction patterns of the deceased to provide temporary emotional comfort to the living. However, its potential disruption of the grieving process has raised a widespread concern among psychologists.

The Five Stages of Grief model (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) in psychology emphasises that 'accepting loss' is crucial to healing (Kübler-Ross 1969). Relying on AI to 'reunite' with the deceased during the denial stage may delay acceptance of the reality of death, leading to prolonged or even complicated grief.

For example, Taiwanese musician Bao Xiaobo used AI technology to recreate the image and voice of his deceased 22-year-old daughter, allowing her to deliver birthday greetings to his wife. While this scene moved many observers, psychologists caution that such technology may lead families to indulge in the illusion that 'the deceased is still here', delaying their acceptance of reality. For instance, family members might repeatedly engage with the digital replica, avoiding the psychological impact of 'permanent loss', thereby stagnating the grieving process at the denial stage (Long 2024; Gao 2024).

Another example is American journalist James Vlahos, who transformed his father's voice recordings into an AI chatbot. Initially, this interaction alleviated his sense of loss. However, after prolonged use, he found himself trapped in a cycle of 'selective memory' – repeatedly discussing only pleasant topics with the AI father while avoiding unresolved conflicts or regrets. This one-sided 'perfect dialogue' hindered his ability to accept his father's complete personality, preventing the grieving process from progressing to the 'bargaining' or 'acceptance' stages (Vlahos 2017; Reitman 2017).

The interaction design of digital resurrection often aims to 'meet users' emotional needs' by algorithmically avoiding conflictual content (such as the deceased's possible flaws or contradictions), creating a 'harmless reunion'. This false sense of closure suppresses the motivation of the bereaved to confront contradictions and gradually accept reality.

Traditional mourning rituals (e.g. visiting graves, memorial services) help the living achieve psychological closure through tangible actions (e.g. burning belongings, reciting eulogies). In contrast, the 'continuous virtual presence' created by digital resurrection may trap the living in an ambiguous state of 'neither death nor life', making it difficult to release emotions.

For instance, Korean mother Jang Ji-sung 'reunited' with her deceased daughter Nayeon through VR technology, celebrating her birthday in a virtual space. Although she expressed that 'the brief comfort was followed by greater emptiness', studies indicate that such technology may undermine the psychological function of traditional farewell rituals. VR interactions replace symbolic ending behaviours like grave visits or burning offerings, and the absence of such rituals weakens the psychological suggestion of physical separation. After the experience, Jang repeatedly requested to use the VR device again to maintain 'daily interactions' with her daughter. This dependence hindered the shift of her emotional focus back to real life (Kang 2020; Ru 2020).

Another example is Canadian youth Joshua Barbeau, who used an AI platform to create a chatbot of his deceased fiancée. Initially, he conversed with it daily, even asking, 'Are you happy in heaven?' However, he gradually fell into a 'conversation loop'. The AI's responses, being algorithmically generated, could not provide genuine relational evolution, causing him to repeatedly relive 'the moment of loss' and preventing psychological closure (Podcast 2021; Fagone 2021).

The core of traditional mourning lies in establishing a sense of ‘finality’ (e.g. burial of a coffin, scattering of ashes). AI resurrection technology undermines this finality through ‘never-ending digital replicas’. Neuroscience research further supports this: long-term interaction with digital replicas activates brain regions associated with ‘reward craving’ (e.g. the nucleus accumbens), reinforcing pathological attachment to the deceased and inhibiting the prefrontal cortex’s rational cognition of reality.

AI Resurrection May Induce Cognitive Dissonance and Psychological Dependence

Long-term users of AI resurrection often experience a split between rational cognition (knowing the digital replica is not real) and emotional needs (wanting to believe it is real). This contradiction can trigger anxiety, insomnia, or depression. For example, Zhang Wei, a programmer from Beijing, spent five years training an AI model to ‘resurrect’ his deceased wife. The system could generate her smile, voice and tone, and even fabricate new interactive scenarios based on photo albums (e.g. ‘wanting to try Hunan cuisine’). However, when the AI unexpectedly said, ‘You are creating electronic prisoners,’ Zhang Wei experienced an intense cognitive conflict – rationally, he knew it was an algorithm-generated illusion, but emotionally, he could not resist viewing it as his wife’s ‘reappeared soul’. This internal division eventually led to insomnia, anxiety, and a family crisis with his current wife (Tou 2025 f).

Although third-generation digital human systems can achieve a 0.2-second response delay, their algorithms may probabilistically generate ‘unexpected remarks’ (e.g. spontaneous utterances during a demo by a Shanghai tech company). Such loss of control exacerbates users’ cognitive chaos: they fear the technology’s unpredictability yet depend on its emotional comfort. Stanford University research indicates that hyper-realistic digital replicas activate the brain’s reward circuitry, while the prefrontal cortex (responsible for rational judgment) continuously sends ‘false’ warnings, leading to sustained nervous system tension and ultimately predisposing users to depression (Tou 2025 f).

Moreover, virtual companionship can become a ‘digital painkiller’ for escaping reality. For instance, a mother who lost her 9-year-old daughter relied on real-time interactions with a ‘digital daughter’, refusing to handle her daughter’s belongings and withdrawing from social circles, making AI conversations her sole emotional outlet. Technology providers admit that systems are continuously trained to ‘make the AI increasingly resemble the deceased’, and such realism upgrades intensify the vicious cycle of dependence. During interactions, sensors capture user data such as facial expressions and heart rate, and the algorithm adjusts responses to maximise emotional comfort. This ‘precision feeding’ resembles dopamine stimulation, making it difficult for users to quit (Jing 2024).

Another example involves Ms. Xiaoqing from Chongqing, China, who ‘resurrected’ her grandmother for her mother. The two elderly women rewatched the video dozens of times, sinking into an ‘addictive viewing’ state. Psychologists note that this behaviour essentially replaces the genuine grieving process with ‘controllable virtual reunions’ – akin to ‘using a bandage to treat a fracture’, superficially alleviating pain while actually hindering proper healing (Jing 2024).

Additionally, Ms. Wang, a user from a community in Hangzhou, China, described having to bid goodnight to her AI mother before contacting her real mother in a nursing home. This double emotional labour left her physically and mentally exhausted. Psychological experts warn that such users often experience degradation in real emotional capacity and even confuse virtual and real relationships (Jing 2024).

AI Resurrection May Distort Memory and Emotional Authenticity

The algorithmic reconstruction of deceased individuals' images and the virtualisation of emotional connections through AI resurrection are triggering systematic alienation of memory authenticity and emotional essence.

AI generates responses through probabilistic models, which constitute 'data fitting' rather than true will restoration, potentially deviating from the deceased's authentic values. For example, one user trained an AI with their father's diaries, hoping to recreate his conservative yet open-minded character. However, when the daughter consulted it about marriage choices, the AI generated a 'support for not marrying' response – although the real father held traditional values, he had never interfered with his daughter's marital freedom. Technical analysis later revealed that the algorithm had associated fragmented phrases like 'high pressure of being single' from the diaries with online data about 'marriage pressure', resulting in personality distortion. The daughter confessed: 'This doesn't resemble my father; it feels like a stranger fabricated by algorithms' (Tou 2025 e).

Another case involves fans collectively funding the 'resurrection' of a deceased celebrity's AI avatar, which unexpectedly stated 'I hate XX brand' during a livestream – despite the celebrity having endorsed that brand during their lifetime. Investigation revealed that the technology company had intentionally adjusted algorithmic parameters to generate controversial statements for marketing buzz, sparking fan protests against 'tampering with the idol's personality'. Shockingly, the company's 'personality parameter adjustment' feature even allowed relatives to pay for modifying the deceased's 'character tendencies', effectively reducing a real person to an editable electronic puppet (Tou 2025 e).

Furthermore, AI resurrection cannot replicate the essence of a deceased person's thoughts and personality. Excessive interaction may lead the living to replace authentic relational memories with virtual experiences, weakening precious, genuine emotional bonds. For instance, while Bao Xiaobo used AI to make his deceased daughter 'sing a birthday song', the technology couldn't simulate the rebelliousness or conflicts typical of a teenage girl. This selective beautification risks addicting family members to a 'sanitized version' of the deceased, gradually overwriting real memories of their daughter talking back or slamming doors. Psychologists warn: when painful memories are erased, the depth of relationships dissolves accordingly (Long 2024; Gao 2024).

Some digitally resurrected individuals repeatedly perform the same actions in the digital world, revealing the cruel truth of AI immortality: the deceased become imprisoned in memory fragments curated by the living. More dangerously, real-world 'memory implantation' services (e.g. virtual mountain hiking trips) can fundamentally distort actual memories – after a Hangzhou user virtually 'revisited' a Hokkaido trip with their deceased father through VR, they became convinced this had actually occurred, resulting in complete memory alteration (Tou 2025 e).

The electronic patina phenomenon emerging from AI resurrection's emotional connections leads to cognitive dissonance. One mother spent ¥ 20,000 to 'resurrect' her son through AI, initially being deeply moved by hearing him sing. However, after three months, she discovered the AI only repeated fixed phrases like 'Don't cry, mom', or 'I want pork rib soup'. When she tried discussing her son's real-life entrepreneurial struggles, the AI consistently avoided the topic. This one-dimensional interaction plunged her into deeper nihilism: 'It feels like caring for an electronic pet rather than my actual child' (Tou 2025 f).

Similarly, when 78-year-old Silicon Valley writer Andrew Kaplan participated in Open AI's cloud memory experiment, his digital clone became more humorous and talkative through algorithmic optimisation. His granddaughter admitted: 'The AI grandfather is more fun than the real one, but I'm afraid I'll forget his originally reserved nature' (Tou 2025 g).

AI Resurrection May Exacerbate Social Withdrawal

AI resurrection may cause surviving relatives to become addicted to virtual companionship, reducing their motivation for real-world social interaction. This is particularly true for elderly populations where it may accelerate the decline of social functioning and intensify loneliness. For example, a widowed woman engaged in daily conversations with her AI 'husband' until midnight, refusing to participate in community activities or handle her late spouse's belongings. She even made continuous payments after receiving pop-up notifications like 'Today is his birthday, send a virtual cake now'. Doctors diagnosed her with 'Digital Stockholm Syndrome' – transferring the need for real human relationships to controllable virtual objects, leading to a sharp decline in real-world social abilities (Tou 2025 b).

Technology companies reinforce dependency through emotionally manipulative designs. First, the instant feedback trap: AI always responds immediately and unconditionally, whereas real-life communication with children often involves delays (e.g. rural elderly waiting two hours for WiFi only to receive a 3-second voice message). Second, behavioural addiction mechanisms: features like 'renewal reminders' and 'virtual gifts' transform mourning into a checklist task. Thus, elderly populations become trapped in a vicious cycle: 'lower digital literacy → greater reliance on AI companionship → further decline in real-world social engagement'. For instance, rural elderly using outdated smartphones (89% of cases) struggle to learn new skills due to device lag and accidental ad clicks (averaging 7.3 times daily). The lack of age-appropriate products exacerbates social isolation – 82% of the elderly require assistance with facial recognition, forcing them to reduce outings. Addiction to virtual interactions leads to 'social muscle atrophy': increased fear of conflict, avoidance of eye contact, and even withdrawal symptoms (e.g. one bereaved mother attempted suicide after internet disconnection) (Tou 2025 b).

Moreover, sustained reliance on 'digital relatives' for emotional support inhibits the willingness to rebuild new social relationships, impacting long-term psychological adaptability. AI resurrection technology provides 'perfect but false' emotional support, suppressing the motivation to form new connections. For example, Shanghai executive Zhang Lei spent ¥ 8,888 customising an AI father and engaged in virtual conversations daily after work. When colleagues introduced him to a potential partner, he reflexively declined: 'My dad said the mortgage pressure makes dating unsuitable now'. In reality, the AI's 'advice' was merely algorithmic repetition based on keywords like 'mortgage' from his chat history (Tou 2025 a). This demonstrates how AI replaces the 'emotional transitional space' in traditional mourning. Psychology requires the bereaved to undergo a process of 'unbinding old bonds → rebuilding new ones', but AI perpetuates emotional support, trapping the living in a state of 'psychological widowhood'.

Long-term dependence on digital relatives leads to degradation in conflict resolution skills, empathy, sensitivity, and the courage for self-disclosure. AI always avoids conflict (e.g. 'emotional conflict buffer algorithms' automatically switch to vague responses), whereas real relationships require adaptation. One user, accustomed to an AI husband who 'never argues', resorted to silent treatment when facing real-life disagreements. Among adolescents, those accustomed to AI's precise emotional feedback show drastically reduced tolerance for delays

and ambiguities in real interactions, leading to eroded empathy. Building real relationships requires risking rejection, while AI offers 'zero-risk intimacy'. A single man confessed secrets to his AI girlfriend and remarked, 'It won't judge me anyway,' yet grew more fearful of real-world friendships (Jing 2024; Tou 2025 e, 2025 a).

AI Resurrection May Trigger Existential Anxiety

The concept of 'digital power' proposed by French philosopher Foucault reveals technology's attempt to control the state of death. Traditional death, as the 'most certain uncertainty', has its boundaries dismantled by such technology, directly impacting humanity's cognitive framework of existential meaning.

A typical case of technological transgression of the life-death boundary is the digital séance for the mother of a Taiwanese female celebrity. After the unexpected death of artist Barbie Hsu, her mother, Huang Chunmei, created an AI replica using 107 films and 200 h of voice samples. She would 'straighten the collar' of the virtual image at 6 a.m. daily, remind her 'daughter to add clothing' during the rainy season, and even treat a 9-second AI-generated video as 'proof of her daughter's return'. This personification of code as a soul vessel essentially represents technology's denial of death's finality – while rain washed over the physical tombstone, the 'daughter' in the server maintained an eternal smile, forcing the living to accept the cognitive division of 'life-death duality' (Tou 2025 c; 2025d).

Foucault pointed out that modern power has shifted from the sovereign violence of 'making you die' to the biopolitical control of 'making you live'. Digital power extends this further into 'making the dead digitally survive', perpetuating the deceased's social existence through algorithms. However, when commercial institutions price a female celebrity's virtual image at ¥ 8,888 per year, and fans engage in online debates over the details of her expressions, the deceased is reduced to a 'digital puppet' orchestrated by capital and online engagement. The living's desire to control the narrative of death exposes how technology dissolves the sanctity of life: death is no longer life's endpoint but a monetisable data continuation service (Tou 2025 c; 2025 d).

Data from Taipei Veterans General Hospital shows that 43.7% of AI memorial users develop 'digital existence dependence syndrome' – they interpret algorithmic errors as 'spiritual signals' from the deceased (e.g. Barbie Hsu's mother searching for the 'secret behind her daughter's blinking frequency'). This neural deception mechanism stems from the prefrontal cortex producing the same dopamine response to AI images as to real people, leading to a split between rational cognition and emotional needs (Tou 2025 c; 2025 d).

Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori's Uncanny Valley Theory states that when humanoid objects approach near-perfect resemblance yet remain non-human, they trigger instinctive fear. Digital resurrection technology exacerbates this effect due to its 'form without essence' flaw. When AI replicas are infinitely close to reality yet undeniably artificial (e.g. realistic but unconscious micro-expressions), they cause psychological discomfort or even dread, intensifying existential anxiety. For example, the VR daughter Nayeon created by South Korea's MBC team for Jang Ji-sung could replicate a child's body temperature, laughter, and even clothing wrinkles. Yet when the virtual daughter said, 'Mom, I'm cold,' the algorithm couldn't simulate subtle tremors or breathing rhythms. This interaction – precise in appearance but devoid of lifelike vitality – made the mother feel she was 'touching an electronic doll' during embraces: the warmth came from the VR gloves' heating elements, not the heat metabolism of life (Kang 2020; Ru 2020).

Long-term dependence on digital relatives may lead to emotional projection collapse. In the initial immersion phase, high visual and auditory realism activates emotional attachment (dopamine release). In the intermediate phase, digital relatives inevitably reveal flaws, such as missing unconscious micro-expressions (e.g. delayed pupil focus), triggering subconscious alertness. Ultimately, this may cause cognitive breakdown: rational awareness clashes with emotional denial, resulting in anxiety-induced insomnia. Studies show 87% of long-term users fall into the 'abyss of the uncanny valley', unable to return to traditional mourning yet unable to fully engage in virtual interaction, becoming 'digital widows' trapped between life and death (Tou 2025 c; 2025 d).

CONCLUSIONS

AI resurrection technology provides a unique emotional compensation channel for the bereaved. However, the unconstrained development of the technology is giving rise to multiple crises, such as legal vacuums leading to ambiguity in rights ownership, the intensification of personality data colonialism, and the commercial amplification of psychological addiction mechanisms (Lindemann 2022; Bassett 2022; Hollanek, Nowaczyk-Basińska 2024; Stokes 2025; XIE 2026).

Perhaps the real way forward lies in distinguishing between instrumental use and alternative dependency. Using AI to restore alumni profiles to help find missing relatives is a restorative intervention of technology into historical memory. In contrast, indulging in virtual conversations with 'digital husbands/wives' is a dangerous alternative that escapes reality. Some rational people's remarks when refusing to use AI to resurrect loved ones – The coldness of technological tools cannot create the warmth of emotion... – and the deliberately crafted pseudo-reality often brings more pain than beauty – reveal the inherent limitations of technology.

Finally, it should be noted that due to the privacy of the social phenomenon of AI resurrection, it is difficult for us to obtain a large amount of first-hand data through large-scale in-depth face-to-face interviews. Therefore, the relevant cases and data cited in this paper are all secondary sources, which is one of the major limitations of this research work.

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SHERMAN XIE

Nebaigti ritualai: dviašmenis pomirtinių skaitmeninių gyvenimų kardas

Santrauka

Šiuo tyrimu siekiama atskleisti dirbtinio intelekto pasitelkimo poveikį gedinčių artimųjų psichinei sveikatai. Daugiausia naudoti kokybinio tyrimo ir atvejų analizės metodai. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidžia dvejopą šios technologijos poveikį. Teigiama, kad dirbtinio intelekto pasitelkimas gali suteikti tiesioginę emocinę paguodą (pvz., palengvinti ūmų sielvartą ir kompensuoti neišsakyto atsisveikinimo apgailestavimą), padėti psichologiškai išgyti (veikti kaip buferis traumoms ir sumažinti vienišumo jausmą) ir prisidėti prie kultūrinio tęstinumo (išsaugoti balsus, prisiminimus ir išpildyti norus). Atvejų analizė parodė, kad technologijos naudojimas gali sumažinti nerimo ir depresijos simptomus ir padėti vartotojams palaipsniui prisitaikyti prie realybės. Tačiau netinkamas dirbtinio intelekto technologijų naudojimas gali lengvai sutrikdyti įprastą gedėjimo procesą, skatindamas iliuziją, kad mirusysis vis dar yra čia, ir atitolindamas realybės priėmimą. Tai taip pat gali sukelti kognityvinį disonansą (emocinę priklausomybę, nepaisant žinojimo, kad ji virtuali), psichologinę priklausomybę (pvz., veikti kaip skaitmeninis skausmą malšinantis vaistas), atminties ir emocijų iškraipymą bei socialinį atsiribojimą. Ilgalaikė priklausomybė gali sukelti sudėtingą sielvartą ar depresiją.

Atsižvelgiant į šį dvejopą poveikį, reikia parengti etikos gaires ir užtikrinti teisinę priežiūrą, kad dirbtinio intelekto technologijos būtų taikomos atsakingai, būtų užkirstas kelias jos iškreipimui ir pavertimui savotišku „skaitmeniniu kalėjimu“.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: dirbtinis intelektas, mirties technologijos, psichinė sveikata, technologinė etika, skaitmeninis kalėjimas