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Matthew Jackson: No job is safe from AI



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Southern Weekend

Published on the official account of Guangdong Southern Weekend at 20:00 on 2025-01-12

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Since the artificial intelligence Go robot "AlphaGo" defeated the Go world champion Lee Sedol in 2016, questions about whether AI will replace humans have been raised one after another. A more representative negative view is that these heartless machines will never be able to understand human emotions like humans.

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But in 2024, multiple scientific experiments have shown that this may not be the case. Scientists studying the psychological processes of large language models have found that the theory of mind ability, which was originally considered unique to humans, now unexpectedly appears in powerful AI language models. ChatGPT-4, which started in June 2023, can solve 75% of theory of mind tasks, which means that it is equivalent to a six-year-old child in its ability to understand and infer the mental state of others, and has stronger social skills than previous versions.

Similarly, in February 2024, Matthew O. Jackson, a member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and professor of economics at Stanford University, and others published a Turing test study in the Proceedings of the National Academy

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of Sciences, which showed that the performance of the AI chatbot ChatGPT-4 in a variety of situations was so similar to that of humans that its robot identity was difficult to identify, and therefore it passed the Turing test.

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Matthew Jackson, a member of the National Academy of Sciences and professor of economics at Stanford University. (Data map)



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Moreover, through game theory experiments and psychological tests, researchers have found that AI not only behaves like humans in general, but in many cases, it is even more cooperative and altruistic than humans. These characteristics also mean that AI has considerable potential when it comes to participating in various tasks in human society.

In fact, not only in chess, in the past few years, AI has shown the potential to be comparable to or even surpass humans in many tasks such as exams, writing, and disease screening. In December 2024, Google DeepMind also released a research introduction, saying that its latest AI model GenCast can predict the weather for the next 15 days in a few minutes, as well as the corresponding accuracy probability, and in most indicators, it exceeds the current top medium-

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term weather forecast system of humans, reflecting the dual advantages of speed and reliability.

However, for the AI human-machine collaboration model, which has attracted much public attention, scientists at MIT systematically reviewed experiments in recent years and found that the average performance of the two after collaboration is even worse than that of the best performing humans and AI working alone. But it does not mean that collaboration is impossible. In different situations, if the performance of humans in a task is better than that of AI, the effect after collaboration will be better. On the contrary, if the performance of AI has surpassed that of humans, the performance after collaboration will be significantly worse. This interesting but abnormal phenomenon, although a preliminary discovery, suggests that the future combination of humans and AI may not be generalized and may face extremely complex challenges.

So, will AI really replace humans? How will AI, which is still developing rapidly, collide with human social and economic networks in the future? Recently, Professor Matthew Jackson accepted an exclusive interview with a Southern Weekend reporter and analyzed the issues related to how AI will be integrated into human networks.

AI is already replacing humans

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Southern Weekend: Nowadays, there seem to be more and more AI tools in our lives. To what extent has AI changed your life and work?

Matthew Jackson: Whether we realize it or not, it's almost impossible to avoid AI tools now. In addition to using them by default every time I search for something online, ask for directions on an app, or translate something I want to read, I also use them specifically to do my taxes, recommend music I might want to listen to, get nutrition and health advice, and manage my schedule and send me reminders.

As a researcher, AI can now help me write code in seconds, which normally takes hours to write and debug. Although it is still a bit unstable to use it for literature reviews because it may produce hallucinations, it is improving rapidly. Moreover,

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AI can now not only understand and integrate large amounts of data, but its logical ability is also increasing. It can not only help chess players learn new strategies, but also assist mathematicians in the conception and testing of theorems. However, it is always difficult to fully evaluate the extent to which these innovations have changed our lives, especially considering that they are still being developed and promoted in many different environments. Of course, it seems difficult to overestimate the extent to which our lives will change in the future.



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Southern Weekend: After the release of ChatGPT, this difficult-to-assess impact has also made people from all walks of life begin to worry that they will lose their jobs one day. What do you think about the impact of AI on the labor market?



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Matthew Jackson: Various forms of AI have been replacing people for some time. Large language models like ChatGPT are a new type of AI that have attracted a lot of attention, but in fact many forms of AI have been running for some time. In the past, people booked travel through agents, but now most of these transactions are conducted online or through apps. In many restaurants, people can now place orders and pay through apps. We are about to enter an era where driverless technology will become the norm. This may take another decade or so to fully realize, but the technology for driverless cars and trucks is improving rapidly. In addition, people who used to help proofread and edit documents, as well as those who do accounting and basic programming work, are now being replaced.



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Southern Weekend: Overall, which groups of people are more likely to be replaced by AI?

Matthew Jackson: It's true that eventually anything humans do could be done by some combination of AI and robots, though some jobs may take longer to be

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actually free up humans to do other things and explore and enjoy our world more. But our road to a Star Trek future could be bumpy.

Southern Weekend: Indeed, even in the most basic social aspects, in traditional social networks, people may be accustomed to asking their family and friends for help, but now, some advanced AI tools seem to have become better social partners for some people. They not only seek answers and decision-making suggestions from AI, but also chat with AI to meet their social needs. What do you think of the impact of AI on our social networks?

Matthew Jackson: Over the past two decades, the growth of social platforms and social media has brought about a huge change in our lives. And these are all driven by various forms of AI, which affect the content we are exposed to and who we interact with the most. There are actually two conflicting effects on our social networks at the same time, which is a theme I wrote about in my book *The Human Network*. Modern platforms help us interact with more people at a greater distance, and process more information every day than ever before. In this way, AI is helping our world become more connected than ever before. But at the same time, there is a conflicting force. AI is also helping us sort, exposing us to only what we want to see and hear, and finding people who are similar to us. So, at the same time that AI increases the connectivity of our networks, it can also make those networks more separate and polarized. It seems that we are already seeing this around the world.

But in terms of AI becoming a replacement for humans, that's something we don't know much about yet. But it's clear that AI can help educate people who might not have access to good teachers, and that this can happen at all ages. As for the extent to which AI can become a substitute friend and meet human social and psychological needs and alleviate loneliness, that's not well understood yet, but could be very valuable.

Potential unequal impact

Southern Weekend: AI not only has a great impact on human social relations, but also in terms of economy, you have mentioned that artificial intelligence



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technology may be more economically disruptive than many technological advances in the past few centuries. So from an economic perspective, what are the main differences between AI and the technological advances in the past few industrial revolutions?

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Matthew Jackson: AI is a very general tool. Most previous technological innovations have had narrow applications, like irrigation, plows, tractors, assembly lines, and so on. Some modern innovations, like computers and the internet, have much broader applications. However, AI combined with improved robotics takes this to a new extreme and can start to perform almost all the tasks that humans do. This means it will touch every aspect of our lives, while changing many business models and our economy. So AI has huge potential to increase productivity, but also has the potential to cause broader disruption as jobs and skills are replaced around the world as we transition to a very different world that none of us fully understand yet.

Southern Weekend: Based on past experience, how does scientific and technological innovation replace labor?

Matthew Jackson: Let me give you a quick example from the past with agriculture. Most of the world's population used to work in agriculture. But as technology improved, new technologies replaced many farmers and related workers, but it also created more jobs in manufacturing and services. Over time, manufacturing also became more automated and capital-intensive, which allowed more people to work in the service industry. But in every transition, while there was a net gain overall, there were also some people who lost. This often takes generations to fully come out of. Because if a middle-aged farmer can't make enough money to support his family, he has few other options. People who used to work in factories may have difficulty finding new jobs after being laid off. People who grew up in rural families have to find other jobs, and their parents may not be so lucky, and entire generations may be left behind. This is a major problem in many countries, including China, and has led to a lot of internal and external population movement as people try to find better jobs through migration. And as manufacturing jobs disappear, people need to re-

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equip themselves and find jobs in the service industry. And the jobs that are easiest to switch to may also be the most boring and lowest-paying jobs.

Southern Weekend: What implications does this have for labor substitution in today's AI era?



Matthew Jackson: In the long run, society will ultimately benefit from increased productivity. When AI can do human work, it frees humans to do other things.

But the challenge is that those whose jobs are replaced will not be paid, and they will have to find new jobs. Therefore, as we transform, the benefits will be unevenly distributed, which may lead to huge inequality and political polarization. Policy making is not easy either. It means that we need more accessible education and a more flexible education system so that we can help train people in a changing world. Of course, this also means that since some people will be replaced and unable to transition, a safety net that provides protection and support for people is essential.

Another impact of AI innovation is that new types of organizations and companies will emerge with the new technologies. It is not entirely clear how these will work and how they will differ from previous organizational structures, but past major innovations have resulted in larger and more complex businesses than before, and in more global and interconnected supply chains. AI is likely to generate some new forms of decentralization and interconnectivity.

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Southern Weekend: Faced with these potential impacts of AI on human labor, what can individuals do to cope with this trend?

Matthew Jackson: For individuals, the key is to let AI enhance your work efficiency, not replace you. As I mentioned earlier, no job is absolutely safe, but some jobs are safer than others. Clerical, repetitive, or routine jobs are the easiest to replace because the tasks of these jobs are easy to outline and define, and there are examples and templates to refer to. Jobs that require more flexibility, judgment, creativity, communication, and teamwork, as well as jobs that require constant updating and improvement, will not be so easy to replace. For the latter, the better we are trained, the better the results will be. A key

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approach for a society is to stop viewing education as something that is only for children or young people. We need to constantly develop and further educate ourselves to adapt to and make the most of the changing world. It can be said that education will become a lifelong career.

Need to constantly cultivate yourself

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Southern Weekend: Indeed, although many people are worried about being replaced by AI, in fact, AI can not only replace humans, but also help humans. As you found in your research on the AI Turing test, AI's behavior is very similar to that of humans, which also provides conditions for humans to use AI to enhance their abilities. Overall, how do you personally view the relationship between AI and humans in the future?

Matthew Jackson: There are deep and interesting scientific debates about the possibility of human extinction and eventual AI domination, which I won't summarize here, and it's a theme we see again and again in classic science fiction. I guess I'm optimistic, at least ultimately, because AI will be a great benefit to humanity and the environment by making us more efficient and giving us time to do other things. Part of my optimism comes from what we've seen in research. AI can be trained to be cooperative, selfless, and empathetic. We can train it to bring out our best traits and avoid our worst, like we can have it make some decisions quickly without panicking, and we can train it not to be jealous or malicious, but to be patient and considerate. And it won't get tired or distracted while driving. Of course, all of this may take time, but eventually, AI will not only do a lot of the work we have to do now, but do it better.

Southern Weekend: As AI continues to develop, its functions are becoming more powerful, but its risks and supervision are also becoming more complicated. How do you view the risks and supervision of AI tools?

Matthew Jackson: AI, like any technology, can be used for productive purposes or counterproductive purposes. For example, AI has already transformed crime, with things like deep fakes and fraud, and is also transforming warfare, with drones and swarming technologies. It will also continue to develop in ways we

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cannot predict, which is inevitable. And our laws and regulations are often lagging and conservative, especially when it comes to technology. So it is difficult to predict what kind of regulation we will need in the future, because we don't want to over-regulate and slow it down, but then it provides new opportunities for some adverse consequences to occur, which we must guard against. Because this technological change may be faster and more dramatic than we have seen in the past, we need to be more predictive and respond more quickly. We need to develop some methods to collect accurate and timely information about how AI is developing and how it is affecting our world. The biggest challenge is that technological innovation seems to be accelerating. While some previous technological revolutions took centuries, what we are seeing now is happening in decades or even just a few years. So it is difficult to keep up with this speed of change.

Southern Weekend: Not only is it difficult for risk regulation to keep up, it is also difficult for individuals to keep up with the pace of technological development. You mentioned that because AI may have been built into our commonly used software, mobile phones, computers and technologies, the public may soon adopt many new forms of AI without realizing it. So how do you think the public should adapt to such a rapidly changing AI era?

Matthew Jackson: This is a very exciting time, and we should enjoy and appreciate all the new wonders that we will experience, but also understand and deal with the fact that there will be labor displacement in the future and it will have very unequal impacts on different people. We need to constantly educate ourselves to adapt, respond, and be more flexible because our world is constantly changing.

Southern Weekend reporter Wang Jiangtao

Editor: Zhu Liyuan

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