

On the Paradigm Shift in Film and Television Talent Development: From Technical Discipline to Ecological Literacy

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ABSTRACT

The technological evolution and media convergence within the film and television industry are reshaping the foundational logic of production, thereby prompting a fundamental reevaluation of talent cultivation models in this sector. Traditional film and television education has been guided by the paradigm of "technical training," which is predicated on an industrial landscape characterized by a clear division of labor, stable workflows, and standardized skills. However, in the current context—marked by the rise of streaming platforms, the integration of intelligent technologies, blurred job boundaries, and increasingly prominent ethical concerns—this paradigm has revealed structural challenges, including a shortened skill half-life, a lack of systemic cognition, and the neglect of value dimensions. From a theoretical standpoint, this paper proposes "ecological literacy" as a new framework for cultivating talent in film and television, defining its core components as three interrelated dimensions: systemic cognitive capability, cross-sectoral collaborative awareness, and ethical judgment. Building on this framework, the paper explores three strategic pathways for transformation: shifting the curriculum design from "job-specific modules" to "problem-domain modules"; transitioning the practical training paradigm from "workflow simulation" to "ecological simulation"; and evolving evaluation mechanisms from "skill attainment" to "competency profiling." This transformation is driven not only by external demands of the industry but also by the need for the theoretical framework of film and television education to undergo self-renewal.

KEYWORDS

Film and television education; Talent cultivation; Paradigm transformation; Ecological literacy; Media convergence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The film and television industry is undergoing profound structural transformations. The global expansion of streaming platforms, the widespread adoption of virtual production technologies, the competitive landscape between short-form and long-form video content, and the integration of artificial intelligence into screenwriting and post-production have collectively reshaped the production methods, distribution channels, and consumption patterns of cinematic and television content. Against this backdrop, the cultivation of talent in the film and television sector has emerged as a focal point of shared concern within both academia and industry [1]. From various film and television education forums to the revision of university curricula, and from industry-education integration initiatives to discussions on the development of "New Liberal Arts," the question of how to cultivate professionals capable of adapting to these industrial transformations has been regarded as a critical issue determining the future trajectory of the industry [2]. However, existing discourse often remains confined to a pragmatic level—namely, "what skills does the industry require, and what skills should education teach"—lacking systematic reflection on the underlying theoretical premises of these cultivation models. As the organizational structure of film and television production shifts from

relatively stable "assembly-line division of labor" to highly complex "ecological collaboration," does the traditional cultivation model, centered on technical training, remain effective? If its efficacy is waning, what alternative theoretical frameworks should be adopted? This paper seeks to address this question from a theoretical standpoint, arguing that the cultivation of talent in the film and television sector necessitates a paradigm shift-from "technical discipline" to "ecological literacy." "Technical discipline" refers to a cultivation model centered on standardized training of job-specific skills, guided by instrumental rationality; in contrast, "ecological literacy" emphasizes the comprehensive capability to comprehend systemic dynamics, transcend disciplinary boundaries, and make informed judgments within a complex media ecosystem. This paper first analyzes the theoretical premises and challenges of the traditional paradigm; next, it elucidates how transformations in the media ecosystem are reshaping the competency structure of professionals; then, it proposes a theoretical framework termed "ecological literacy"; and finally, it explores theoretical pathways for such transformation.

2. THE TECHNOLOGICAL DISCIPLINARY PARADIGM: THE TRADITIONAL LOGIC AND THEORETICAL PREMISES OF FILM AND TELEVISION TALENT CULTIVATION

The fundamental model of traditional film and television education can be summarized as a linear model of "division of labor-training-output." This model is rooted in industrial practices under the Hollywood studio system and the separation of production and broadcasting within television station frameworks during the twentieth century. In the studio era, roles such as director, screenwriter, cinematographer, editor, sound engineer, and art director were clearly delineated, and each role adhered to relatively stable technical standards and operational protocols; under the television station model, the separation of production and broadcasting, coupled with channel specialization, likewise required practitioners to possess well-defined job-specific skills. Consequently, film and television education has developed a basic framework characterized by: categorizing specialties according to specific roles, structuring curricula along production workflows, and evaluating students based on technical standards [3]. The theoretical core of this framework is a conception of competence guided by instrumental rationality. The defining feature of instrumental rationality is the reduction of action to the most effective means of achieving predetermined goals, emphasizing efficiency, calculability, and standardization. In the cultivation of film and television talent, instrumental rationality manifests as a strong emphasis on "hard skills": students are required to master camera operation, the use of editing software, adherence to script formatting conventions, and techniques for lighting and set design. While these skills are undoubtedly important, when they become the central-or even sole-object of education, the cultivation of such talent is reduced to a process of technical discipline [4]. Technical discipline disregards value-based questions such as "why do this," "for whom is this done," or "how should this be done"; instead, it presupposes that the existing division of labor within the industry and its production logic are stable, natural, and require no critical reflection. The theoretical premises of the technical discipline paradigm can be distilled into three points. First, the presupposition of industrial stability. First, it assumes that the organizational structures, technological tools, and job role configurations in film and television production will remain relatively stable over an extended period; consequently, education can provide students with vocational skills that yield lifelong benefits through a "one-time training" approach. Second, there is the assumption of the transitivity of skill standards: it posits that the skills required for different job roles can be clearly defined, graded for training, and objectively assessed, and that the objective of education is to enable students to meet these standards. Third, there is the assumption of value neutrality: it holds that technical training itself does not involve value judgments, while issues such as ethics, politics, and culture fall within the purview of "general education" or "professional literacy," and are unrelated to core professional competencies [5].

These presuppositions are not entirely devoid of historical justification. During periods of relative stability in the film and television industry, the paradigm of technical discipline could indeed efficiently cultivate qualified practitioners for the sector. However, when the industrial landscape, technological tools, and media environment undergo profound transformations, these presuppositions gradually lose their explanatory and guiding power. The dilemma faced by the paradigm of technical discipline lies not in operational aspects-such as "insufficiently innovative curricula" or "insufficiently advanced equipment" -but rather in a theoretical dimension: a "paradigm crisis."

3. TRANSFORMATION OF MEDIA ECOSYSTEMS AND RECONFIGURATION OF THE COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR FILM AND TELEVISION PROFESSIONALS

The defining characteristic of the current transformation in the film and television industry can be summarized as a shift from a "industry chain" to an "ecosystem." The traditional film and television industry operates along a linear chain: creative development, financing, production, distribution, screening/broadcasting, and derivative development unfold sequentially, with relatively clear boundaries between each stage. In contrast, under the influence of platformization, digitalization, and intelligence, film and television production increasingly manifests as a complex ecosystem: diverse stakeholders-including platform enterprises, content producers, technology providers, advertisers, user communities, algorithmic systems, and policy regulators-interact closely, fostering cyclical interactions among content production and distribution, consumption and reproduction, and data feedback and creative adjustments [6]. This ecological transformation imposes entirely new requirements on the competency profiles of film and television professionals, while also rendering the three foundational premises of the technological training paradigm progressively obsolete.

First, the half-life of technical skills is rapidly shortening, rendering the assumption of stability obsolete. The rapid iteration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence means that the lifecycle of "hard skills" -such as specific software operations, equipment parameters, and post-production workflows-may now be shorter than a single undergraduate training cycle. The editing software students learn upon enrollment may already have been superseded by new tools by the time they graduate; likewise, currently popular virtual production techniques may have been completely updated within a few years. If education is designed around the core objective of achieving technical proficiency, it faces the risk of "graduates becoming obsolete" [7]. More critically, as artificial intelligence can assist in tasks such as script generation, shot design, and initial editing, the weight placed on mere technical operational skills in talent evaluation will inevitably decline. Second, the boundaries between job roles are becoming increasingly blurred, thereby invalidating the assumption of interoperability. Streaming content production demands practitioners to possess cross-functional understanding; in short-video creation, a single individual often handles the entire workflow-from planning and filming to editing and operations. Emerging formats, such as interactive dramas and VR content, further require creators to comprehend narrative construction, technical capabilities, and user behavior simultaneously. The traditional, job-specific training model struggles to meet these "end-to-end" demands. What industries now require are not individuals who "only know cinematography" or "only know editing," but rather individuals who grasp the overarching logic of content production and can collaborate effectively within cross-disciplinary teams [8]. Third, the dimension of value is becoming increasingly prominent, rendering the assumption of neutrality obsolete. Algorithmic recommendations influence content visibility; deepfakes challenge the boundaries of authenticity; data collection raises concerns about user privacy; and platform monopolies spark worries about cultural diversity. Professionals in film and television are no longer merely "content creators"; they also function as actors within the media ecosystem, and their choices carry ethical, political, and cultural consequences. Current technical training models reduce film and television production to a question of "how to do it," while evading the fundamental inquiries of "why to do it," "for whom to

do it," and "how one ought to do it" -an issue that has become particularly urgent in the present context [9]. If film and television education continues to treat ethical judgment as a "soft skill" separate from professional competence, it will fail to meet the demands placed upon practitioners in this era.

4. ECOLOGICAL LITERACY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE CULTIVATION OF FILM AND TELEVISION PROFESSIONALS

In response to the challenges posed by the technological training paradigm, this paper advocates shifting the core objective of film and television talent cultivation from "technical training" to the development of "ecological literacy." The concept of "ecological literacy" draws on theoretical foundations from media ecology and educational ecology; its fundamental meaning is the ability, within a complex, dynamic, and interdependent media system, to understand the positioning and consequences of one's own actions, and to collaborate effectively with diverse stakeholders. In the context of film and television talent cultivation, ecological literacy comprises three interrelated dimensions: systemic cognitive capability, cross-disciplinary collaborative awareness, and ethical judgment [10].

Film and television production is no longer a closed textual production process; instead, it is embedded within a complex system constituted by the platform economy, audience behavior, technological infrastructure, and policy regulations. Practitioners must understand the interconnections between content production and distribution mechanisms, algorithmic logic and traffic allocation, and copyright regimes and industrial policies. For instance, the success of a web series depends not only on the script and acting but also on the platform's scheduling strategies, algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, social media marketing efforts, and user community management. Systemic cognitive capability requires practitioners to discern the relationships among these diverse elements, rather than focusing solely on the technical operations within their specific roles. Such systemic understanding cannot be fully acquired through a single "Industrial Overview" course; instead, it should be integrated throughout the entire training process [11].

Cross-disciplinary collaborative awareness: The ecological nature of film and television production necessitates that practitioners work within cross-disciplinary, cross-media, and cross-cultural teams. Collaborative competence extends beyond mere "communication skills"; it comprises a cognitive habit characterized by an understanding of diverse knowledge systems, respect for distinct professional logics, and the ability to forge consensus amidst differences. Under traditional studio models, collaboration was safeguarded by explicit hierarchical rules; in contrast, within an ecological production environment, collaboration relies more heavily on negotiation, trust, and the cultivation of shared objectives. This paradigm shift demands that film and television education dismantle departmental barriers, creating authentic interdisciplinary practical scenarios where students learn to collaborate with individuals from diverse backgrounds while tackling complex challenges [12].

Ethical judgment: As technology endows creators with unprecedented capabilities, ethical judgment has become a core component of professional competence. This encompasses the sensitivity and reflective capacity to address issues such as representation ethics, boundaries of privacy, algorithmic fairness, and cultural respect. Ethical judgment cannot be acquired through the mere imposition of rules; rather, it must be gradually cultivated through discussion and practical application within specific contexts. Consequently, film and television education should not only impart "how to film," but also guide students to critically examine "what to film," "why to film," and "to whom they are accountable." Given the growing prominence of issues such as deepfakes, data privacy, and cultural appropriation, ethical judgment has evolved from being merely an "add-on humanistic literacy" to becoming an essential professional competency for practitioners [13].

5. FROM TECHNICAL DISCIPLINE TO ECOLOGICAL LITERACY: THEORETICAL PATHWAYS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Based on the "ecological literacy" framework, the transformation of film and television talent cultivation models can be pursued through three theoretical pathways: curriculum design, practical paradigms, and evaluation mechanisms.

Reconstruction of the Curriculum System: From "Occupational Module" to "Problem Domain Module." Traditional curriculum systems organize modules according to specific roles—such as screenwriting, directing, cinematography, and editing—where each course corresponds to a specific professional skill. In contrast, an ecology literacy-oriented curriculum system should adopt "problem domains" as its organizational logic, including examples such as "cross-media storytelling," "platform-based dissemination," "ethical considerations in intelligent imaging," and "ecological production management." Each problem domain integrates multiple dimensions—technology, theory, ethics, and industry—enabling students to naturally acquire comprehensive capabilities while addressing concrete challenges. For instance, the "cross-media storytelling" problem domain may encompass interactive storytelling theory, fundamentals of game engines, user behavior analysis, and copyright ethics, rather than simply combining a "screenwriting course" with a "new media course" [14]. This reconstruction does not negate traditional curricula; rather, it represents an upgrade to their organizational logic.

Transformation of the Practical Paradigm: From "Process Simulation" to "Ecological Simulation." Traditional practical teaching simulates a linear studio workflow: scriptwriting, filming, editing, and output. Practical training guided by ecology literacy, however, should simulate authentic industrial ecosystems: incorporating platform feedback mechanisms, designing cross-disciplinary collaborative tasks, and embedding ethical decision-making scenarios. For example, student projects should not only complete production but also traverse a complete chain: "distribution strategy design → audience feedback analysis → ethical impact assessment." Practical projects may involve teams composed of students from diverse disciplines, each responsible for content development, technical execution, operational management, and ethical evaluation—thereby making collaboration and judgment intrinsic components of the practical experience, rather than external requirements. The key to this paradigm shift in teaching practice lies in integrating "uncertainty" and "diversity" into instructional contexts, enabling students to develop the ability to make professional judgments under complex conditions [15].

A pivotal innovation in evaluation mechanisms is the transition from "skill attainment" to "competency profiling." Evaluation systems centered on skill attainment often fail to adequately assess systemic cognition, collaborative awareness, and ethical judgment. Instead, educators may explore competency profiling approaches—utilizing process-based documentation, multidimensional competency descriptions, and reflective writing—to capture students' holistic performance in complex scenarios, rather than relying solely on technical precision as the sole criterion for assessment. For instance, when evaluating a student's work, evaluators should consider not only technical metrics such as visual composition and editing rhythm, but also whether the student's distribution strategy aligns with platform logic, whether their teamwork was effective, and whether their ethical decision-making included critical reflection. Such an evaluation framework necessitates that teachers evolve from acting as "skill-based judges" to serving as "competency coaches," while also requiring instructional management to shift from standardized assessments to personalized documentation. Although this transformation presents numerous operational challenges, its theoretical direction remains clear: evaluations should align with educational objectives rather than remain tethered to outdated paradigms.

6. CONCLUSION

The transformation of talent cultivation models in film and television production may appear, on the surface, to be driven by industrial technological shifts; however, at its core, it represents a self-

renewal of the theoretical framework of film and television education. The paradigm shift from "technological discipline" to "ecological literacy" signifies that film and television education is no longer positioning itself merely as a provider of human resources for the industry, but rather as a cultivator of reflective agents endowed with practical wisdom within a complex media ecosystem. This transformation cannot be achieved overnight; it requires corresponding adjustments across curriculum design, faculty composition, practical training conditions, and evaluation mechanisms. Nevertheless, conscious theoretical reflection remains the prerequisite for such practical change. As the future of film and television production grows increasingly unpredictable, cultivating individuals capable of comprehending systemic contexts, transcending disciplinary boundaries, and making informed judgments may prove far more critical than cultivating those who merely master specific technical skills. The future of film and television education lies not in chasing every emerging technological trend, but in returning to the fundamental question of "what kind of people to cultivate" -thereby safeguarding and fostering the comprehensive literacy of individuals within a constantly evolving media landscape.

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