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Can Life Be Designed?—An Exploration From the Perspective of the Unified Complex Systems Theory

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Human life is not determined by mechanical fatalism or a single material factor; instead, based on the dualistic ontology and active force mechanism in the Unified Complex Systems Theory (UCST), it can be actively designed under the guidance of mind, in accordance with causal laws, and through systematic interactions. This study integrates the dualistic ontology of UCST, as well as the cooperative mechanism of active force (F_a) and passive force (F_p). Furthermore, by incorporating Master Jiqun's philosophy of "life design" and the practical principle of "destiny establishment and transformation" from *The Four Lessons of Liaofan Yuan*, it constructs a three-dimensional framework for life design encompassing the dimensions of science, philosophy, and practice. The significance of this research lies in breaking through the predicament of materialism in the AI (artificial intelligence) era, explaining the autonomy and initiative of life, providing feasible pathways for life design, and ultimately achieving the in-depth integration of scientific rationality and the wisdom of traditional Eastern culture.

Keywords: life design, Unified Complex Systems Theory (UCST), dualistic ontology, active force, destiny-establishing practice

Introduction

When the snowstorm in Ili froze the final figure of He Jiaolong galloping forward on horseback, this outstanding cadre, who had illuminated the livelihoods of farmers in Xinjiang through more than 500 public welfare live streams, came to an abrupt end due to an accident. Her life sparked a collective inquiry about fate across the entire network. Despite suffering from waist injuries, she promoted camel caravans in the desert; braved sandstorms to introduce ancient cities; and even when she broke her ribs, she still cared about the unsold agricultural products of her fellow villagers. She spent 47 years fulfilling her sincere commitment of "doing things for her hometown", yet ultimately could not escape the impermanence of fate (Xinhua News Agency, 2026). Such regret has grieved countless people: Why do those who pour out kindness and dedicate themselves to practice encounter misfortune? Is the traditional creed that "good deeds reap good rewards" fragile in the face of randomly occurring accidents? Is life ultimately guided by a predetermined trajectory or dominated by unpredictable contingencies? Are our life plans and adherence to kindness meaningless in the face of the randomness of fate?

These inquiries are not merely emotional outpourings, but philosophical reflections that penetrate individual tragedies. In the process of value reconstruction during the social transition period, the realistic contrast between

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"the risk of doing good deeds" and "the benefit of pursuing profits" has long made many people confused about the significance of "accumulating virtue and doing good". He Jiaolong's story has pushed this confusion to an extreme—when the purest kindness encounters the most impermanent fate, we have to re-examine: Is there a possibility that life can be designed? Can individual choices and persistence anchor the direction of life in an uncertain world?

In contemporary society with the rapid development of AI (artificial intelligence) technology, materialist science struggles to explain the essence of consciousness initiative and the meaning of life, and human beings' pursuit of independent existence and fate control has become increasingly urgent. The material accumulation-oriented lifestyle formed since the Industrial Revolution has created a sharp contrast between technological prosperity and spiritual distress, with anxiety and confusion becoming prevalent social mentalities (Walach, 2019; Cheng, 2025). Nietzsche once proposed that "God is dead" (Nietzsche, 2007) and that "values need to be re-evaluated" (Nietzsche, 1991, p. 99). This proposition still has strong practical significance today—as AI gradually replaces many human functions, including mental labor, the value of living and the way forward have become core issues that urgently need to be addressed.

The birth of the Unified Complex Systems Theory (UCST) provides a new scientific perspective for solving this dilemma (Cui, Li, & Pan, 2025). Developed gradually by the team led by Weicheng Cui from Westlake University since 2019, this theory breaks the limitations of materialist science through innovations such as extending classical mechanics, establishing a dualistic mind-body ontology, and introducing active force, thereby realizing a unified explanation of micro and macro systems, as well as living and non-living systems. Meanwhile, Master Jiqun's enlightenment that "life can be designed" (Master Jiqun, 2025) and the practical wisdom of "establishing and transforming destiny" in *The Four Lessons of Liaofan Yuan* (Yuan, 2004) provide a profound philosophical foundation and practical experience for life design. The three are highly consistent in their core logic: All recognize the autonomy and initiative of life, and emphasize the improvement of life quality through active choices and continuous practice.

Based on such an era context and individual tragedy, this paper attempts to explore the possibility and boundary of life design from the perspective of the tension between the randomness of fate and subjectivity, aiming to find a rational answer about the meaning of life for people who adhere to their values in confusion. Taking UCST as the core analytical tool and combining the wisdom of traditional Eastern culture, this study conducts arguments from four dimensions: "theoretical feasibility", "core mechanism", "practical path", and "boundary and value". It intends to systematically answer the fundamental proposition of "whether life can be designed" and provide contemporary people with a life design scheme that integrates scientificity and practicality.

The Theoretical Foundation of Designable Life: Core Support of UCST

Dualistic Ontology: Breaking the Cognitive Shackles of Materialism

The core breakthrough of UCST lies in its proposed dualistic ontology, which completely breaks the cognitive limitation of materialism that reduces all existence to matter (Cui et al., 2025). This theory explicitly asserts that the world is composed of two fundamental categories of existence: material entities (aether) and non-material entities (minds). As an aggregation of invisible particles, aether constitutes the essence of inanimate objects; minds, as non-material existence, form the essence of living beings. These two categories are mutually independent yet synergistically interactive, jointly constructing a complete picture of the observable world. In sharp contrast to the monism of traditional materialism/idealism, this perspective provides an ontological

foundation for explaining the autonomous initiative of life, while avoiding the violation of the basic common sense of mass conservation and energy conservation inherent in idealist philosophy.

Within the dualistic ontological framework of UCST, the mind is not an epiphenomenon of matter (e.g., a property of the brain in modern mainstream science) but a core entity with independent existence and agency. The combination of mind and body forms a living organism, whereas their separation signifies the termination of the current life cycle (with the body degenerating into an inanimate entity). This postulation is highly consistent with Master Jiqun's proposition that "the human mind is the element for designing life" (Master Jiqun, 2025)—the "human mind" referred to herein (i.e., the mind in UCST), as a non-material essence, endows humans with the capacity for autonomous choice beyond physical constraints, serving as the subjective foundation for life design. Concurrently, it corroborates the core logic of "Fate Is Created by Oneself, Blessings Are Sought by Oneself" in *The Four Lessons of Liaofan Yuan* (Yuan, 2004): The subjective initiative of the mind enables humans to transcend the constraints of innate conditions and reshape their life trajectories through proactive actions. For instance, consider a pair of monozygotic twins with identical genotypes, who received the same family upbringing and school education from an early age, attended the same class in the same school, and were exposed to entirely identical external growth environments and resource conditions. Individual A, during the learning process, actively followed teachers' guidance, devoted himself to knowledge acquisition and capacity training with strong self-discipline, and established clear and lofty life goals based on the understanding of social development needs. His subsequent growth remained goal-oriented, and through continuous autonomous choices and agentic practices, he eventually made remarkable contributions to society in the corresponding field and became an exemplary figure with extensive demonstration significance. In contrast, Individual B adopted a passive "lying flat" mentality during growth, abandoned active planning for self-development, and always approached study and life with a laissez-faire attitude. His behavioral choices were more passively driven by the external environment, lacking internal goal motivation and agentic support, and he ultimately grew into an ordinary member of the social division of labor.

UCST's subdivision of consciousness further reinforces this logic. The theory categorizes consciousness into eight types, among which six—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and cerebral consciousness—are products of mind-body interaction. The seventh consciousness acts as a bridge connecting the first six consciousnesses and the eighth consciousness. The eighth consciousness (Alayavijnana), regarded as the core of consciousness (hence referred to as the mind in UCST), possesses the attribute of eternal existence. This classification not only explains why the six consciousnesses corresponding to the physical body cease to exist after death but also clarifies why certain conscious experiences (e.g., out-of-body experiences in near-death states) can exist independently of the body (Mishlove, 2021), thereby providing a more refined theoretical support for the continuity and designability of life.

Driving Force Mechanism: The Core Power Source of Life Design

Another key innovation of UCST is its division of forces into passive forces ($\vec{F}_{\mathrm{p}}$) and active forces ($\vec{F}_{\mathrm{a}}$), along with the establishment of a unified dynamic equation integrating both. Passive forces refer to those in traditional physics, such as gravitation, electromagnetic force, strong interaction and weak interaction; they abide by physical laws and govern the motion and changes of inanimate objects. Active forces, by contrast, are generated by living organisms through the interaction of mind-body-supporting environment, with their magnitude and direction determined by the free will of the mind, serving as the core power source for the

autonomous behaviors of life. For example, the ground acts as the supporting environment when a person walks; the surrounding water serves as the supporting environment when a person swims. When a person is suspended in the air, the active force obtained by pushing the air during movement is insufficient to drive the human body, whereas only supports like the ground or high-density fluids can achieve this. The innovation of this mechanical model explains the essential difference between living and non-living entities from a scientific perspective, and also provides a quantifiable dynamic mechanism for life design.

The revised Newton's second law in UCST clearly presents this logic:

$$\frac{d^2\vec{s}}{dt^2} = \sum \vec{F}_p + \vec{F}_a \tag{1}$$

For inanimate objects, the active force $\vec{F}_a = 0$, and their motion is entirely governed by passive forces in accordance with mechanical physical laws—this is the scenario considered in classical mechanics (Goldstein, Poole, & Safko, 2002). For living organisms, however, the existence of active forces renders their motion no longer confined by physical constraints, enabling them to alter motion trajectories and development directions through the autonomous choices of the mind. This mechanism perfectly accounts for the purposeful behaviors of humans—ranging from daily autonomous movements to long-term life planning, all of which are essentially processes of system optimization dominated by active forces.

From the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, classical mechanics gradually revealed limitations in explaining a series of emerging observational phenomena. Its scope of application struggled to cover core issues such as wave-particle duality in the microcosmic domain, blackbody radiation laws in the thermal radiation field, and the complex dynamic processes of living systems. This theoretical predicament drove the academic community to break through traditional frameworks and construct landmark new theoretical systems like quantum mechanics (Fitzpatrick, 2015), relativity (Einstein, 1916), and general system theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) with revolutionary research paradigms. From the perspective of disciplinary logic, the failure of classical mechanics to explain life phenomena stems from its simplistic equivalence of dynamic and complex living organisms to inanimate objects that follow mechanical motion laws, ignoring the unique essence and inherent laws of living systems.

Erwin Schrödinger, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, was the first to pose critical inquiries into this core dilemma, explicitly raising the fundamental scientific question of "what is life" and pioneering attempts to analyze the internal mechanisms of life phenomena from a physical perspective (Schrödinger, 2021). Schrödinger's exploration not only broke down traditional disciplinary barriers but also inspired a number of physicists to engage in cross-disciplinary research in life sciences, directly promoting the birth of molecular biology as an interdisciplinary field (Alberts et al., 2018).

After decades of development, molecular biology has achieved breakthrough progress, with the complete decoding and mapping of whole-genome sequences of humans and various model animals. Nevertheless, the core scientific question regarding "the essence of life" remains unresolved fundamentally. More crucially, the existing theoretical system of molecular biology has not yet achieved breakthrough progress or reached a consensus conclusion in explaining core issues such as the origin, essence, and activity laws of consciousness. At present, theoretical interpretations of conscious phenomena in the academic community are still in a stage of diversified exploration, without the formation of a unified core theoretical framework (Kuhn, 2024).

Looking back at the original intention of classical mechanics, its core goal was to construct a theoretical system capable of systematically explaining the laws of motion and changes of various objects observed by

humans. To accurately describe the motion trajectories of objects, Newton introduced a coordinate system composed of time and space, defined mass as the basic intrinsic property of objects that does not change with the transformation of coordinate systems, and categorized physical quantities such as position, velocity, acceleration, momentum and various forms of energy as derivative properties dependent on the coordinate system. Based on this core framework, Newtonian mechanics was established (Newton, 1846), and the birth of this theory marked the official formation of the modern scientific paradigm.

Re-examining this theoretical system from the perspective of modern science, it can be found that Newton had the following core limitations and cognitive biases when constructing his theory: (1) Although Newton accepted Copernicus' heliocentric theory and clearly acknowledged the Earth's rotation and revolution, he still adopted the inertial frame assumption derived from the geocentric theory, failing to completely break free from the constraints of traditional cosmology on theoretical construction; (2) Newton recognized that the measurement of all object properties relies on human observation behaviors, but did not consider the impact of the precision characteristics of measuring instruments and the subjective cognitive biases of observers on measurement results, defaulting that the measured object properties are objective existences completely independent of the observation process; (3) he failed to realize that various concepts and theories relied upon by human communication are inherently relative. For instance, the determination of an object's motion state and the evaluation of an individual's moral attributes (good or evil) are both premised on the cognitive perspectives and evaluation criteria of human observers, without the existence of an absolute and unified basis for judgment. Expressions such as "motion relative to the sun" in Copernicus' heliocentric theory and "velocity relative to the aether" in the Michelson-Morley experiment are strictly speaking concepts lacking verifiability—from the practical dimension of human observers, such physical quantities are essentially theoretical calculated values that cannot be confirmed through direct observation.

If Newton had defined the core boundary between living and non-living entities from the perspective of human observation during the theoretical construction process, classifying objects with the ability of active movement (e.g., animals and humans) as living organisms and those without such ability (e.g., stones, tables, and chairs) as inanimate objects, then from a logical deduction perspective, various celestial bodies as well as subsequently discovered molecules, atoms, subatomic particles, etc., should all be categorized as living organisms. A mechanical theoretical system constructed based on this definition logic might have effectively avoided many theoretical predicaments faced by classical mechanics from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.

Therefore, the core value of active forces lies in their adjustability. According to the nine-layer life model of UCST (Cui, 2019) and David Hawkins' consciousness level theory (Hawkins, 2014), the elevation of consciousness levels can enhance the intensity and positive orientation of active forces. This echoes Master Jiqun's emphasis on "eradicating greed, anger and delusion, and strengthening positive thoughts" (Master Jiqun, 2025) as well as the practice of "accumulating merits and rectifying faults" in *The Four Lessons of Liaofan Yuan* (Yuan, 2004): Through purifying the mind and regulating behaviors, positive active forces can be continuously enhanced, offsetting the inertia of negative behaviors and realizing the positive reshaping of life trajectories. A number of empirical studies provide support for the existence of active forces. For example, near-death experience (NDE) research shows that 98% of survivors report experiences of the mind separating from the body (Mishlove, 2021). This phenomenon cannot be explained by materialism-based science (Walach, 2019), but is highly consistent with the setting of the mind being independent of the body and the active force mechanism in UCST (Cui et al., 2025).

Systematic Unity: The Cross-Scale Logic of Life Design

Whether our research object is an electron, a human being, the entire Earth, or the whole Milky Way, we can all analyze it using a system model (Bertalanffy, 1968). However, current theories of complex systems are diverse and fragmented; a 2021 map of complexity sciences indicated that there were as many as 67 distinct schools of thought (Castellani & Gerrits, 2021). In the 21st century, how the theory of complex systems should evolve has become a hot topic of discussion among complex systems theorists (Bianconi et al., 2023). One of the important contributions of UCST is breaking the fragmented state of system research across different scales and fields. It integrates microcosmic and macroscopic, living and non-living systems with a single dynamic equation, providing a unified analytical framework for understanding human life as a complex system. This theory defines human life as an open system that maintains an ordered state through continuous exchange of matter, energy, and information with the environment, where active forces play a core role in regulating the system's entropy change and development trajectory.

The complexity of the life system is reflected in its characteristics of multi-scale interaction and dynamic equilibrium. At the microcosmic level, basic units with biological attributes such as human cells and atoms have their movements influenced by active forces. At the macroscopic level, the interactions between an individual and other people, society, and the natural environment form a complex system network, and active forces affect the operational state of the entire network through information transmission and the exchange of matter and energy. UCST's determinism-probabilism unification axiom states that the determinacy or randomness of system behavior depends on the completeness of information—if parameters such as active forces and environmental resistance can be fully grasped, the development trajectory of the life system is predictable and controllable; if there is uncertainty in the parameter information, the system behavior exhibits probabilistic characteristics. This perspective not only acknowledges the complexity and uncertainty of human life, but also provides a scientific basis for active life design.

The systematic unity of UCST is also reflected in its compatibility with the law of causality. The theory abides by the fundamental karmic principle of "cause, condition, effect, and retribution" (Roach, McNally, & Gordon, 2011), holding that the development of life is the combined result of innate accumulation and present choices. This is fully consistent with the transformation logic of Liaofan Yuan in *The Four Lessons of Liaofan Yuan* (Yuan, 2004), who progressed from the belief that "destiny is predetermined" to the understanding that "destiny can be created by oneself": The innate "predestined fate" can be regarded as the initial state of the system and the constraints of passive forces, while present active choices can reshape the causal trajectory and realize the transformation of fate by regulating active forces. Master Jiqun's emphasis on the "law of life continuity" (Master Jiqun, 2025) is also consistent with this—the accumulation of life is not limited to the present life, but a combination of accumulations across multiple lifetimes and present choices; active choices can break through the limitations of past accumulations and achieve the leap of life quality.

Core Dimensions of Life Design: Three-Dimensional Construction Based on UCST

Consciousness Dimension: Source Regulation of Active Forces

According to the theoretical framework of UCST, the mind, as the generator, receiver, and storage carrier of active information, is the source of active forces (Cui et al., 2025). Therefore, the core of life design lies first in the regulation and elevation of the consciousness dimension—by optimizing the information generation and processing mechanism of the mind, one can always maintain positive mindfulness and positive thinking (Master

Jiqun, 2025; Yuan, 2004; Roach et al., 2011), strengthen positive active forces, and provide fundamental motivation for life development.

The information generation function of the mind determines the orientation of active forces. UCST holds that active information originates from the internal signals of the mind, while passive information comes from the external environment, and both jointly influence behavioral choices. The key to life design is to enhance the positivity and dominance of active information, with specific paths including mindfulness practice, cognitive upgrading, and psychological self-examination. Mindfulness practice can improve the awareness of consciousness, helping individuals timely detect negative thoughts such as greed, anger, and delusion, and reduce their interference with active forces (Master Jiqun, 2025; Yuan, 2004; Roach et al., 2011); cognitive upgrading constructs a correct worldview, outlook on life, and values through learning traditional cultural wisdom (Yuan, 2004) and scientific knowledge (Cui et al., 2025), providing a positive framework for active information; psychological self-examination draws on the "psychological inventory" method proposed by Master Jiqun, regularly sorting out one's own negative and positive psychology (Master Jiqun, 2025), clarifying the adjustment direction, and continuously optimizing the orientation of active forces.

The elevation of consciousness level is the key to enhancing the intensity of active forces. Both the nine-layer life model of UCST (Cui, 2019) and David Hawkins' consciousness level theory (Hawkins, 2014) indicate that consciousness level is positively correlated with energy intensity. The consciousness leap from instinct-driven to self-awareness and awakening others can significantly improve the regulatory effectiveness of active forces (Roach et al., 2011). This process requires long-term practice and cultivation: At the Confucian level, it is manifested as the moral cultivation of "learning to become a person"; at the Taoist level, it is reflected as the cultivation of life and nature in accordance with the "Tao follows nature"; at the Buddhist level, it is embodied as the wisdom enlightenment of "realizing the mind and seeing the nature"; under the scientific framework of UCST, it is the transformation from passive response to the environment to active life design through continuous mind training. The case of Yuan Liaofan in *The Four Lessons of Liao Fan* who improved his mind level through vowing to do good deeds and continuous self-reflection (Yuan, 2004) is a vivid practice of this logic.

Behavior Dimension: Synergy Between Active Forces and Passive Forces

If the mind dimension is the source of active forces, then the behavior dimension is the specific embodiment of the synergistic effect between active forces and passive forces. The revised Newton's second law in UCST provides a clear mechanical logic for behavior design: The development trajectory of life is the result of the combined action of passive forces (innate conditions, environmental constraints, etc.) and active forces (behavioral choices dominated by the mind). The behavioral dimension of life design essentially lies in realizing the positive synergy between the two through optimizing behavioral choices, so as to maximize the positive effectiveness of life development.

The core of behavior design is to transform positive thoughts into continuous behavioral practices, thereby accumulating active force potential energy. The practice of "merit and demerit record" in *The Four Lessons of Liao Fan* (Yuan, 2004) is a classic example of this process—by recording good and evil behaviors daily and quantifying the positive and negative values of behaviors, it is essentially the dynamic tracking and adjustment of the interaction between active forces and passive forces. This practice is highly corresponding to the concepts of "karmic seeds", "karmic capital", and "karmic files" in the *Karma Management* theory (Roach et al., 2011), and the two have a strong isomorphism in core logic and practical paths. From the perspective of UCST, good

behaviors can enhance positive active forces, while evil behaviors will strengthen negative inertia (similar to the restrictive effect of passive forces). The "merit and demerit record" or "karmic files" help individuals continuously strengthen positive behaviors and offset the impact of negative behaviors through clear behavioral feedback.

Altruistic behavior has special systematic value in behavior design. UCST holds that altruistic behavior is not merely self-sacrifice, but a systematic optimization strategy for "long-term self-interest". Since the life system is open, altruistic behavior can strengthen the positive connection between individuals and the environment through mind interaction and information transmission, form a systematic synergy effect, and then improve the stability and gain of life design. Master Jiqun regards "Bodhicitta" as an important element of life design, emphasizing "benefiting oneself and others, awakening oneself and others" (Master Jiqun, 2025), which is highly consistent with the systematic value of altruistic behavior in UCST. From a mechanical perspective, altruistic behavior can trigger positive environmental feedback, which is equivalent to introducing positive external forces into the life system, forming synergy with internal active forces, and promoting the continuous optimization of the life trajectory.

Environment Dimension: Interaction Optimization of Open Systems

The open system theory of UCST (Cui et al., 2025) points out that the life system cannot exist in isolation and must maintain an ordered state through the exchange of information, matter, and energy with the environment. The environment is an important supporting condition for the exertion of active forces. Therefore, the core of the environmental dimension in life design lies in optimizing the interaction between the system and the environment, and constructing a supportive environment conducive to the exertion of positive active forces.

The key to environmental selection and transformation is to identify and approach positive environments while avoiding consumptive environments. Positive environments include positive cultural environments, interpersonal environments, and natural environments. Such environments can strengthen an individual's positive consciousness and active forces through information transmission and energy exchange; consumptive environments, on the other hand, will weaken the effectiveness of positive active forces through negative information and energy consumption. The inheritance of the "cultural and moral tradition" emphasized by Master Jiqun (2025) essentially guides individuals to choose a positive cultural environment—the traditional cultural wisdom such as Confucianism's "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness", Buddhism's "realizing the mind and seeing the nature", and Taoism's "returning to simplicity and innocence" can provide a stable value anchor for the mind and strengthen the sustainability of active forces. Yuan Liaofan's choice to associate with virtuous mentors such as Zen Master Yungu in *The Four Lessons of Liao Fan* is also an important practice of environmental optimization.

The empowerment of cultural and moral traditions holds a core position in the environmental dimension. The "information integration" axiom of UCST (Cui et al., 2025) states that information is a key factor affecting the behavior of open systems. As a core information carrier that condenses human wisdom, cultural and moral traditions can provide a stable value framework and behavioral norms for the life system. The concept of "self-cultivation as the foundation" in traditional Chinese culture unifies individual cultivation and environmental optimization—influencing the surrounding environment through one's own positive behaviors, forming a systematic diffusion effect of "cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the

world". This two-way optimization between individuals and the environment can provide continuous motivational support for life design and ensure the long-term effectiveness of active forces.

Practical Paths of Life Design: From Theory to Implementation

Cognitive Construction: Clarifying the Underlying Logic of Life Design

Cognitive construction is the premise and foundation of life design. Its core lies in establishing a correct cognition of the designability of life and breaking cognitive barriers, supported by the scientific framework of UCST and integrated with traditional cultural wisdom. First of all, it should be clarified that life design is not arbitrary subjective speculation, but a scientific practice based on dualistic ontology, active force mechanism, and systematic laws. The axiom of UCST that distinguishes between "universe (infinite)" and "world (finite)" reminds us that life design should focus on the perceivable and intervenable finite world, avoid meaningless speculation on the unobservable infinite universe, and concentrate on the controllable factors of one's own mind, behavior, and environment.

Establishing an ultimate value goal beyond material pursuit is a core link in cognitive construction. The "nine-layer life model" of UCST (Cui, 2019) reminds us that the value of life lies not in the amount of material accumulation, but in the improvement of mind level and mind quality. This is completely consistent with Master Jiqun's emphasis that "who you are is more important than what you have" (Master Jiqun, 2025) and the value orientation of "accumulating merits to establish destiny" in *The Four Lessons of Liaofan Yuan* (Yuan, 2004). In the AI era, when the significance of material pursuit gradually weakens, establishing the ultimate goals of "becoming a sage" and "awakening oneself and others" (Cheng, 2025) can provide a stable value anchor for life design and avoid losing direction in the complex environment.

Accepting the uncertainty of the system is an important content of cognitive construction. The "determinism-probabilism unification" axiom of UCST (Cui et al., 2025) indicates that the development of the life system has both a predictable and controllable deterministic aspect, and an uncertain aspect caused by incomplete information. Therefore, life design should not pursue absolute certainty and rigid planning, but maintain the flexibility of dynamic adjustment while clarifying the core direction. This requires us to face changes and challenges in life with an open mind, regard uncertainty as an opportunity to optimize design schemes, and realize the dynamic balance and continuous optimization of the life system through continuous feedback and adjustment.

Behavioral Practice: Daily Training of Propulsive Force

Behavioral practice serves as the pivotal process of translating cognition into reality, whose core lies in consolidating positive propulsive force through daily training and achieving the unity of mental awareness and behavior. Mindfulness practice constitutes the fundamental approach to behavioral practice; through methods such as meditation, contemplation, and self-reflection, it enhances the awareness and concentration of mind, enabling individuals to promptly detect and block the interference of negative thoughts on propulsive force (Master Jiqun, 2025; Yuan, 2004; Roach et al., 2011). The practice of "mindfulness and altruism" emphasized by Master Jiqun essentially relies on sustained mind training to strengthen the guidance of positive thoughts on behaviors, thereby maintaining the positive orientation of propulsive force at all times.

Self-examination of merits and demerits acts as an important tool for behavioral practice. Drawing on the "Merit-Demerit Record" from *Reflections on My Life* (Yuan, 2004) and the principle of "behavior-karma correlation" in *Karma Management* (Roach et al., 2011), a daily mechanism for recording and reflecting on

behaviors should be established: classifying and documenting daily good and evil deeds, analyzing their impacts on propulsive force, and clarifying directions for improvement. This quantitative self-monitoring helps individuals form behavioral habits, continuously accumulate positive propulsive force, and counteract the inertia of negative behaviors. For instance, positive actions such as "altruistic behavior", "mindfulness practice", and "learning and self-improvement" can be designated as daily essential tasks, and the potential energy of positive propulsive force can be reinforced through consistent practice.

Altruistic practice represents the advanced form of behavioral practice. Starting with trivial daily matters—such as helping others, offering charity, and sharing knowledge—individuals can strengthen positive connections with the external environment through persistent altruistic behaviors. According to the UCST, altruistic behaviors can trigger positive feedback loops within the system, enhancing the orderliness and stability of the life system. Cases recorded in *Reflections on My Life*, such as Yang Zicheng and his wife relieving prisoners and the elderly Mrs. Lin distributing rice cakes as charity (Yuan, 2004), all testify to the crucial role of altruistic behaviors in accumulating positive energy and optimizing life trajectories. In practice, emphasis should be placed on the sincerity and consistency of altruistic behaviors, and utilitarian formalism should be avoided to ensure that such behaviors can be truly transformed into positive propulsive force.

Environment Optimization: Constructing a Supporting Network for the Life System

The core of environment optimization lies in constructing a supportive network conducive to the exertion of positive propulsive force, so as to realize the coordinated development of individuals and their surroundings. Cultural infiltration serves as the fundamental path of environment optimization. By delving into the wisdom of self-cultivation and life orientation embodied in traditional culture—through approaches such as reading classics, participating in cultural activities, and engaging in exchanges with insightful individuals—we can provide mental awareness with a stable cognitive framework and value support. The practice of overseas Chinese parents attaching great importance to their children's traditional cultural education, so as to prevent them from becoming "bananas" (individuals who are yellow-skinned but Westernized in thinking), precisely reflects the recognition of the empowering role of cultural tradition in shaping mental awareness. Bloodline merely constitutes the material foundation, while cultural tradition embodies the spiritual essence. A sound cultural environment can strengthen the stability of mental awareness and provide sustained energy support for propulsive force. The prominent Qian clan of China has nurtured numerous talents, including a galaxy of scientific giants such as Qian Xuesen, Qian Sanqiang, and Qian Weichang. The clan explicitly attributes its enduring prosperity to the cultural tradition and spiritual core carried forward in *The Family Instructions of the Qians*.

Interpersonal synergy constitutes a crucial component of environment optimization. One should proactively choose to associate with individuals of high-level mental awareness and positive behaviors, thereby forming a community of positive energy. According to the principle of systemic interaction in the UCST, the interaction of mental awareness among individuals can transmit proactive information and energy, enhancing the positive propulsive force of all parties involved. A typical case of interpersonal synergy is recorded in *Reflections on My Life*: Yuan Liaofan embarked on the journey of changing his fate after receiving enlightenment from Chan Master Yungu. Interactions with virtuous and knowledgeable mentors can rapidly elevate one's level of mental awareness, optimizing the orientation and intensity of propulsive force. Meanwhile, excessive contact with individuals harboring strong negative energy should be avoided to reduce the dissipation of one's own propulsive force.

Resource integration acts as the practical guarantee for environment optimization. Rational utilization of material, technological, educational, and other resources can alleviate the constraints of passive force, creating favorable conditions for the exertion of propulsive force. For instance, improving one's capabilities through education that aligns with the world outlook and values of sustainable human development (e.g., the notion that altruism is essentially self-beneficial, and that humanity is a community with a shared future) provides the foundation for practicing positive behaviors; leveraging technological tools to assist mindfulness practice and behavior recording enhances the efficiency of life design. However, attention should be paid to the moderation of resource utilization, so as to avoid falling into the trap of materialism—resources are merely means to achieve life design rather than ends in themselves. Excessive pursuit of material resources will instead weaken the autonomy of mental awareness and impede the positive exertion of propulsive force. An important reason for the intensification of violent conflicts confronting humanity today is the dominance of the dualistic and confrontational mindset of "if not an ally, then an enemy". To fundamentally resolve this predicament, the United Nations must replace such a mindset with the Eastern philosophy of dualistic coexistence (Cui, 2025).

The Boundaries and Contemporary Value of Life Design

The Boundaries of Design: Respecting Laws and Maintaining Flexibility

The notion that life can be designed does not mean that one can act arbitrarily or break all constraints; instead, the design process must respect objective laws and maintain reasonable boundaries. First and foremost, the physical laws represented by passive force and the belief that active force also abides by the law of causality constitute the bottom-line boundaries of life design. The UCST clearly states that the combined effects of active force and passive force ultimately determine the trajectory of one's life. Life design must be carried out within the framework of physical laws and the law of causality. For example, natural laws such as birth, aging, illness, and death cannot be completely transcended; the laws and regulations of society and universally recognized ethical norms should serve as inviolable bottom lines for one's conduct. Life design ought to respect these environmental constraints and focus on maximizing the improvement of life quality within the scope permitted by the environment.

Avoiding the utilitarian misconception is an important boundary of life design. The core of life design lies in the growth of mental awareness and system optimization, rather than the mechanical achievement of a single goal. Some people may simplify life design into the pursuit of fame, fortune, and power—a utilitarian orientation that distorts the positivity of active force and leads to the loss of mental awareness. Master Jiqun reminds us that morality is the foundation of establishing oneself and securing one's life path; practicing morality is a form of life wisdom, which entails understanding how to conduct oneself and how to live a fulfilling life (Master Jiqun, 2025). Therefore, life design must take the perfection of mental awareness and the cultivation of sound personality as its core goals, avoiding being kidnapped by short-term utilitarian objectives.

It is imperative to profoundly understand the causal principle that "you reap what you sow"—even if we embrace the core tenet of "good causes lead to good fruits", we must also clarify that good causes differing in their original intentions, orientations, and practices will ultimately yield distinct karmic outcomes. This point is clearly elaborated in *Reflections on My Life*: The paths and methods of practice for seeking longevity, offspring, and wealth each have their own emphases and must not be conflated. Understanding this logic will dispel confusion over misfortunes befalling benevolent individuals such as He Jiaolong, and prevent the formation of the misleading conclusion that "good people do not get their just deserts", which is highly detrimental to the

values of young people. From a karmic perspective, He Jiaolong's relatively short lifespan in this life might have resulted from heavy karmic debts of killing in his past lives; moreover, she neither perceived the limitations of her lifespan nor comprehended the truth that longevity can be extended through positive spiritual practice, failing to take targeted measures to reform her ways, accumulate good karma, and make adjustments. This ultimately led to a regrettable outcome. Nevertheless, this does not mean that "good deeds bring no good results"—the contributions she made to the people throughout her life will forever be imprinted as positive karma, manifesting as blessings in the cycle of samsara. In contrast, Yuan Liaofan, upon learning from Mr. Kong in his early years that he was destined to have a short life and no children, did not passively accept his fate. Instead, he followed Chan Master Yungu's "method of changing destiny", practiced good deeds and rectified his thoughts through the "Merit-Demerit Record", and ultimately resolved the two major life predicaments of lifespan and offspring satisfactorily. This practice validates the core essence of "shaping one's own destiny" under the law of causality (Yuan, 2004).

Embracing dynamic adjustments is a necessary flexibility in life design. The complexity of open systems dictates that life design plans cannot remain static; instead, they must be continuously optimized and upgraded in tandem with environmental evolution and personal growth. The "finite world" axiom of UCST reminds us that human cognitive abilities have inherent boundaries, making it impossible to fully predict all future variables. Therefore, life design plans should maintain appropriate flexibility, reserving sufficient buffer space to address uncertainties. This requires us to examine life design from a dynamic and developmental perspective, defining it as a continuous process of calibration and iterative optimization, rather than a one-time fixed plan.

It is worth emphasizing that the core goal of a fulfilling life should be established as early as possible; a clear core orientation can help individuals avoid detours in their growth and focus their core energy (Cui, 2019). Drawing from personal experience, I regarded Zhang Jian (Zhang, 2023) as a life idol in my childhood, establishing a preliminary life orientation. Upon entering university, through in-depth study and reflection, I discovered that Li Shutong's insights into the universe and life (Chen, 1995) were more profound, prompting me to optimize and adjust my life plan. I then formulated the life path of "emulating Zhang Jian to dedicate myself to serving the country and benefiting the people before the age of retirement; following Li Shutong to immerse myself in spiritual practice and attain enlightenment after the retirement", and set the core pursuit of a fulfilling life as "being a filial son who brings honor to one's ancestors; being a father whose legacy endures for generations; being an individual who lives free from illness, foresees the time of one's passing, and attains rebirth in the Pure Land", striving unremittingly toward this goal throughout my life.

Regarding whether individuals can fully grasp their own destiny and truly achieve the ultimate pursuit of living without illness, foreseeing the time of passing, and attaining rebirth in the Pure Land, the spiritual practices and life demonstrations of esteemed patriarchs and virtuous masters in history have already established firm confidence and confirmed that this pursuit is not empty talk, but a realm attainable through diligent spiritual practice. One year before his parinirvana, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng calmly instructed his disciples to build a stupa at Nengren Temple in Xinzhou. After the stupa's completion, he gathered his disciples one month in advance to announce the time of his departure from the mortal world, declaring plainly, "In the eighth lunar month, I shall leave this world", and reserved ample time to resolve his disciples' doubts and answer their questions. In his later years, he enjoyed good health and a clear mind; after his parinirvana, he left behind an incorruptible physical relic, interpreting the authenticity of "foreseeing the time of passing" through the realm of mastering life and death freely (Huineng, n.d.). The modern Chan Buddhism giant, the Elder Xuyun, arranged

all posthumous affairs in detail one month before his parinirvana, wrote his will in his own hand, and ultimately passed away peacefully in a thatched hut on Yunju Mountain, lying on his right side in the auspicious posture, free from suffering until his last moment. This fully demonstrated a practitioner's complete mastery over life (Cen, n.d.). Master Yinguang practiced Buddha recitation diligently throughout his life; before his passing, he foresaw the time of his departure, arranged his funeral affairs calmly, and passed away peacefully amid the Buddha recitation of the assembly. His life demonstration has been revered as a model of the Pure Land School by later generations (Yinguang, n.d.).

Master Hongyi (Li Shutong), once a talented scholar of the secular world and later a distinguished Buddhist monk, provided even more compelling evidence through his conduct before and after his parinirvana. Although physically weak in his final years, he remained mentally lucid at all times. Sensing the impending end of his life, he implied his passing with the phrase "soon to embark on a long journey", and wrote the four-character final inscription "Sorrow and Joy Intertwined" calmly before his death. He declined unnecessary medicines and donated them to others instead, ultimately passing away peacefully at the Quanzhou Wenling Nursing Home. He practiced the realm of being free from attachments and foreseeing the time of passing through his lifelong spiritual practice (Chen, 1995). The 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, handed over his prophecy letter to his disciples more than 10 months before his parinirvana. When seriously ill, he clearly informed his disciples, "I see Tibet; I have clearly seen my future parents", predicting the message of his reincarnation in advance. At the time of his parinirvana, a rainbow auspicious omen appeared in the sky, and eagles circled overhead to pay homage. The process of his reincarnation fully confirmed his pre-life prophecy, demonstrating a practitioner's autonomous control over the cycle of life, death, and rebirth (Cooney & Altieri, 1996). These esteemed patriarchs and virtuous masters, using their own lives as testimony and through well-documented deeds, have shown that living without illness, foreseeing the time of passing, and attaining rebirth in the Pure Land are not unattainable fantasies, but a life realm naturally reached through rooted spiritual practice and unremitting dedication. They further strengthen our conviction that only by adhering to the path of spiritual practice can individuals truly grasp their own destiny and approach the ultimate goal of a fulfilling life.

Contemporary Value: Solutions to the Predicaments of the Times

Against the backdrop of the AI era, the theory and practice of life design hold significant contemporary value, providing a systematic solution to address the predicaments of the times. First and foremost, life design can effectively alleviate the prevalent social mentality of anxiety and confusion. The limitations of materialist science have led people to overemphasize external possessions while neglecting the value of internal being (Walach, 2019). When such external pursuits are disrupted by technologies like AI, individuals are prone to falling into anxiety and bewilderment (Cheng, 2025). The internal growth path jointly indicated by the UCST (Cui et al., 2025) and the wisdom of traditional culture (Master Jiqun, 2025; Yuan, 2004) helps people find the foundation for establishing themselves and securing their life paths through the regulation of active force and the elevation of mental awareness quality, enabling a transformation from external pursuit to internal abundance.

Life design bridges the fragmented divide between science and humanities. In modern society, the separation of science and humanities has resulted in an imbalance between technological development and spiritual civilization (Walach, 2019). By virtue of its dualistic ontology and active force mechanism, UCST constructs a bridge connecting science (mechanics, systems theory) and humanities (ethics, spirituality). This theory not only offers a scientific analytical framework for life design, but also endows science with humanistic care through

integration with the wisdom of traditional culture, thereby achieving the unity of rationality and value. Such integration can guide technological development toward a direction that promotes the spiritual growth of humanity and social harmony, preventing the alienation of technology (Cui & Pan, 2025).

Life design drives the coordinated development of individuals and society. At the individual level, life design can generate a systematic diffusion effect through the accumulation of positive active force, fostering interpersonal harmony and social progress. UCST posits that altruism constitutes "long-term self-interest": The benevolent thoughts and deeds of individuals can be transmitted to others through systemic interaction, fostering a positive social atmosphere (Cui et al., 2025). Numerous cases recorded in *Reflections on My Life* of virtuous families enjoying lasting blessings are vivid manifestations of this logic (Yuan, 2004). In contemporary society, if every individual practices the philosophy of life design, guides their behaviors with positive thought, and repays society through altruistic practices (Master Jiqun, 2025), it will surely drive social harmony and progress, realizing the coordinated development of individuals and society. Individuals will also be able to fulfill their aspirations and ultimately achieve their ultimate goal of a fulfilling life (Roach et al., 2011).

Conclusion

From the perspective of the UCST, integrating Master Jiqun's philosophy of life design (Master Jiqun, 2025), the destiny-establishing practices recorded in *Reflections on My Life* (Yuan, 2004), and the operational guidelines in *Karma Management* (Roach et al., 2011), this study draws a clear conclusion: Life is not determined by mechanical fatalism or a single material factor, but rather possesses significant designability. The essence of this designability lies in "shaping one's own destiny"—that is, realizing the independent improvement of the life system through the three-dimensional construction of mental awareness dominance, behavioral practice, and environment optimization.

UCST provides a solid scientific foundation for life design: The dualistic ontology establishes the independent status and subjective initiative of mental awareness; the active force mechanism reveals the core driving source of life design; and the systemic unity offers a cross-scale analytical framework (Cui et al., 2025). The wisdom of traditional culture, on the other hand, provides a profound philosophical foundation and practical experience for life design: Master Jiqun's emphasis on "discerning the mind and realizing its nature" and "mindfulness and altruism" points out the direction for the elevation of mental awareness (Master Jiqun, 2025); the practices of "accumulating good deeds and reforming shortcomings" and the "Merit-Demerit Record" documented in *Reflections on My Life* offer actionable behavioral methods (Yuan, 2004). The integration of the two forms a life design system that is both scientific and practical.

Contemporary people are confronted with numerous challenges such as the impact of AI technology and spiritual distress, and the theory and practice of life design hold important practical significance. By clarifying value goals through cognitive construction, strengthening positive propulsive force through behavioral practice, and building a supporting network through environment optimization, every individual can break through the limitations of materialism and achieve the improvement of life quality (Walach, 2019). Future research may further verify relevant predictions of UCST (such as active force measurement and ether detection), providing more precise scientific support for life design. Meanwhile, integrating more cultural traditions and practical cases will enrich the theoretical system and practical paths of life design.

In the final analysis, the ultimate goal of life design is to realize the awakening and perfection of mental awareness. On the basis of respecting scientific laws, through active choices and continuous practice, one can

live the life they desire and achieve a meaningful and valuable life. This process is not only an inevitable path for individual growth, but also an important way to address the challenges of the times and promote social progress.

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Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author CUI Weicheng.

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