

'Doll-like' girls and 'narrow-waisted' men: How AI Prompts Reinforce and Challenge Hegemonic Gender Norms in China

This corpus study focuses on the ability of text prompts within generative AI to mediate hegemonic gender norms. The corpus comprises 2,000+ user-generated prompts scraped from a Chinese text-to-image AI platform, Jimeng (即梦). Only prompts containing semantically gendered markers (e.g., pronouns) are analyzed. Prompts with female markers form the *female* subcorpus (210k characters) while those with male markers form the *male* subcorpus (185k characters).

Keyword and collocation analyses reveal gendered discourse themes, a snapshot of which is shown in the table below. Jimeng's Chinese prompts reproduce similar gendered themes to that which Moriarty (2025) observed in Midjourney's English prompts. For instance, texts prompting female figures often cluster around an "innocence vs seduction" dichotomy, with keywords such as "doll-like" (洋娃娃般) and "innocently seductive style" (纯欲风). In contrast, texts prompting male figures foreground competence and aggression, including "business" (商务) and "battle armor" (战甲). In terms of agency, female figures are more often prompted with passive state verbs such as "sleep" (睡觉), whereas men are more often attributed with active behaviours such as "staring" (注视).

While many findings echo the English data, like those shown above that reinforce existing gendered stereotypes, we also observed a notable divergence from hegemonic gender norms, especially in prompts depicting male figures. For example, "androgynous" (雌雄莫辨) emerges as a key term in the *male* subcorpus, suggesting that male figures increasingly incorporate stereotypically feminized features. Moreover, many physical traits traditionally associated with Chinese females also appear as keywords for males, such as "light/fair skin" (白皮) and "narrow waist" (窄腰). While effeminate masculinities, long valued in Chinese literary culture, offer partial precedent for such "androgynous" aesthetics, they do not fully account for the intensified and explicitly gender-crossing keywords found in our *male* subcorpus. Instead, we argue that they represent Chinese AI users' linguistic construction of a "desired" male figure that is sexualized, beautiful, and fragile.

Overall, our findings indicate that Chinese AI users, through the linguistic act of text-to-image prompting, engage AI as a space in which traditional gender norms are both reproduced and contested, reflecting broader gendered discourses circulating in society.

Selected Keywords and Discourse Themes		
	Female	Male
Vibe	Innocence vs seduction: doll-like (洋娃娃般), innocently seductive style (纯欲风)	Bad-boy: cultured scumbag (斯文败类), psychotic (疯批)
Outfit	Sexy: off-shoulder (露肩), spaghetti straps (吊带)	Practical: formal (正式), business (商务), battle armor (战甲)
Body	Sexy: impressive (figure) (傲人的), curved (曲线)	Sexy: narrow waist (窄腰) Strong: beefy (壮硕)
Action	Passive: sleep (睡觉), comfortably (闲适)	Active: staring (注视), ruthlessly (狠戾)