



小仙女

Little fairy (feminine)





小仙女



I'm a tiny little
fairy princess!



仙女
下凡



我是世界上最可爱的
小仙女

Context

- origin of the word:
Chinese legends - 仙女 are immortal females with celestial abilities or daughters of gods. Associated with the heaven in chinese mythologies.
- a word that became popular in 2016 on social media as a response to the popular expression at the time 你咋不上天 (*why don't you go to heaven?*)
e.g. Why don't you go to the Heaven?
- I'm a little fairy from the Heaven.

Methodology

- Survey of usage on various social media platforms
 - **WeChat** - a messaging app like Whatsapp, also includes a social media function where people can post and share pictures, articles, and videos. The main social media platform that people from all age groups and backgrounds use.
 - **Sina Weibo** - a chinese microblogging website. Similar to Twitter.
 - **Bilibili** - a video website similar to Youtube. Known as a community for young people who are into 宅文化 (otaku culture).
 - **Zhihu** - a question-and-answer website that is similar to Quora.
 - **Xiao hongshu** - a fashion app and e-commerce platform that caters to mainly young women who are active consumers in the cosmetics/ fashion industry. 80%+ users are females.

Methodology

- Interviews

Gender: 9 female & 1 male

Age range: 18-27

Geography: most participants from southern China

Mainly Bi-Co freshmen and sophomores

A few upperclassmen and non-students

Indexicality

Feminine

Females and males sharing feminine qualities: Florent Mothe

Appearance: east Asian aesthetics

Interviewee 1-5, 7, 10: good-looking

Weibo & Xiao hongshu: cosmetics advertisements

Bilibili: videos about makeup and cuttings of idols

“气质” - feeling of grace and delicate combining personality and appearance

Interviewee 9: “人美心善” - pretty appearance with kind heart

Natural vs fake

Indexicality

Fantasy

Living in a bubble, extra attentions on appearance and nuances

Unaware or careless about true feeling of other

Childishness

Multiple Use

Praising

→ Address others

- ◆ Interview 4(BMC, transfor, female): people will say “little fairy, you are so pretty today”



Multiple Use

→ Describe other people

- ◆ Mostly female
 - Stars, idols, someone looks good
- ◆ Some male
 - Interview 2 (BMC female): males who are gay or like makeup
- ◆ 泥塑 (to address male as female) usually appear in the fan culture
 - Interview 3 (BMC female): you can use on any gender



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当土匪得有当土匪的规矩对不

Multiple Use

2. Intimacy

→ Stranger

- ◆ Online, with netizens
 - Interview 6,7 (BMC female) : to reduce the distance with stranger
- ◆ Opposited: Depends on gender of the user
 - Interview 2 (BMC female): if a boy says a girl is a little fairy, that is creepy flirting
 - Interview 8 (HC male): If I am a girl, I will feel disrespectful if someone call little fairy

Multiple Use

2. Intimacy

→ Costume/audience

- ◆ Interview 5(BMC female) : to promote a product usually clothes or makeup products
- ◆ Interview 6(BMC female): to promote makeup and recommend your idol
- ◆ Interview 7(BMC female): for marketing and promotion

→ Close friends

- ◆ Interview 9(working, non-bmc, female): I will only use with my close friends
- ◆ Opposited
 - interview 10(BMC female): If my friend uses it with me, I will feel distance



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Multiple Use

3. Sarcasm

→ Too sensitive

- ◆ Interview 2(BMC female): 玻璃心 (easy to get hurt and emotionally fragile)

→ Do not understand the suffering and miserable life of people

- ◆ Interview 1(BMC female): they don't need to worry about troubles of ordinary people (不问凡夫俗子之事)
- ◆ Interview 2(BMC female): they are live in a fantasy world or bubble (不知人间疾苦)

Rejection of the word

- Rejection of such categorization: construct of a patriarchal society
 - **“disrespectful”**
 - Interviewee 8 (male, hc): disrespectful, if I am a woman
 - Interviewee 4 (female, bmc transfer): a very feminine word, marking a traditional construct of femininity
 - Interviewee 3 (female, bmc): I feel disrespected. A flirtatious and shallow word.
 - **“小”: diminutive prefix--insignificance of women, pursuit of youth**
 - Interviewee 1 (female, bmc): *Xiao* marks a thing/ person insignificant. For example, a nurse and a little nurse are two different words. *Xiao* gives a sense of a mascot, like when a person only has to act cute and does not need to worry about getting things done.
- a word that is infantilizing, deminutizing, gendering, and sexualizing

小仙女 and gender

- **A gender-neutral word for some people:** marking feminine qualities-- not necessarily only women but also men who have feminine energy

Interviewee 2 (female, bmc): the word 小仙女 can be used as a noun or an adjective. As an adjective, the word is gender-neutral. As a noun, it refers to women and young gay men. those (men) who like makeup can call themselves 小仙女.

Interviewee 5 (female bmc): (this word) has its limitations. Men (who use this word) like makeup.

Interviewee 3 (female, bmc): So I feel like you can use 小仙女 to refer to any gender. You can use it to refer to any gender.

Interviewee 7 (female, bmc): (gave the example of a celebrity, a cis man) I praise him using a word that marks him as feminine, which is my own gender, is a form of acknowledging myself

→ creative use of the word “little female fairy” to refer to cis men and genders other than cis women. The broadening of the word to refer to a more diverse group of people. Young women’s practice of anti-gazing: practice of agency.

- Variations/ alternatives
小仙子: little fairy (gender neutral)
小仙男: little fairy (masculine form)

Interviewee 2 (female, bmc): All fairies are female (referring to 仙女) because fairy tales tell you so when you were a child. But it's ok to call a man a 仙女 (female). There is not much difference between a 仙女 and a 仙男.

Interviewee 4 (female, bmc transfer): my parents would think the word 小仙男 is too gay. I'm ok with it though.

Interviewee 3 (female, bmc): there is no need to have the term 仙男 (masculine form of the word fairy). I would not see anyone as 仙男. If I want to praise someone who identifies as cis man and call them a 仙女 (fairy- feminine,) I will just say that you are a 仙女.

Notes

- Meanings can be lost through translation
- Our own positionalities- we have our own understandings of the word