小仙女

Little fairy (feminine)
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
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
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”: deminutive 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
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 it 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