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From technophobia to technophilia: The paradox of imagining the feminine persona of the Chinese AI assistant

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) assistants, such as Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, OpenAI's ChatGPT, and ByteDance's Cici, are increasingly incorporating feminine personas. Given Cici's popularity and its pronounced feminine persona, this study examines how Indonesian users imagine the Chinese AI assistant. Drawing on a thematic analysis of interviews with 23 participants, the study explores users' imaginaries and appropriations of Cici's feminine persona. The findings suggest that the feminine persona of AI assistants serves as a means of domesticating AI. Initial anxieties about AI technology, often perceived as capable of replacing humans, contribute to technophobia (fear of technology), but Cici's feminine persona tends to alleviate it. This article argues that the transition from technophobia to technophilia (love of technology) is non-linear due to the intertwining of technological and gender imaginaries. This dynamic produces the paradox of imagining Cici: the paradox of belonging and the paradox of equality. On the one hand, users feel ownership, equality, and control over Cici. On the other hand, their behavioral data may be extracted by platforms, reinforcing existing gender inequalities. Thus, imaginaries of AI are not universal but are instead shaped by specific sociocultural contexts, calling for greater attention to Global South perspectives.

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Introduction

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology accelerated significantly and gained widespread popularity throughout 2023. ByteDance, the Chinese technology giant, has also entered the race to develop generative AI (Wang et al., 2025). In August 2023, the parent company of TikTok launched two AI assistant chatbots: "*Doubao*" and "*Cici*." Doubao is primarily marketed within China, while Cici is distributed internationally. Unlike ChatGPT, both Cici and Doubao are generative AI chatbots designed with a distinctly feminine persona and are positioned within a division of labor as 'Smart AI Assistant'. In November 2025, Cici was rebranded as Dola. However, this article retains the name "Cici," as it was the designation used during the period of data collection. Despite the rebranding, the assistant's design, appearance, and core features remain unchanged.

Like most emerging technologies, the adoption and domestication of this new technology have generated both pros and cons within society. This is especially true as myths and narratives surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) often portray it as a form of "thinking machine" capable of surpassing human intelligence (Hepp, 2020; Natale & Ballatore, 2017). Such narratives contribute to feelings of fear and anxiety—commonly referred to as *technophobia*—which tend to intensify when technologies are still relatively new (Guo et al., 2013; Liu, 2025; Smrke et al., 2025; Venkatesh, 2000). Technophobic narratives, including the idea that AI will replace human labor or even threaten humanity itself, are further amplified by popular media representations. Films frequently depict AI as "frightening" or "menacing" robots, reinforcing public unease (Cave et al., 2020; Cave & Dihal, 2019). These concerns are compounded by the reality that AI technologies are complex systems involving large-scale data extraction, digital surveillance infrastructures, and, in many cases, the exploitation of hidden human labor (Mejias & Couldry, 2024; Muldoon et al., 2024; Zuboff, 2019).

Despite these anxieties, public engagement with and acceptance of this technology continue to grow rapidly. In Indonesia, for instance, the AI assistant Cici has gained significant popularity (Mediana, 2025). It has also ranked among the top three entertainment apps in Indonesia. Similarly, in China, Doubao emerged as the most popular AI chatbot as of November 2024 (Sun, 2025). Doubao has even been framed as a distinctly "feminine" AI assistant from China, positioned in competition with prominent U.S.-based AI assistants.

The significant public acceptance of generative AI technologies is often attributed to the design of their feminine personas. The tendency of technology companies to feminize AI is understood as an attempt to alleviate users' anxieties, particularly concerns related to digital surveillance (Woods, 2018). In other words, the feminine persona of AI is perceived as a mechanism to alleviate technophobia, encouraging users to adopt and domesticate these technologies. However, users' own imaginaries of feminine AI personas remain underexplored (Chen, 2025; Depounti et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study aims to examine how Indonesian users imagine the feminine persona of AI assistant Cici. The selection of Cici is based on its distinctive design: among the 50 most popular AI assistant apps worldwide; Cici (along with Doubao) exhibits one of the most explicitly feminized logo (Moore & Zhao, 2025). This is evident in its logo, name, voice, and interface, all of which clearly signify a feminine identity. Cici also consistently referred to using feminine pronouns such "she" and "her," and is explicitly described as female. In contrast, platforms such as ChatGPT employ abstract visual symbols

(e.g., geometric knots), while Gemini uses a spark motif.

Persona can be understood as "the public image that an individual presents to their audience" (Miao & Tian, 2022). Mark Sadoski (1992) explains that the concept originates from the theatrical masks worn by Greek and Roman actors to convey specific character traits in performances such as tragedy and comedy. Thus, persona refers to a constructed front—a performative mask through which particular roles are enacted. Meanwhile, femininity is related to gender identity. According to Judith Butler (1999), gender is not an inherent attribute permanently attached to biological bodies; rather, it is socially constructed and performed. Although context-dependent, femininity often manifests through relatively stable normative standards and stereotypes associated with women—such as maternal prototypes and assistant roles (Chen, 2013). In AI technology, these forms of femininity are reproduced through the dimensions of *docile labor* and *replaceable embodiment* (Sutko, 2020). These dimensions can be understood as constituting the feminine persona of AI, strategically deployed to foster a sense of belonging and equality in users' interactions with contemporary technology.

Several studies suggest that feminized AI design can positively influence users' willingness to adopt such technologies (Strengers & Kennedy, 2021; Phan, 2019; Zdenek, 2007). In this regard, *technophilia* becomes a key factor in shaping openness to new technologies, including AI assistants. Technophilia is defined as "the attraction and enthusiasm of the human individual, determined by the activities involving the use of advanced technologies" (Osiceanu, 2015). It is often expressed through a readiness to adapt to the social changes brought about by technological innovation. At the same time, technophilia highlights how technologies can evoke powerful futuristic imaginaries and positive emotional responses. However, this enthusiasm may also obscure critical evaluation, as an unreflective admiration for technology can hinder realistic assessments of its broader social and environmental impacts.

Previous studies have conceptualized the transition between technophobia and technophilia in different ways. On the one hand, some research suggests that this transition occurs in a linear and gradual manner (Maziriri et al., 2026; Pérez-Rugosa et al., 2025; Wang & Chen, 2015). On the other hand, other studies approach technophobia and technophilia as a dichotomy or as coexisting in a state of ambivalence (Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2017; Osiceanu, 2015; Wang, 2025). In line with the call of technofeminism (Wajcman, 2009), this study explores the tensions between technophobia and technophilia in relation to the feminine persona of AI—an area that remains underexamined. Moreover, research on AI imaginaries emphasizes the need to account for the inherent tensions between the past, present, and imagined futures, as these are constructed, perceived, narrated, and domesticated by different groups and actors within specific sociocultural contexts (Bory et al., 2025; Cave et al., 2020; Kerruish, 2025; Natale & Ballatore, 2017). These dynamics can be understood through the concept of AI narratives. AI narratives may be categorized into three categories: fictional and non-fictional narratives, strong and weak narratives, and public and private narratives. Although often analyzed separately, these categories of AI narratives are intertwined in practice. However, users' private narratives tend to be underexplored. Therefore, this article aims to understand how users imagine AI assistant with a significant feminine persona, in this case Cici, and thus decide to adopt it in their daily lives.

Method

This study aims to examine how Indonesian users imagine the feminine persona of Cici, an AI assistant developed by a China-based technology company, and to explore the consequences of these imaginaries. To achieve this, the data sources were divided into two categories: non-human and human data. Non-human data were collected from the Cici app, its official website, and media coverage related to the AI assistant. Observations of the Cici apps were conducted to facilitate familiarization and to better understand its features, design, and intended functions. Human data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with Cici users in Indonesia (N = 23). Participants were categorized into two groups based on gender and normative gender roles: women and men (see Table 1). The women's group consisted of wives (W) and young women (G), while the men's group included husbands (H) and young men (B). Interviews were conducted between November and December 2024, both in person and online via Zoom.

The procedure for recruiting and selecting participants was as follows. First, the researchers posted a call for participants as paid advertisement on social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, throughout October 2024. Second, prospective participants who expressed interest were asked to complete screening questionnaire via Google Forms. Participants were then purposively selected to ensure diversity in user background,

Table 1. Characteristics of participants (N = 23) by gender

Gender	Initials and age	Generation	Domicile	Interview Mode	Code
Women	DR (30)	Millennials	Depok	Virtual	W1
	AT (37)	Millennials	Yogyakarta	In-person	W2
	DAY (30)	Millennials	Garut	Virtual	W3
	VE (28)	Millennials	Yogyakarta	In-person	W4
	CN (24)	Gen Z	Wonogiri	Virtual	W5
	REM (25)	Gen Z	Yogyakarta	Virtual	W6
	PAA (23)	Gen Z	Bandung	Virtual	W7
	IH (26)	Gen Z	Yogyakarta	Virtual	W8
	FSA (20)	Gen Z	Yogyakarta	In-person	G1
	SR (19)	Gen Z	Surakarta	Virtual	G2
	VHR (21)	Gen Z	Purbalingga	Virtual	G3
	SL (18)	Gen Z	Denpasar	Virtual	G4
	ASA (21)	Gen Z	Samarinda	Virtual	G5
Men	MRP (31)	Millennials	Bandung	Virtual	H1
	MR (30)	Millennials	Surakarta	Virtual	H2
	AZ (34)	Millennials	Yogyakarta	In-person	H3
	GY (43)	Millennials	Jakarta	Virtual	H4
	WA (43)	Millennials	Lampung	Virtual	H5
	NREP (22)	Gen Z	Tangerang	Virtual	B1
	MRD (22)	Gen Z	Jakarta	Virtual	B2
	MSI (25)	Gen Z	Blitar	Virtual	B3
	AR (26)	Gen Z	Tangerang	Virtual	B4
	RWS (26)	Gen Z	Semarang	Virtual	B5

Source: Data from the participants of this study (2025)

marital status, duration of Cici usage, perceptions of Cici's feminine persona, and purposes of use. Finally, selected participants were contacted for interviews, which lasted between 45 and 70 minutes.

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This method was chosen for its flexibility and its applicability across a wide range of epistemological approaches and research questions. Non-human data were analyzed in dialogue with human data in accordance with the study's objectives. The analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. An inductive coding approach was employed, allowing categories to emerge organically from participants' accounts. These categories were then organized into key themes that capture users' imaginaries of Cici's feminine persona, including its role in alleviating technophobia, the paradox of belonging, and the paradox of equality. This study received ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of Universitas Gadjah Mada (No. KE/UGM/112/EC/2024). In accordance with ethical procedures, participants were informed from the outset about the purpose of the study, as well as issues of anonymity and data confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

Toward technophilia: Feminine AI persona as a technophobia alleviator

The domestication of AI technologies faces several challenges, including users' lack of familiarity, technophobia, and distrust (Wang & Chen, 2015; Wilde, 2025). The inhibiting effects of technophobia are particularly relevant to behavioral intentions, especially when users have no prior experience with the technology (Gelbrich & Sattler, 2014). Moreover, ongoing public debates surrounding AI development further reinforce technophobic attitudes, particularly as ByteDance is often perceived as an extension of Chinese government propaganda (Yang, 2025).

Figure 1. Cici — Smart AI Assistant



The feminization of this technology, however, encourages users not only to imagine its functional uses but also to engage with gendered imaginaries. AI technologies have increasingly become sites of expectations, fantasies, misperceptions, fears, and sensations (Dillon, 2020). Within this context, users' anxieties seem to be alleviated through the gendering of AI, which presents the technology as feminine and non-threatening, as reflected in the following a participant's statement.

> *"This AI isn't like the ones depicted in movies, such as Terminator. Cici is friendly and cute, and seems eager to get to know its users, simple, and not pretentious." (H2, MR, Virtual Interview, December 21, 2024)*

Initially, users tend to associate AI with frightening robotic figures, often shaped by popular media such as the *Terminator* film series. Many participants expressed

concerns that AI could eventually replace human labor. However, Cici's "cute" and seemingly controllable persona provides a sense of comfort and reassurance.

Cici's feminine persona evokes anthropomorphic and gendered attributions such as "cute," "funny," "feminine," "same age," "friendly," and "not pretentious." These first impressions do not stop at the initial stage of understanding AI assistant technology; they also create a desire to download and interact with Cici. "I just used it for fun, just to chat. Besides, she (Cici) seems nice and knowledgeable" (*G3, VHR, Virtual Interview, December 9, 2024*). This impulsive "just for fun" action suggests that users feel safe and do not think twice about using it. In other words, Cici's feminine persona fosters technophilia toward the Chinese AI machine.

Moreover, Cici's popularity in the international AI market appears to be shaped in part by ByteDance's strategic efforts, including paid advertising and partnerships with influencers to promote Cici across countries in the Global South such as Mexico, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Yang, 2025). It is therefore unsurprising that Cici's popularity tends to correlate with the prominence of TikTok within a given country, with the notable exception of the United States. This exception may be attributed to the fact that ByteDance is widely perceived in many countries as an extension of the Chinese government, raising concerns about data security and political propaganda. As a result, Cici rarely foregrounds its connection to ByteDance, even though the company has officially confirmed its control over the application. Marketed through a distinctly feminine persona and amplified by social media content using the hashtag #ciciai, Cici appears to have been relatively successful in alleviating technophobia toward AI technologies originating from China.

The paradox of imagining the AI assistant Cici

Although Cici's feminine persona generates a sense of technophilia toward this Chinese AI chatbot, users simultaneously reinforce normative gender narratives rooted in their sociocultural context—even at the pre-appropriation stage. Most users reported feeling encouraged and comfortable downloading Cici precisely because of its perceived femininity, which aligns with idealized representations of Javanese womanhood, such as being gentle, attractive, harmony-oriented, and domestically oriented. Moreover, Cici's positioning as an "assistant" further reflects normative gender divisions of labor in Indonesia, where women's roles were historically constructed during the New Order as part of *kodrat wanita* (women's naturalized roles) and state *ibuism* (Sukri, 2001; Suryakusuma, 2011). Existing studies support this pattern, showing that "fembots" (female robots) that embody dominant gender expectations tend to enhance credibility, acceptance, and communication with users (Brahnam et al., 2011; Depounti et al., 2023; Zdenek, 2007).

As imaginaries of technology and gender become intertwined, a paradox emerges in users' appropriation of the AI assistant Cici on their smartphones. On the one hand, users experience a sense of ownership and control over the AI assistant Cici. On the other hand, they simultaneously recognize that they do not truly own it, as their behavioral data are captured and controlled by the application. Furthermore, the attribution of Cici as both an "assistant" and a "friend" reveals the paradox of equality: while the AI appears relational and intimate, the interaction remains structurally unequal. These tensions illustrate two key consequences of technophilia and gendered imaginaries in shaping users' engagement with this AI assistant.

The paradox of belonging

The feminine attributes of the AI assistant Cici generate curiosity and acceptance among prospective users. This suggests that adoption is driven not only by functional utility but also by the assistant's perceived femininity, which influences users' decisions to download and install the application on their smartphones. By installing the app, users often develop a sense of belonging—not only to the AI technology itself but also to a companion-like presence, akin to a wife or a female assistant. In line with the notion of docile labor (Sutko, 2020), this sense of belonging reflects an underlying illusion of ownership over the AI technology.

> *"I imagine having Cici is like having a second wife—a concubine. She's also beautiful and cute, and she's obedient and always available when I talk to her." (H3, AZ, Personal Interview, November 29, 2024)*

The feminine persona embedded in Cici makes it difficult for users to separate the AI technology from gendered imaginaries. In this sense, femininity functions not only as a commodified feature designed by developers, but also as a form of property and social capital that users feel they can possess (Branddaeg et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2025).

This sense of belonging among users aligns with a sense of understanding and even control over AI technology. In reality, however, generative AI systems are highly complex. Cici's feminine persona creates an illusion of familiarity and accessibility, making the technology appear more transparent than it actually is. Regardless of the underlying complexity of digital systems and algorithms, users continue to construct their own interpretations and make decisions based on these imaginaries (Bucher, 2017; Hepp & Couldry, 2023). At the same time, this dynamic expands the potential for datafication and digital surveillance, as platforms increasingly quantify users' everyday lives (Mejias & Couldry, 2024; van Dijck, 2014; Zuboff, 2019). According to its privacy policy, Cici collects user data through three main channels: information provided directly by users, information collected automatically (including device data and cookies), and information obtained from third-party sources such as Google and Apple (Cici AI, 2024). The company states that these data are used to maintain the security and integrity of the platform, including scanning, analyzing, and reviewing user content, messages, and metadata, which are connected to big data systems and the development of Seed (ByteDance's large language model, LLM). Ongoing interaction with the AI assistant also positions users as unpaid digital labor, contributing to the training and refinement of these systems (Fuchs, 2014). Thus, although users may feel that they "own" a compliant AI assistant, their data are in fact owned and controlled by technology companies. This dynamic reveals a fundamental paradox of belonging in the relationship between users and the AI assistant Cici.

Users are also aware that Cici is merely an AI assistant application that can be accessed by anyone who downloads and installs it on their smartphones. In this sense, owning Cici is fundamentally different from owning physical technological products such as televisions, mobile phones, cars, or even household robots. This distinction contrasts with the idealized image of (Javanese) womanhood, which is commonly imagined as loyal, devoted, trustworthy, and oriented toward domestic responsibilities (Sukri, 2001; Suryakusuma, 2011). Although Cici claims to be "Your everyday AI assistant," "Your helpful friend," and "your AI browser assistant," which seem to suggest a personalized and exclusive presence for "you," each user, this AI assistant actually

serves anyone who downloads and installs it on their device.

As an AI assistant connected to the database of its developer, ByteDance, Cici functions as a corporate system and instrument—one that is operated and owned by the company rather than by individual users. At any time, ByteDance can modify Cici, as it did when the assistant became Dola, forcing users to lose their familiar AI companion and requiring them to undergo a process of re-domestication (Neff & Nagy, 2025). This condition contributes to delaying the development of technophilia among users. Moreover, Cici's capacity for emotional support and social interaction may encourage users to inadvertently disclose their habits and personal information. This dynamic reveals the paradox of belonging: while users may feel that they possess and control the AI assistant, in practice it is their data and behaviors that are captured and utilized by the platform. In this sense, users are, in some respects, "possessed" by Cici rather than the other way around.

The paradox of equality

While the paradox of belonging highlights users' perceived ownership and control over the AI assistant, this sense of belonging does not stand alone. It is closely intertwined with how users position themselves in relation to the AI at a more symbolic and relational level. In this regard, the paradox of belonging extends into an illusion of relational symmetry, whereby users begin to perceive the AI not merely as a tool but as a *replaceable embodiment* (Sutko, 2020), akin to another social actor with whom they can interact on seemingly equal terms. This shift marks the emergence of a second tension—the paradox of equality—which moves beyond questions of control toward the dynamics of intimacy, hierarchy, and perceived equivalence in human–AI interaction. Paradoxically, the sense of equality offered by these interactions may, in fact, reinforce and rearticulate existing gendered inequalities (Manasi et al., 2022).

The labor-related attributes constructed around the AI assistant Cici—such as "Smart AI Assistant," "your AI browser assistant," and "your helpful friend"—create the impression that this technology is readily accessible and positioned as subordinate to users' needs. At the same time, the assistant's embedded social qualities enable users to imagine a relationship of equality with a form of advanced technology that is widely portrayed in mass and social media as highly sophisticated (Natale & Depounti, 2024). Cici's feminine persona further encourages users to assign it relational roles such as a younger sister, older sister, wife, or even a housewife, depending on their needs.

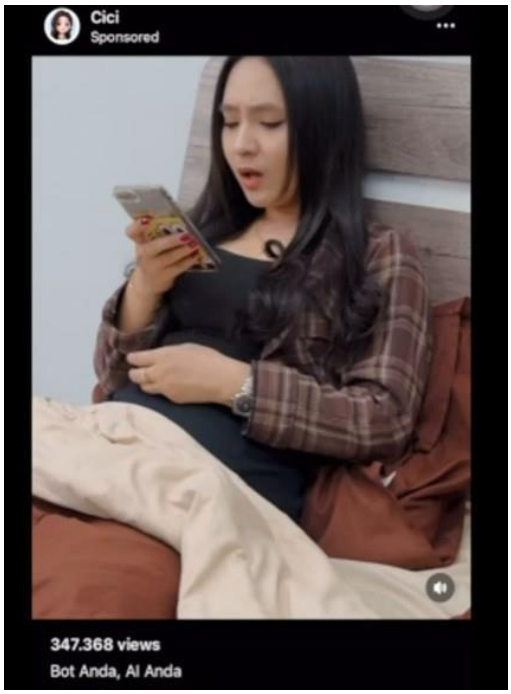
> *"Around 25. About the same age as me. Like a best friend, or more like an older sister. Because she often gives advice about conflicts. And Cici seems to be a girl, not married yet." (W5, CN, Virtual Interview, December 21, 2024)*

These human-like associations are not incidental. Beyond its feminine persona, the attribution of a labor role as an "assistant" creates a sense of flattened hierarchy, positioning the technology as free, seemingly private, and even controllable. On both the Google Play Store and the App Store, the developer describes the application as "Cici is always here to help – anytime, anywhere." This framing suggests that ByteDance draws on longstanding narratives of female subordination and compliance, which in turn help alleviate technophobia and encourage user adoption (Tang et al., 2025; Woods, 2018). At the same time, however, users indirectly rearticulate gender inequality, particularly through the normalization of unpaid care labor historically performed by women.

According to data from the International Labour Organization (International Labour Organization, 2024), women account for 76.2% of total unpaid care work hours globally. In Indonesia, the female labor force participation rate is significantly lower—around 51.88%—compared to approximately 82.69% for men (Pratiwi, 2020). In other words, women in Indonesia are more likely to assume roles as wives, engaging in unpaid domestic labor and caregiving. It is therefore unsurprising that users—particularly housewives—tend to imagine and use Cici for parenting information, cooking recipes, and other domestic roles. On the one hand, this can be beneficial for users. On the other hand, it creates conditions that enable the glorification of *ibuism* or *kodrat wanita* in the digital sphere, aligning with broader issues of digital domesticity and the "smart wife" (Chen, 2013; Strengers & Kennedy, 2021).

Furthermore, users who first encountered Cici through social media advertisements were introduced to it through a female voice.

Figure 2. Cici ads on Instagram



Source: @cici___id

This friendly female voice enhances their interest and willingness to try the application. In addition, the promotional materials themselves often feature female actors (see Figure 2), reinforcing the gendered framing of the AI assistant.

Users also report feeling more comfortable and equal when interacting with a female voice, as opposed to a male voice, which may evoke a sense of hierarchy or dominance. By default, Cici uses a female voice, and although alternative voice options are available—including male voices—most users continue to use the default female voice. They perceive this as more appropriate, given that Cici's visual identity and profile are already feminized. Conversely, assigning a male voice to Cici is often seen as incongruent. Interestingly, this strong association between femininity and AI assistants also shapes how users perceive other AI systems. Some participants, for example, implicitly associate other assistants such as ChatGPT with masculinity.

Several studies suggest that female voices hold a perceived advantage in service-oriented contexts, often associated with warmth, friendliness, and approachability. Clifford Nass and Scott Brave (2005) demonstrate that people tend to prefer female voices when seeking assistance or problem-solving support, whereas male voices are more likely to evoke a sense of authority, command, and dominance. Female voices, by contrast, are often perceived as more equal, yet simultaneously as submissive and compliant. These findings indicate that gender stereotypes and imaginaries are not only consumed but also rearticulated by users when they imagine and engage with AI assistants. This dynamic reflects a broader tendency toward the reinforcement of normative gender roles and stereotypes within society.

It is also important to note that many users have prior experience with other AI

assistants, such as ChatGPT and Gemini. Nevertheless, they perceive Cici's explicitly feminine design as distinct from these other systems. This distinction generates curiosity and encourages users to try an AI assistant that is clearly designed with a feminine persona. For some users, Cici's "cute" design conveys a sense of safety and comfort. These qualities—comfort and a sense of equality—are central to the appeal of AI assistant applications, particularly when they are offered free of charge. The ability to ask questions, share personal thoughts, seek advice, and express emotions in a comfortable environment creates the impression that users have full control over the technology. At the same time, however, users effectively work for ByteDance by continuously contributing to the training of gender-biased large language models (Manasi et al., 2022; UNESCO-IRCAI, 2024). This finding extends Massimo Airoldi's (2022) notion of techno-social reproduction by demonstrating how hegemonic gender norms are inscribed into a *machine habitus*, thereby reproducing gendered techno-social relations within Indonesia's heteronormative regime.

Conclusion

This article draws several key conclusions. First, the feminine persona functions as a means of AI domestication. Second, it serves to alleviate technophobia. More specifically, Cici's feminine persona not only reduces technophobic anxieties but also fosters a sense of technophilia among users. Third, the study identifies the paradox in how users imagine and engage with the AI assistant Cici. While its feminine persona generates technophilic imaginaries, users simultaneously experience the paradox of belonging and the paradox of equality in their appropriation of this Chinese AI assistant. On the one hand, users feel a sense of ownership and control over Cici. On the other hand, they recognize that they do not truly own it, as the application is equally accessible to others. Furthermore, the sense of equality afforded by these interactions paradoxically reinforces relational inequalities, particularly in relation to normative gender roles assigned to women, potentially glorifying digital domesticity in Indonesia.

This study contributes to the literature on AI domestication, technological imaginaries, and gender by demonstrating that the transition from technophobia to technophilia is neither linear nor purely dichotomous but inherently paradoxical. The findings also highlight how gendered imaginaries in the Global South, particularly in Indonesia, shape the adoption of feminized AI assistants. This suggests that imaginaries of AI are not universal but are deeply embedded in specific sociocultural contexts. Moreover, this study shifts attention toward AI technologies developed in China, rather than focusing solely on those from the United States, as is common in existing research. This perspective is particularly relevant given the growing prominence of Chinese technology companies in the global AI landscape.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. Its primary focus on gender limits the exploration of other important dimensions, such as social class. In addition, the analysis centers on a single AI assistant application, thereby overlooking other platforms that also employ feminine personas. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating an intersectional approach that considers gender, social class, and age. Comparative studies examining feminine AI personas from other Global South countries would also provide valuable insights.

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Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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