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# **Ambivalence of Chinese Incel Community: A Text-based Analysis on Sun Ba Forum**

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**Abstract:**

Online platforms have become key spaces for expressing gender tensions in China. This research focuses on Sun Xiaochuan Ba (Sun Ba), a Chinese online forum with incel (involuntary celibate) tendencies—a subculture often marked by misogyny. Based on a dataset of 119,497 threads collected between August and November 2024, this research investigates the predominant topics and linguistic strategies employed by forum members. This research adopts topic modeling, emoji analysis, and thematic analysis. Topic modeling identifies four main topics: (1) everyday gender conflicts; (2) societal gender conflicts and nationalism; (3) romantic struggles and daily life; and (4) community interactions and support.

The findings of the study reveal four key themes: (1) ambivalent attitudes towards women, marked by both hostility and desire; (2) contradictory expressions of masculinity, with members criticizing other men and themselves; (3) creative use of slang, homophones, and emojis to strengthen group identity and mask aggression; and (4) the merging of anti-feminist views with nationalist narratives. This research contributes to the understanding of Chinese incel culture by highlighting how structural gender dynamics and online language practices converge to form a distinct digital subculture.

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, online platforms have increasingly become spaces where social tensions are expressed and amplified. Topics such as gender, identity, and power are no longer limited to private discussions but have become central to online debates. One of the most controversial online communities is the incel (involuntary celibate) subculture, which first gained global attention after violent incidents such as the 2014 Isla Vista killings (BBC, 2018). Although incel discourse originated in Western contexts, similar expressions have emerged in China, shaped by local social norms and internet culture. As China experiences rising gender tensions—driven by demographic imbalances, growing feminist activism, and enduring patriarchal structures—online spaces have become sites of increasingly polarized discourse. Within this context, Chinese incel communities have formed their own distinct narratives and linguistic practices, reflecting both the global incel ideology and China’s unique sociopolitical environment.

Existing studies on incel communities have predominantly focused on Western platforms such as Reddit, 4chan, and incels.co. Scholars have examined incel worldviews (Baele et al., 2021), linguistic patterns (Moonshot, 2020; Pražmo, 2020), and psychological well-being (Delaney et al., 2024). However, little attention has been paid to non-Western contexts, particularly China’s digital sphere. The Chinese incel subculture is embedded within the broader phenomenon of “abstract culture”—a unique Chinese internet phenomenon that blends irony, satire, and coded language. Due to strict internet regulations and censorship, Chinese incels developed creative linguistic adaptations, including homophones, emojis, and coded expressions, to navigate platform restrictions. These linguistic strategies, which play a crucial role in shaping community identity and in-group cohesion, have been largely overlooked in existing incel studies.

This research aims to analyze Sun Xiaochuan Ba (hereafter referred to as Sun Ba), a Chinese incel-tendency forum, to examine key themes and linguistic patterns in discussion. Specifically, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. What topics are predominantly discussed in the Sun Ba?

2. How do Sun Ba members use linguistic strategies to construct gender identities and reinforce group boundaries?

Methodologically, data was collected from Sun Ba using a web scraper from August 19, 2024, to November 18, 2024, resulting in 119,497 threads, each including the title and first post. After preprocessing, this research integrates topic modelling (LDA), emoji pattern analysis, and qualitative thematic analysis. The LDA model identifies 4 discussion themes and linguistic trends, which inform the subsequent qualitative examination. Special attention is given to how emojis are deployed in expressing gender attitudes and how users construct the ideal of “good women” through symbolic and coded language.

By combining computational and qualitative methods, this research offers a layered understanding of how Chinese incels articulate frustration, navigate gender conflicts and shape a shared identity in online spaces. In this way, this research contributes to broader discussions on online misogyny, masculinities, and digital subcultures in non-Western contexts.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Gender imbalance and the rise of online male-centric communities

China has long experienced a significant gender imbalance, primarily due to the combined effects of the One-Child Policy, son preference, and sex-selective abortion (Chen and Zhang, 2019). According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2024), China's male population was 720.32 million, compared to 689.35 million females, resulting in a sex ratio of 104.49 (per 100 females). This imbalance is even more pronounced in rural areas, where the sex ratio is exacerbated by economic disparity and migration patterns.

One of the major consequences of this gender imbalance is the marriage squeeze, where a surplus of men faces difficulties in securing spouses. In rural China, among men aged 20 to 49 with a primary school education or less, there is a striking ratio of 474.5 unmarried men for every 100 unmarried women (Zheng, 2023). The inability to marry is particularly acute among lower-income men, many of whom attribute their single status to economic disadvantages, where women seek partners with higher socioeconomic status (Guilmoto, 2007). This phenomenon has led to various societal concerns, including skyrocketing bride prices, transnational marriages, and marriage fraud (Das Gupta et al., 2010; Meng et al., 2021).

These psychological effects of involuntary bachelorhood are profound. Unmarried men in rural China often describing themselves as: aimless, hopeless, miserable, sad, angry and lonely (Zhou et al., 2011). This sense of failure and frustration has, in some cases, been linked to increased hostility towards women, reinforcing misogynistic narratives that portray men as victims of gendered social injustices. While this frustration exists offline, it is increasingly expressed in online male-centric communities, where these men share their grievances, construct narratives of male victimhood, and sometimes even celebrate acts of violence against women (Huang, 2024).

### 2.2 Sun Ba: the largest incel-tendency forum in China

Against this background, certain online spaces have become outlets for disaffected men, allowing them to express their frustrations anonymously. One such space is Sun

Xiaochuan Ba (Sun Ba), an online forum hosted on Baidu Tieba, which has evolved into one of China's most active male-dominated communities.

Sun Ba gained widespread attention in March 2023, when a video blogger exposed misogynistic content of Sun Ba, stating, "There exists such a male forum online, conducting a feast of insults against women." The video revealed that Sun Ba users frequently reposted images of women from other social platforms, followed by derogatory, insulting, and sometimes explicitly violent comments (Yu & Zhao, 2023). This exposure triggered widespread public outrage, leading Baidu Tieba platform to launch a "special cleanup campaign" on March 23, 2023, aimed at moderating the forum's content.

Despite this, Sun Ba has continued to operate and expand. The forum was originally named after Sun Xiaochuan, a controversial online game streamer. Over time, it evolved from an anti-fan forum into a gathering place for a marginalized male-dominant community, drawing members from various online spaces, including gaming subcultures, anti-feminist groups, and other male-centric digital communities. Due to multiple instances of viral exposure and external traffic influxes, Sun Ba's user base grew significantly. However, its core forum culture continues to align with Western incel discourse, characterized by misogyny, a belief in male victimhood, and the conviction that women are exploitative. As of March 2025, Sun Ba has more than 5.72 million members and 200.77 million posts, making it one of the largest incel tendency communities in China.

### 3 Literature Review

#### 3.1 Online incel subculture

The online incel (involuntary celibate) subculture is a distinct and troubling community characterized by its norms, beliefs, and worldview. As “one of the internet’s most dangerous subcultures” (Beauchamp, 2019), the online incel community is built on a foundation of shared resentment and radical ideologies, particularly concerning gender relations and social structures.

##### 3.1.1 Origins and evolution of the term “incel”

The term “Incel” was coined in 1997 by Alana, who sought to build an online support group for people struggling in the dating sphere. Alana established a website to express her frustrations, which quickly attracted others with similar experiences. Initially, Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project was an inclusive community that welcomed those whose sex lives had been marginalized due to factors such as rigid gender norms mental illness, or social awkwardness (Kassam, 2018).

The Manosphere has its roots in the Men’s rights (men’s liberation) movement which started in the 1970s in response to second-wave feminism (Woodward et al., 2021). Though Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project was not founded on a misogynist ideology, later incel communities increasingly drew members dissatisfied with their sexual experience and members from the Manosphere, who began reshaping the term’s meaning and scope. This shift was influenced by feelings of sexual entitlement and a dehumanizing attitude towards women in society (Kelly et al., 2021).

The Santa Barbara attack marked a significant turning point, marking the coalescence of incel ideology as a separate movement organized online. In May 2014, a 22-year-old man murdered 10 people after posting online that “The Incel Rebellion has already begun.” In his manifesto, distributed in his final hours, he described himself as the “ideal magnificent gentleman” and could not comprehend why women would not want to have sex with him (BBC, 2018). Following his death, he was hailed as a martyr by incel communities. His manifesto became a central document of the movement, encapsulating themes of misogyny, male sexual entitlement, and the glorification of violence, which continue to influence incel ideology today.

### 3.1.2 Worldview

Incel worldview is a rigid three-tier social hierarchy exclusively based on physical appearance. Incels define themselves in opposition to the archetypes of Chads, Stacys, and Normies (Moonshot, 2020). A minority of “Alpha” males (“Chads”) and females (“Stacys”) stand on top, a majority of average-looking “Betas” (“normies”) follow, and a minority of physically unpleasant “Incel” individuals—exclusively males—is stuck at the bottom, victims of “involuntary celibacy”. This structure is common among related but less extreme groups who consider “lookism” as the organizing principle of social life; what is specific about incels is their understanding that this hierarchy is immutable; categories are impermeable, no-one can move from one to another (Baele et al., 2021).

Women are also portrayed as only capable of simple emotions (chiefly sexual desire) and guided by anti-social values, i.e. cheating on their partners or manipulating men for sex or money (Baele et al., 2021). Ironically, while incels view themselves at the bottom of their hierarchy, they consider all men, including themselves, as superior to women.

O’Malley et al. (2022) found that the incel community was structured around five interrelated normative orders: the sexual market, women as naturally evil, legitimizing masculinity, male oppression, and violence. This structural framework shapes the interactions and ideologies within the incel subculture. The first four orders serve for the fifth, the validation and justification of violence, especially against women.

### 3.1.3 Red Pill to Black Pill

The “*Red Pill*” philosophy, derived from *The Matrix* film, is a central concept to incel and related male supremacist ideologies. “Swallowing the red pill” refers to a man waking up to the real world, where women are better off than men, female oppression is a myth, and women desire traditional gender roles. As in the film, choosing the blue pill, conversely, is to accept the mainstream narratives and live in ignorance of the world's truths. Red Pillers see themselves as intellectually superior to “blue-pilled normies” (Moonshot, 2020). *Red Pill* ideology has since been adopted across incel, far-right, and violent far-right communities.

Building upon the *Red Pill*, incel communities developed the “*Black Pill*.” This philosophy asserts that sexual rejection is the result of female prejudice, making unattractive, genetically inferior men perpetually excluded from romantic opportunities. *Black Pill* adherents believe that individual efforts like self-improvement are futile due to genetic and societal constraints, leading many to embrace a resigned “Lay Down And Rot” (LDAR) mentality (Kelly et al., 2021). *Black Pill* ideology has also been linked to calls for violent uprisings, or “beta uprising”, aimed at disrupting societal norms (Dewey, 2015).

#### 3.1.4 Self-hatred and depression

Self-hatred is pervasive within incel community, manifesting as self-pity, frustration, and suicidal ideation. While incels express resentment towards women—viewing women as responsible for their suffering and sexual rejection—they direct much of this hatred inward (Turner, 2024). Studies indicate that incels demonstrate heightened levels of depression compared to control groups, attributed to their pessimistic outlook on relationships and self-worth (Delaney et al., 2024; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Stöber, 2000). The prevalence of depression and anxiety among incels significantly exceeds national averages, with reports indicating 95% and 93%, respectively, compared to 28% and 36% in the general U.S. population (CDC data).

In the incel subculture, self-harm and suicide are often encouraged. The online incel community serves as a concentrated reflection of the larger issues surrounding male depression and suicide. For those who accept a black-pilled fate, suicide is frequently portrayed as the most inevitable solution (Kelly et al., 2021). Incels who vocalize thoughts of suicide are often lauded as brave, while others are criticized for their perceived weakness if they do not follow the same path. Conversely, those showing interest in seeking mental health support are met with derision and reminded of their supposed worthlessness, with dismissive remarks like “therapy can't fix your face.” Although some incels pursue plastic surgery, engage in “gym maxxng”, or attempt to enhance their physical appearance, many believe these efforts are futile since incelhood is viewed as a societal problem rather than an individual one.

The online incel community serves as a condensed representation of the broader issue of male depression and suicide. Incels who express thoughts of suicide are often

encouraged and praised as courageous, while others lament their own perceived weakness for not following suit. Conversely, those who express interest in seeking mental health support are met with scorn and reminded of their perceived worthlessness, with comments like “therapy can't fix your face.”

Incel discussions around self-harm and suicide reveal a deeply entrenched and troubling normalization of these issues within their community. Some incels have resorted to posting their suicide notes online, transforming forum discussions into a regular reminder of the option of suicide (Khawaja, 2019). They use phrases such as “rope” (referring to suicide by hanging), “LDAR” (lay down and rot), or “suifuel” (suicide fuel) to talk about potential self-harm, hopelessness, or suicide. Terms like “suifuel”, “it’s over”, “brutal”, and “it never began” are commonly used responses and tags for posts that members believe illustrate the Black Pill philosophy. Additionally, internal polls on incels. co have asked members when they anticipate they will “rope” (Kelly et al., 2021).

Incels are particularly vulnerable to depression and suicidal thoughts due to profound social exclusion and humiliation. Daly and Laskovtsov (2021) analyzed 80 suicide posts shared to incel sub-Reddits and found that the high risk of suicide among incels is largely attributed to these intense feelings of social exclusion and humiliation they experience. Common methods of suicide among incels include hanging, self-cutting, and jumping from buildings. Common triggers for suicide among incels include heartbreak, job loss, and social isolation.

## **3.2 Linguistic analysis of incel discourse**

### **3.2.1 Linguistic patterns of online forums**

Online forums serve as dynamic spaces where language, community, and identity intertwine, shaping the users’ interactions and discourse. Researchers have identified several key themes regarding the linguistic patterns observed in online forums, emphasizing the role of language in fostering social cohesion and constructing collective identities.

Baym (2015) introduces the concept of “speech communities” in online forums, emphasizing shared communication practices as central to group cohesion. Speech communities have distinctive patterns of language use that enact and recreate a

cultural ideology that underpins them (Philipsen, 1992). Baym (2015) identifies key qualities such as shared space, practice, resources, identities, and interpersonal relationships that contribute to the sense of community in online contexts. These shared qualities give rise to unique linguistic features within speech communities, such as insider lingo, vocabulary, genres, and play, which serve as markers of group identity and core values.

Informal communication is another feature of online communities. Amarnih et al. (2024) noted that the proliferation of slang within digital networks has been noted as a significant manifestation of cultural dynamics, playing a pivotal role in forming and evolving distinct linguistic subcultures. The proliferation of slang emphasized the dynamic nature of language in online spaces and its reflection of cultural values and group identities. Claerbaut's (1972) study of jargon among black communities in the states revealed that jargon has a function to communicate presence, responding to hegemonic culture and language use. Jargon is identified as a cultural symbol in many minority or undervalued groups (MacQueen et al., 2001). This phenomenon is also observed in online spaces. A study of seven Reddit communities within the manosphere found that each group develops its own prominent themes, with some groups sharing common jargon. These online groups often create new terms and language to describe experiences unique to their subculture, which are not widely shared across the broader manosphere (Farrell et al., 2020).

The formation of collective identities within online forums is a recurrent theme in the literature, with researchers emphasizing the role of social identity in fostering ingroup norms and solidarity while delineating boundaries with outgroups (Lea et al., 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In this context, linguistic practices are key to shaping social interactions and constructing collective identities. Bäck et al. (2018) describe how new users in online forums often assimilate linguistically with established members, adopting forum-specific jargon and informal communication styles that reflect the community norms established by long-time participants (Nguyen & Rosé, 2011). This assimilation process underscores the role of language in forging a collective identity.

Forum members distinguish core members and evade platform deleting through adding the barrier to understand their communication way. Tuters & Hagen (2020) highlight how 4chan's meme culture employs abstraction as a means of reinforcing

in-group identity. Through reducing memes to minimal, often incomprehensible forms, only those with deep meme literacy can recognize and appreciate them, thereby drawing a clear line between insiders and outsiders. This abstraction process not only solidifies group boundaries but also aligns with the platform's antagonistic style, where meaning is accessible exclusively to those "in the know." A study on hate speech in fringe communities noted that hate speech under the guise of "insider jokes", humor, or memes can avoid platform censorship due to it is not recognized as such or are perceived as less harmful (Rieger et al., 2021).

Online forums have long been recognized as dynamic spaces for community building, where shared language fosters group identity. From the creation of insider jargon and slang to the use of informal communication styles, these practices underpin a wide range of digital communities. However, the incel community represents a darker evolution of these phenomena.

### 3.2.2 Discourse analysis of incel community

Language plays a crucial role in reinforcing the incel worldview and perpetuating toxic ideologies. In 2020, Moonshot conducted a systematic study of incel-specific terminology and compiled a glossary of terms. This unique ingroup language incorporates dark, nihilistic humor, fostering an atmosphere of pessimism and despair. At best, incels' language choices merely reinforce their depressing milieu, but at worst they encourage acts of 'retribution' against society, targeted violence against women, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and the celebration of tragedy or violence where women or 'normies' have been harmed, based on their gender, beliefs or access to sex (Moonshot, 2020).

Incel terminology is heavily policed and negotiated online, ensuring a high degree of uniformity and creating a worldview that reinforces the "us vs. them" dynamic within the incel ecosystem - perpetuating a shared sense of grievance, community, and ideology. Radical dualism is employed to portray outgroups (primarily women) as extremely negative, while the ingroup is depicted positively despite perceived shortcomings (Baele et al., 2021). Incel terminology built an in-group vocabulary, isolated incel ideology from mainstream discourse, and reinforce a shared identity within the incel community (Pražmo, 2020). They have a strict discipline to define the in-group members, only the man who never experienced any form of physical

intimacy can be called as “truecel”. Anyone who successfully interacts with women is instantly branded a “fakecel”–meaning “fake incel” (Griffin, 2018). According to Anastasi et al. (2023) incels construct strong boundaries around their community under the duality of hatred and desire towards women, while they also disagree on identity and boundaries.

One prominent feature of incel language is its dehumanizing nature by using metaphor. Key metaphor domains include animals, objects, and substances, all contributing to the perception of women as lesser being, such as femoids or foids (from “female humanoid”, used for women in general), roasties (women who have had multiple sexual partners), and landwhales (obese women) (Bogetić et al., 2023; Ging, 2019). These terms reflect the community’s view of women as governed by an animalistic nature, incapable of rational decision-making, or deeper feelings. Dehumanization justifies incels’ resentment and aggression. The violence towards women is legitimized as “sanitizes violence against the target”, so that killing is reduced to “pulling the plug of an inanimate object” (Kelly et al., 2021).

Another feature of Incel language is to build a hierarchical scale. Heritage & Koller (2020) studied incel subforum corpus and keyword reveals that references to gender social actors are particularly salient within this community. Incels position different groups of men in a hierarchy in which conventionally attractive men occupy the top position, from chads (i.e., conventionally attractive men), followed by manlets (short men), incels themselves, cucks (short for cuckolds), and lastly faggots. Female social actors are not placed in a similar hierarchy. Incel’s language patterns reinforce the hierarchy of men, casting “desirable” men as superior, while incels are framed as “subhumans” (Bogetić et al., 2023). This hierarchy echoes incel’s Black Pill ideology and victimhood narratives.

Furthermore, Ging (2019) noted that the manosphere’s engagement with this field contributes to the proliferation of derogatory language and toxic attitudes towards women. This engagement often entails the superficial interpretation and recycling of theories to support recurring claims about women's irrationality, hypergamy, and the inherent need for domination by alpha males. These evolutionary biological concepts are masculinized and geekified, giving rise to a lexicon that is uniquely misogynist, heterosexist, and racist. Terms such as cuck (a weak man whose girlfriend cheats on him, usually with black men), negging (giving backhanded compliments designed to

undermine women's confidence), and friend-zoning (sexually rejecting a man because he is a friend) are prevalent examples. Although this terminology originated among the PUAs or seduction community, it has permeated all categories of the manosphere and mainstream internet spaces such as Urban Dictionary.

Anastasi et al. (2023) conducted a close reading of 72 threads on an incel forum and observed that while forum members frame women as the common enemy, narratives are highly ambivalent: "Only whites can be truecels ↔ all races are pretty much same"; "Women are the true enemy ↔ women are talked about and sexual encounters wanted"; "Normal morals don't apply ↔ own strict behavior codes"; "Chads are stupid ↔ incels are worse than average people". Jackman (2006) introduced the theory of ambivalence sexism, suggesting that men's attitudes towards women are both hostile and benevolent, working together to maintain traditional gender roles. Hostile sexism aims to control and demean women to preserve male authority, while benevolent sexism idealizes women's traditional roles, which paradoxically limits their independence. HS and BS are positive relevant. In the incel community, this dual attitude is evident as incel express both hostility and dependence on women, particularly in emotional and sexual relationships.

The following table outlines some of the most commonly used terminology in incel discourse, highlighting the dehumanizing language prevalent within this community.

### **3.3 Anti-feminism and incels in China's online space**

#### **3.3.1 Online censorship and coded language in China**

China has the strictest online censorship system in the world, where sensitive words is a core component of the system (Knockel et al., 2011; Liu & Zhao, 2021). The primary methods include keyword filtering (preventing certain terms from being posted) and post-deletion (removing content after publication) (Bamman et al., 2012). Sensitive words are phrases or terms that trigger censorship mechanisms, leading to their restriction or removal from online platforms.

The pervasive surveillance has not only restricted online expression but has also prompted widespread self-censorship. A study by Chen et al., (2023) found that 90.4% of Weibo users admitted to practicing self-censorship, often due to fear of content deletion, suspension, or police summons. Common motivations for self-

censorship include avoiding conflict, cyberbullying, privacy leakage, and conforming to social norms (X. Chen et al., 2023). Moreover, since platforms rarely disclose which specific content triggers censorship mechanisms, users have to treat every post carefully. This uncertainty has broadened the scope of self-censorship to include non-political content, accelerating the adoption of alternative linguistic strategies to evade detection.

In response, users have developed strategies to evade detection, leading to a distinctive online linguistic culture. Studies show that Mandarin's phonological characteristics, such as its abundance of homophones, facilitate the creation of recoded words that bypass censorship filters while enhancing interpretability and emotional resonance (Liu & Zhao, 2021; Ye & Zhao, 2023). Recoded language has thus evolved beyond its practical function into a cultural practice, providing emotional catharsis, humor, and a shared sense of identity within subcultures (Ye & Zhao, 2023).

The interplay between censorship, self-censorship, and linguistic innovation has given rise to a unique online culture. In this language culture, the act of encoding language not only fosters solidarity among users but also embodies their collective resistance against systemic control. These practices show how grassroots creativity thrives under constraint, shaping the evolution of digital discourse in Chinese online forums. These cultural practices run through Chinese online communication, influencing not only general interactions but also the dynamics of specific subcultures.

### 3.3.2 Digital feminism and anti-feminism in China

The development of digital feminism in China is inseparable from the concurrent rise of anti-feminist discourse. While digital platforms have amplified feminist voices, they have also become battlegrounds for anti-feminism, fuelled by both grassroots misogyny and state-endorsed narratives. This interplay highlights the complexities of gender politics in contemporary China.

#### *Emergence and Growth of Digital Feminism*

After 2010, digital feminism emerged in Chinese cyberspace. Unlike the diaosi subculture, which is rooted in Tieba forum, digital feminism primarily utilizes Weibo,

a user-focused platform (similar to Twitter) to achieve rapid dissemination. An increasing number of young women carried out the politics of hypervisibility and confrontation both online and offline in stirring up debates mainly on women's personal conflicts due to sexism and gender inequality in mainstream media and the public (Hou, 2020).

Digital platforms like Weibo and Douban (a forum-like platform) have provided spaces for feminist activism. Campaigns such as the #MeToo movement and the 6B4T ideology have challenged traditional gender norms and raised awareness of issues like sexual harassment and gender-based violence (Hou, 2020; Liao, 2024). These movements reflect a growing feminist consciousness, particularly among young women, who are increasingly rejecting patriarchal expectations such as marriage and childbearing.

However, offline activism faces significant barriers due to state surveillance and the suppression of grassroots organizations. The Chinese government often perceives feminism as a Western-imported identity politics threatening political stability (Huang, 2023). For instance, Feminist Voices, a prominent online feminist account, was permanently banned on Weibo in 2018. Additionally, Douban shut down over 10 feminist forums in 2021 under the guise of combating “extremism” (Zhang, 2023). Feminists are often stigmatized as radical or deviant by official narratives, with platforms tightening regulations under the pretext of reducing “gender antagonism” (Huang, 2023; Li, 2023).

### *State-supported Anti-feminism*

With the rise of online feminism in China, an equally significant counter current has emerged: the proliferation of anti-feminism. This trend has gained momentum in recent years, amplified by state support and reinforced by nationalist rhetoric. National censorship demonstrates a clear double standard, silencing feminist voices while allowing anti-feminist communities to thrive. Through the interplay of nationalism, cultural values, and targeted stigmatization, anti-feminism has entrenched itself as a dominant narrative in China's online gender discourse.

Anti-feminist narratives are actively propagated by state-affiliated institutions like the Communist Youth League (CYL). In a notable incident, the CYL was criticized online for releasing a series of images commemorating historical revolutionary events

that featured only male figures, completely omitting female contributors, with comments like, “Six pictures, and not a single woman—how did you manage to avoid all the female heroes who fought for the nation?”

In response, the CYL accused critics of engaging in “extreme feminism” and published a statement condemning “extreme feminism”, describing it as a manipulative force that sows gender antagonism for personal gain. It further characterized these actions as a “malignant tumor” poisoning online discourse, calling for collective efforts to “eradicate” it (BBC News, 2022).

Anti-feminist rhetoric frequently stigmatizes Chinese feminism through derogatory labels, such as “rural feminism” (田园女权), and by portraying it as inauthentic or illegitimate. According to W. Yang et al. (2023), anti-feminist discourse employs two strategies. The first is to regard Western liberalism feminism as the gold standard, discrediting localized forms of Chinese feminism as pseudo-feminism. The second strategy contrasts contemporary feminist movements with earlier phases of Chinese women’s liberation, declaring the former “authentic” and dismissing current iterations as false or corrupted versions. Even in some academic discourse, the term “rural feminism” has been used pejoratively to position men as victims of feminist activism (Guo, 2019).

Another popular anti-feminist label is “female boxer” (女拳), a pun derived from the phonetic similarity between feminism (nǚ quán) and female boxer (nǚ quán). This term implies that feminists are aggressive, radical, and socially deviant, drawing on traditional stereotypes that view combativeness as inappropriate for women. The label has been widely adopted by male netizens to mock and delegitimize feminist voices, reinforcing the perception that feminism is contrary to Chinese cultural norms. By equating feminism with aggression and extremism, these labels fuel the polarization of gender relations and silence feminist activism online (Brown, 2023). Female-boxer is one of the most popular derogatory labels used in Sun Ba discussions of feminism.

### *Online misogyny and the role of platforms*

The rise of online incel community is the product of online anti- feminism, as incels merges their hate towards both the feminist, feminism and the woman (Berthelsen,

2021). These communities not only hate women but also frame men as the true victims of societal oppression. These narratives resonate with young men frustrated by economic and social pressures, such as the marriage squeeze caused by gender imbalances (Li, 2023; Liao, 2024).

Unlike feminist forums in Douban, which are censored and shut down, the anti-feminism statements in Tieba are under relatively little censorship. This disparity reflects the alignment of their narratives with state-supported patriarchal ideologies. The permissiveness granted to these forums highlights how online platforms can act as enablers of anti-feminism, reinforcing gender inequality while silencing feminist advocacy.

### *Intersection of anti-feminism and nationalism*

The state's support for such a narrative is further bolstered by nationalist propaganda, which often frames feminism as a Western import threatening Chinese values. Feminist activists are portrayed as traitors aligned with external enemies, undermining national unity (Peng, 2020). This intertwining of anti-feminism with digital nationalism and Confucian values creates a uniquely Chinese framework for gender politics (W. Yang et al., 2023), where patriarchal ideologies are not only preserved but actively promoted.

Furthermore, feminist calls for economic independence and the rejection of traditional roles such as marriage and childbearing are cast as moral transgressions against traditional values of family and societal harmony. This rhetoric not only demonizes feminism but also reinforces societal resistance to gender equality by positioning feminists as adversaries of national identity and cultural heritage (Huang, 2023).

### 3.3.3 Studies on Tieba forum subculture

#### *The Precursor to Incel: "Diaosi"*

Tieba forums differ from individual-centered platforms like Weibo by prioritizing community-focused interactions. However, this structure poses challenges for management. Due to the anonymity of accounts and the ease of creating new ones,

banned or penalized users often circumvent restrictions and continue participating in discussions, creating difficulties in maintaining order (J. Chen, 2023).

Since the 2010s, along with the digital feminism trend, Tieba has become a gathering space for disillusioned youth, mainly men from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The precursor to the Tieba incel subculture is the concept of “diaosi” (屌丝), often translated as “loser” in English. The term diaosi originated in late 2011 on the Tieba fans forum of Chinese soccer player Li Yi. It evolved from a playful transliteration of “di-si” (a reference to Li Yi’s fans) into “diaosi” as a result of wordplay (P. Yang et al., 2015).

Diaosi is often described with characteristics such as: “(height) 1.68 m”, “no girlfriend”, “scores 2 points for looks”, “monthly salary 2,000 yuan”, “cheap clothes” and “fake gadget”. The term “goddess”, refers to “perfect” girls, also known as bai-fu-mei (“fair-skinned, rich, and beautiful”), whose natural partners are the gao-fu-shuai (tall, rich, and handsome). For diaosi, these “goddesses” are seen as unattainable (P. Yang et al., 2015).

This perspective resonates with incel ideology, where “Stacys” are considered to belong to “Chads”, leaving those bottom incels resigned to being single. Meanwhile, diaosi created the derogatory term “black fungus” (黑木耳) to insult women with multiple sexual experience, further reflecting their frustration with societal norms and gender dynamics.

In diaosi subculture, physical appearance is considered the most critical factor in the dating market. A survey conducted by China Youth Online (2012), involving 2,315 participants, revealed that 81.2% believed many young people today prioritize gao-fu-shuai and bai-fu-mei as ideal partners. Among the respondents, those born in the 1980s accounted for 52.3%, followed by 22.1% from the 1970s and 18.7% from the 1990s. These results highlight a broader societal fixation on external attributes as markers of personal and romantic value, reinforcing the diaosi community’s feelings of inadequacy.

Though these terms are outdated and no longer widely used, their influence persists, especially in shaping the cultural and demographic foundations of Tieba. The discourse surrounding diaosi not only reflects personal frustrations but also



established patterns of social critique and self-identification. These patterns continue to resonate in forums like Sun Ba, where similar social dynamics are expressed through evolving subcultural narratives.


### *Study on Sun Ba Forum*

As one of the most influential hubs for Chinese youth subculture, Sun Ba represents a space where language, identity, and social critique converge. Its unique “abstract culture” offers insight into how marginalized communities create shared meaning and resist mainstream narratives.

Chen (2023) studied Sun Ba forum, focusing on the “abstract culture”. Similar to the evolution of diaosi, Sun Ba was originally a fan forum of a video game streamer Sun Xiaochuan. According to Chen’s study, the term “abstract” originated from streamer Li Gan’s catchphrase, “Haiya, really abstract!” initially a derogatory term for mocking vulgar behavior, it evolved to describe absurd or bizarre actions. From 2015 to 2017, “abstract culture” developed as a subculture through interactions between Li Gan and his viewers, who often joked and teased each other. Sun Xiaochuan, a member of Li Gan’s “Abstract Studio”, became well-known after a video of him angrily replying to viewers spread widely online. This video becomes the “Abstract Bible” afterward. By 2019, Sun Ba grew from an anti-fan forum into a popular space for young people, borrowing and creating new slang from different internet communities. After 2020, it became one of the main places for Chinese youth subculture, influencing online language and building a unique community style.

According to Tang (2020), “abstract culture” consists of new words and emojis. These new words originate from the catchphrases of online streamers like Li Gan, creative adaptations by fans during the spread of “abstract” culture, and even direct borrowing from the language of other subcultures. The “abstract” community also innovatively uses emoji to replace sensitive words. In this process of translating Chinese words into emojis, three primary methods are employed:

First, emojis are used in their original pictographic sense, such as using the symbol “” to represent “hospital.” Second, their meanings are extended based on context, such as using “” (ghost) to signify “the deceased.” Finally, the most creative and

abstract approach is using emojis as homophones for Chinese words. For example, the emoji “” (chili) is used to represent “that” (那) in Sichuan dialect.

Current studies on Sun Ba primarily focus on its subcultural characteristics, while limited attention has been paid to the forum’s content and the gender-related social conflicts it reflects. In English literature, research on incel forums often employs text analysis, but there is a noticeable lack of such analysis in Chinese studies on Sun Ba. Despite the forum’s large scale and significant social influence, both English and Chinese research remain insufficient in exploring this area comprehensively.

## 4 Data and Methods

### 4.1 Data collection

Data was collected from Sun Xiaochuan Ba (Sun Ba) by Python 3.12.0. To bypass anti-scraping mechanisms, the “Playwright” package was used to automate a Chrome browser instance and moderate the crawling process.

To ensure the comprehensiveness of the data, threads were collected over a period of three months, from August 19, 2024 to November 18, 2024. The threads were selected based on the last reply time, dynamically adjusting the scraping parameters to avoid duplications and maintain consistency.

Each data point in the dataset includes the following attributes:

Table 1. Overview of dataset attributes

Attributes	Definition
Title	The title of the forum thread.
Content	The content of the first post in the thread.
URL	The link to the specific threads for future reference.
Last Reply Time	The timestamp of the latest reply to the thread, is used for sorting and filtering purposes.

Initially, the plan was to collect the entire content of each thread, but due to the large volume of data and anti-scraping mechanism, this approach proved infeasible.

Consequently, this research opted to focus on capturing the title of each thread and the first post within it. This decision was made to balance between obtaining sufficient context and maintaining manageable data size. The first post in a thread (commonly referred to as “first floor” in Chinese forums) often contains the core message or question posed by the thread author, making it a suitable unit of analysis.

#### 4.1.1 Data collection strategy

Threads on Sun Ba are sorted according to their last reply time—whenever a thread receives a new reply, it is “bumped” to the top of the first page. The forum has a visible range of 2000 pages, with each page containing 50 threads. After page 2001, the forum automatically loops back to page 1. To avoid duplicate collection caused by rapid thread updates on the first few pages, I adopted a strategy of collecting posts starting from the 2000th page (the last page) and moving backward sequentially.

This approach ensured that threads with long-standing inactivity were collected first, reducing the chances of collecting rapidly changing content on the first page.

The last few pages generally contain threads with no recent activity, making them relatively stable targets for collection. This strategy helped maintain data integrity and avoided unnecessary duplicates. Each thread was recorded with attributes such as title, first post content, URL, and last reply time, and stored in separate CSV files based on the collection date to facilitate easier management and analysis.

#### 4.1.2 Collection timeline

The data collection process involved multiple rounds, with each session focusing on specific date ranges based on the threads' last reply time. Below is a detailed record of the collection process:

Table 2. Data collection timeline

<b>Collection Date</b>	<b>Covered Last Reply Time</b>	<b>Threads Collected</b>	<b>Days Covered</b>	<b>Interval Since Last Collection (days)</b>
2024-09-24	2024-08-19 to 2024-09-08	38,404	21	-
2024-09-25	2024-09-09 to 2024-09-16	10,013	8	1
2024-09-30	2024-09-17 to 2024-09-19	5,226	3	5
2024-10-04	2024-09-20 to 2024-09-26	9,691	7	4
2024-10-08	2024-09-27 to 2024-10-01	5,933	5	4
2024-10-14	2024-10-02 to 2024-10-05	5,788	4	6
2024-10-18	2024-10-06 to 2024-10-09	5,192	4	4
2024-10-24	2024-10-10 to 2024-10-14	6,270	5	6
2024-10-28	2024-10-15 to 2024-10-18	4,813	4	4
2024-11-04	2024-10-19 to 2024-10-28	11,991	10	7
2024-11-11	2024-10-29 to 2024-11-02	5,725	5	7
2024-11-18	2024-11-03 to 2024-11-11	10,636	8	7
2024-11-25	2024-11-12 to 2024-11-18	7,937	7	7

The first chapter of the thesis that is given a number is the introduction. All text chapters are numbered. References and appendices are not numbered.

## 4.2 Data description

The raw dataset consists of threads collected over periods, containing a total of 127,619 threads. To ensure the dataset’s quality, duplicates were removed according to URL, resulting in 119,497 threads. The dataset contains a total of 7,386,306 characters, with the average combined text length of 61.86 characters.

Table 3. Summary statistics of text lengths

Metric	Title	Content	Title + Content
Total Characters	1,341,347	5,925,552	7,386,306
Longest Text (characters)	76	600	607
Shortest Text (characters)	1	1	5
Average Length (characters)	11.23	49.63	61.86

The dataset contains a total of 7,386,306 characters, with titles contributing 1,341,347 characters and content contributing 5,925,552 characters. The longest combined text is 607 characters, while the shortest is 5 characters, with an average combined text length of 61.86 characters. Given that the data predominantly contains Chinese-language posts, it is important to note that the visual and cognitive information of a Chinese character differs from that of an English letter, which may affect the overall length perception. In Chinese, one character often represents a single concept, making the textual content more compact compared to English (Taub, 2022).

### 4.2.1 Limitations of dataset

The dataset does not include user demographic data, such as gender and age. This limitation prevents any user-level analysis or profiling, restricting the research to analyzing the threads’ content rather than the posters’ characteristics.

Additionally, only the last reply time was collected, rather than the posting time. This raises uncertainties about the temporal analyses.

## 4.3 Data preprocessing

### 4.3.1 Removing noise

For each forum thread, the title and the first-floor content were combined into a single text string to ensure all relevant information was included for analysis. The combined text was cleaned to remove noise and standardize its format. In the context of this research, text noises include punctuation marks, symbols, numbers, emotional emojis, and so on. The “re” (regular expression) package in Python is employed to identify and eliminate noisy components to remove text noises. Non-content elements were removed such as image tags, and specific keywords (e.g., “[表情]”, “[图片]”, which means [emoji] and [image] not included in this research). Additionally, all text was converted to lowercase to ensure uniformity. Specific placeholders like “[lbk]” and “[rbk]” were also removed to prevent noise in the text analysis.

### 4.3.2 Stop words list

In Chinese text, many “meaningless” words are commonly removed in information retrieval and text mining tasks to improve the quality of the analysis. For this research, a combined stop word list was constructed based on a GitHub repository (Goto, 2017), which integrates four public Chinese stop word dictionaries: Baidu, HIT (Harbin Institute of Technology), SCU (Sichuan University), and a general Chinese stop word list. Additional custom stop words (e.g., advertisement-related terms frequently found in Tieba) were added to better suit the data context. This integration ensures that irrelevant terms do not interfere with the analysis.

### 4.3.3 Abbreviations and homophones

One notable feature of Chinese online slang is its use of abbreviations and homophones to encode meaning. To address this, a custom synonym dictionary was created to map these variations back to their standard forms. However, the inclusion of terms in this dictionary was carefully controlled to avoid overgeneralization. Only terms with clear meanings and significant relevance to the research were included. For example, the term “小仙女” (little fairy) frequently appears in the forum and is often abbreviated as “xxn.” To maintain consistency, all instances of “xxn” were replaced with the full term “小仙女” during preprocessing.

#### 4.3.4 Chinese text segmentation

Unlike English text, Chinese text does not naturally contain spaces to separate words, making segmentation a necessary preprocessing step for analysis tasks. In terms of Chinese text segmentation tools, the “jieba” package in Python is widely used and has many advantages, such as adding customized words (Xie et al., 2021). Since Sun Ba users often created slang terms that were not included in the default “jieba” dictionary, a custom dictionary was developed based on observed language patterns in the forum. This dictionary helps ensure accurate segmentation, minimizing the risk of omitting key terms essential to the research.

#### 4.3.5 Preserving emojis in text

In Chinese natural language processing, single-character tokens are often removed during preprocessing. However, this method risks eliminating emojis, which are crucial for Sun Ba subculture. To address this, the “emoji” package in Python was used to convert emojis into descriptive text (e.g., “🐢” to “:turtle:”) before segmentation. After segmentation, the descriptive text was converted back into the original emoji format to preserve its visual and contextual significance for the analysis.

### 4.4 Topic modeling

#### 4.4.1 What is LDA topic modeling?

Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), first introduced by Blei, Ng, and Jordan in 2003 (Blei et al., 2003), is one of the most widely used methods in topic modeling. LDA is an unsupervised, nonparametric, and generative method that treats words in documents as if they were generated by probabilistic sampling based on latent variables (topics) (Hagen, 2018). LDA represents topics as distributions of word probabilities. The words with the highest probabilities in each topic usually provide insight into the topic’s overall theme.

#### 4.4.2 Why chose LDA?

According to Jselodar et al. (2019), LDA modeling is an important tool for studying social networks and user behavior, in the context of Chinese social media. For

instance, Li et al. (2016) used LDA to categorize emotion tendencies on Weibo, a platform similar to Twitter. Xie et al. (2021) applied LDA to analyze 719,570 Weibo posts to explore public responses to COVID-19. Similarly, Fan et al. (2015) addressed the challenges posed by the brevity of Weibo posts by aggregating tweets within hourly intervals to create more substantial text corpora for LDA modeling. LDA has also been applied to research on Tieba. For instance, LDA was used to examine topics related to patient community support and domestic violence survivor support (Chu et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023, 2024). Fang et al. (2016) used LDA to extract popular topics on 19 hacker communities on Tieba. These examples demonstrate that LDA is a feasible and effective method for topic modeling on Chinese social media data.

LDA has also been widely applied in studies of incel communities and related online subcultures. For instance, Jelodar & Frank (2021) applied LDA to uncover latent topics and conduct opinion mining in a popular incel forum, allowing for the discovery of key semantic-related words and emotional expressions that would be difficult to identify manually. Similarly, Verhoef (2024) used LDA to analyze three years of posts and comments from the /r/trufemcels community on Reddit. This study explored how female incels construct their identities within a male-dominated discourse, identifying key concepts and thematic patterns in the data. These studies demonstrate that LDA is an effective method for analyzing incel communities, as it helps to reveal hidden themes and explore the cultural dynamics within these marginalized online spaces.

#### 4.4.3 LDA in this research

In this research, LDA is used to identify the key themes of discussion within the incel community. This research applies LDA to extract a certain number of topics from the cleaned dataset with the Python package “gensim”.

In terms of determination of the number of topics, both perplexity and coherence scores are taken into consideration. While the former measures how well the model is generated from the corpus (the lower the better), the latter measures the sentence similarity of each topic in the dataset (the higher the better) (Blei et al., 2003).

Although perplexity is useful for evaluating a predictive model, a previous study found that models with lower perplexity often have poor interpretability, as they may not align with human judgment (Chang et al., 2009). Therefore, in this research, in

addition to using coherence and perplexity scores, the top 30 keywords from each model will be qualitatively evaluated to determine the optimal number of topics.

After the optimal model was determined, each topic was labelled based on its most relevant keywords. To visualize the topic distribution, another Python package, “pyLDAvis”, is adopted, with a coordinate graph to show the distribution of topics and lists of the top 30 most salient words in each topic. It should be noted that the topic numbers displayed in the LDAvis visualization (Topics 1, 2, 3, 4) do not directly correspond to the original LDA topic indices (Topic 0, 1, 2, 3). This is because LDAvis sorts the topics based on their size and separation in the visualization. To avoid confusion, each topic was labelled by its semantic meaning instead of its numeric index.

#### **4.5 Thematic analysis of keywords**

After performing LDA modelling, thematic analysis was conducted to further explore and complement the topic modelling results. For this research, the keyword “好女” (which translate to “good woman” or “good girl” in English) was selected, resulting in a dataset of 58 posts.

The forum is saturated with misogynistic discourse, but rather than directly analyzing pejorative language, this research adopts a reverse approach by examining how the community discusses the concept of a “good woman.” This choice is motivated by two considerations. First, collecting posts containing derogatory terms poses a significant challenge due to the diverse and highly encoded nature of misogynistic expressions in the forum. These terms often undergo multiple times of encoding, making systematic retrieval difficult and increasing the risk of omission. In contrast, the term “good woman” or “good girl” follows a more standardized usage, allowing for a more straightforward and comprehensive data collecting process. Second, analyzing how users construct the idea of a “good woman” provides indirect yet valuable insights into their gendered expectations and normative beliefs. By investigating what characteristics are associated with a “good woman”, this research sheds light on the implicit standards that shape the community’s broader discourse on gender.

The selected posts were manually reviewed and coded through an iterative process to identify recurring themes and patterns in the discussions. By applying thematic

analysis, this research aims to provide a deeper qualitative understanding of how the concept of a “good woman” is constructed and debated within the forum.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Topic modeling

#### 5.1.1 Perplexity and coherence scores of LDA models

To identify the best-fit topic number, I tested models with topics ranging from 3 to 15. Figure x and figure y respectively show the coherence scores and perplexity of models trained under different number of topics. Analyzing the coherence scores, coherence scores fluctuate as the number of topics increased, with peaks appearing when the topic numbers were set as 4, 5, and 8. The perplexity values for models with 4, 5, and 8 topics were similar.

To further refine the selection, I compared the keywords generated for each topic under these settings. When the number of topics was set to 4, the keywords were more interpretable and aligned better with the research objectives. Therefore, the optimal number of topics was determined to be 4, with the coherence score = 0.488 and perplexity = -8.424.

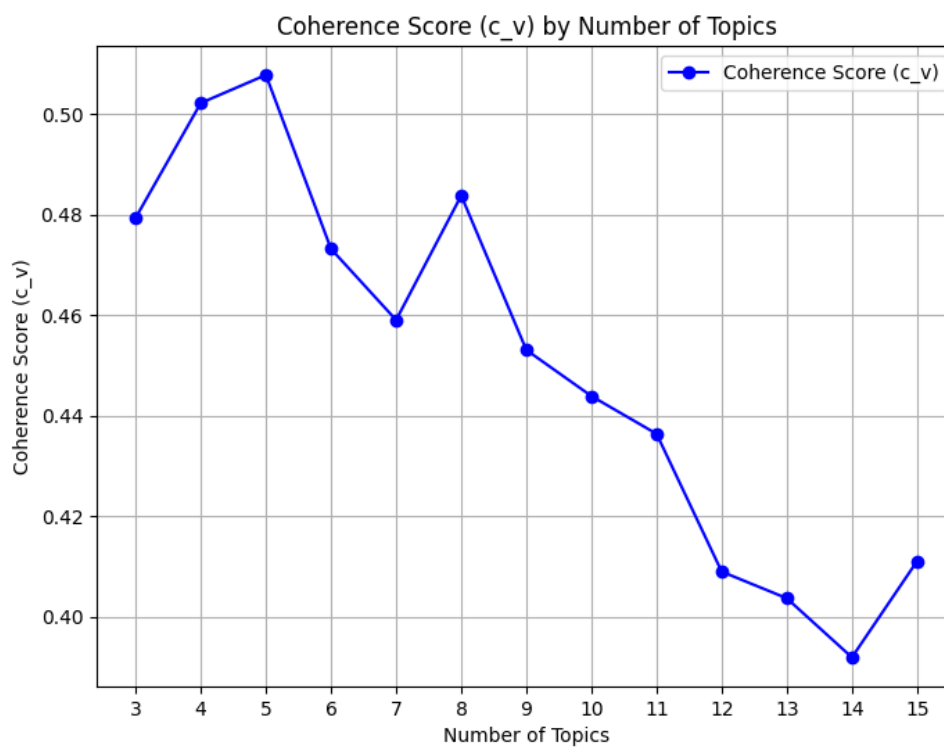


Figure 1. The Coherence Score by Number of Topics.

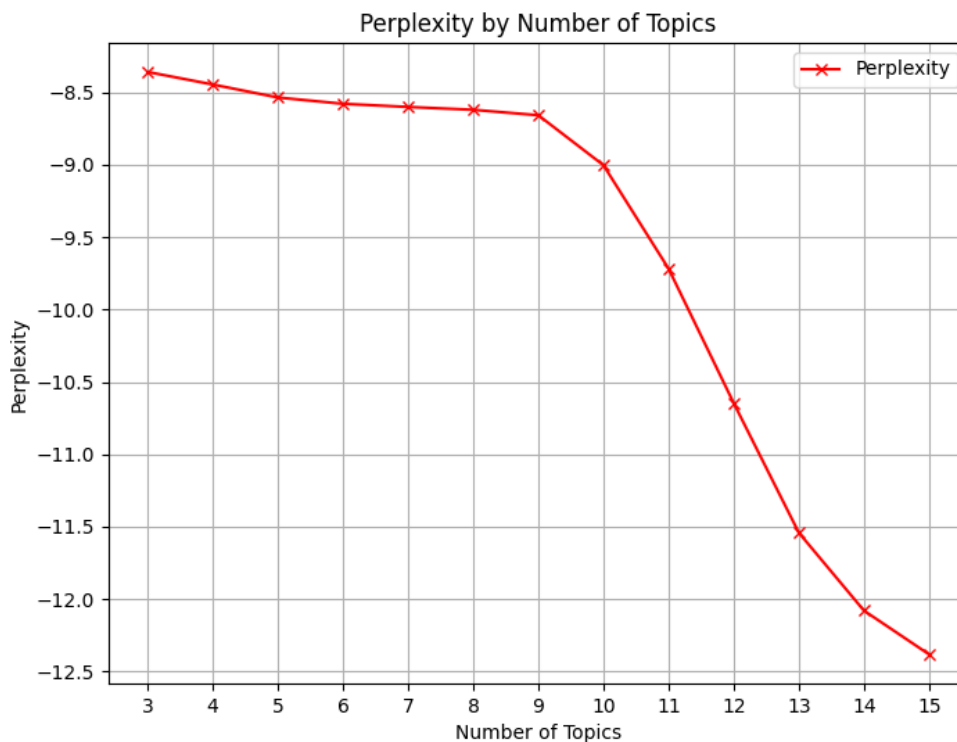


Figure 2. The Perplexity by Number of Topics.


### 5.1.2 Discovered topics

This section summarizes the four key topics identified through topic modeling. Each topic is labelled based on its core themes, with keywords provided in both Chinese and English. Detailed visualizations and deeper interpretations will be discussed in subsequent sections.

#### Topic 0: Everyday Gender Conflicts

Table 4. Representative keywords for topic 0

Keywords	Translation	Meaning
逆天	Against heaven	To defy the heavens, outrageous; Also “mentally disabled” as slang.
评价	Evaluate	-
小仙女	Little fairy	A sarcastic reference to women.
视频	Video	-
集美	Ji Mei	An informal term for close female friends, similar to “sis” or “bestie”.
抖音	Douyin	The Chinese version of TikTok.
B 站	Bilibili	A video-sharing platform, often compared to Youtube

小红书	rednote	A social media platform, often compared to Instagram or TikTok.
攻击	Attack	-
	Turtle (Man)	A sarcastic reference to men who try to please women for mating rights.
版本 T0	Version T0	A sarcastic reference to women.
打拳	Punching / “Fighting for feminism”	Slang for feminist behavior often used pejoratively.

This topic focuses on gender dynamics in everyday contexts, reflecting Sun Ba’s critical views of women as portrayed on short video platforms like Douyin, Bilibili, and rednote. Members often repost videos from these platforms and comment sarcastically about women. Keywords like “little fairy” and “Ji Mei” mock women, while terms like “punching” deride feminist expressions. This topic reveals how Sun Ba members engage with platform culture and reinterpret its content in ways that reflect their subcultural identity.

### Topic 1: Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism

Table 5. Representative keywords for topic 1

Keywords	Translation
女性	Women / Female
世界	World
中国	China
孙笑川	Sun Xiaochuan
社会	Society
男人	Men / Man
女人	Women / Woman
姜萍	Jiang Ping
日本	Japan
国家	Country / Nation
美国	United States (USA)
汉奸	Traitor to China (a derogatory term for people seen as betraying Chinese interests)
杨笠	Yang Li (Chinese feminist comedian known for satirical gender commentary)

Unlike Topic 0, which focuses on individual or daily gender issues, this topic shifts the perspective to broader societal and national contexts. The presence of female public figures suggests that the discussions align with prominent gender-related controversies during the data collection period. Keywords such as “China”, “Japan”

and “USA” reflect a discourse interwoven with nationalism. The keyword “traitor” further highlights nationalistic tendencies within the community.

## Topic 2: Romantic Struggles and Daily Life


Table 6. Representative keywords for topic 2

Keywords	Translation
鼠鼠	Rat, refers to forum users themselves
喜欢	Like
女生	Girl
朋友	Friend
女朋友	Girlfriend
兄弟	Brother / Bro
父母	Parents
家里	Home
工作	Work
生活	Life
分享	Share
分手	Break up (end of a romantic relationship)
恋爱	Love / Romantic relationship
结婚	Marriage

This topic captures the daily experiences of Sun Ba members, many of whom refer to themselves as “rats”. The discussions suggest that a significant portion of participants are students, as the content frequently touches on school life, romantic relationships, and making friends on campus.

## Topic 3: Community Interactions and Support

Table 7. Representative keywords for topic 3

Keywords	Translation
	Rat emoji
学校	School
同学	Classmate
兄弟	Brother / Bro
有没有	Anyone? / Is there
舍友	Roommate
大学	University
宿舍	Dormitory

---

求助	Seek help
推荐	Recommend
大佬	Big boss (used to refer to experts, often with respect)
求求	Beg / Please (often used to add urgency or emotion to a request)
帮忙	Help / Assistance

---

This topic reflects the forum's role as a space for seeking advice, sharing recommendations, and engaging in casual interactions. It emphasizes the community's collaborative and supportive nature in navigating personal and academic challenges.

## 5.2 LDAvis visualization

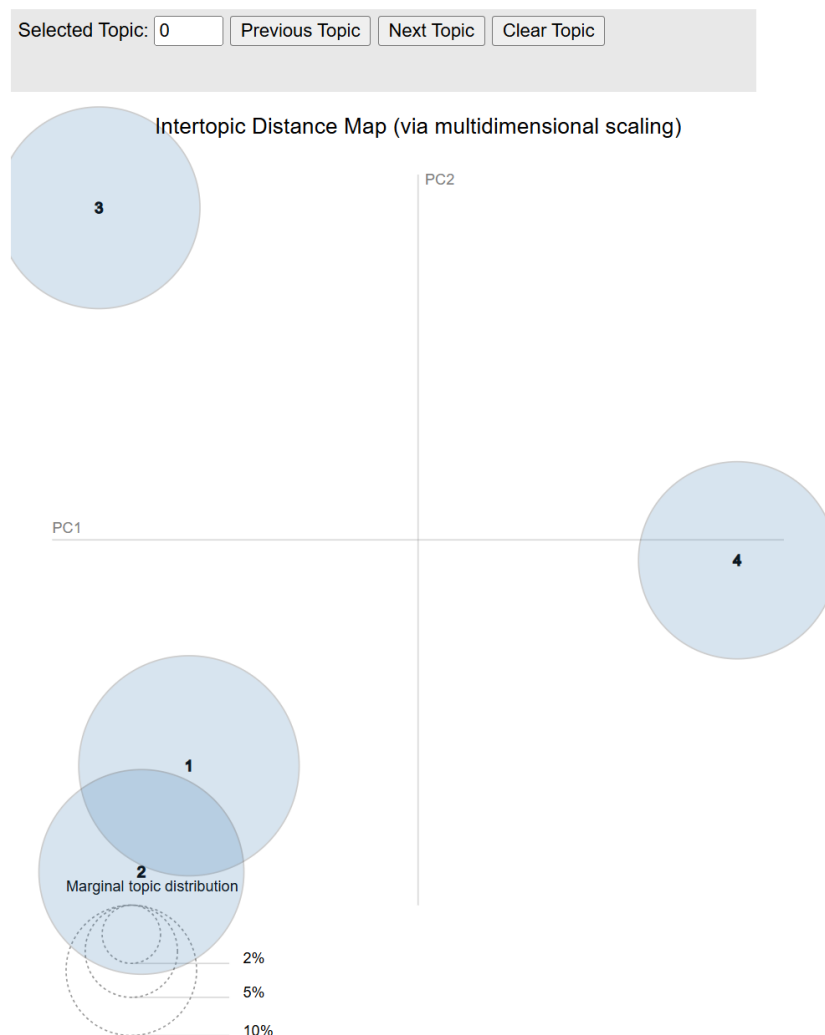


Figure 3. LDAvis Visualization of the 4-topic LDA Model.

The four topics extracted from the LDA model are visualized using the LDAvis tool, which presents the topics in a two-dimensional space. Each circle represents one of the four topics, and its size corresponds to the relative proportion of the topic in the entire corpus. For clarity, the following topic labels are assigned to each circle:

Circle 1: Romantic Struggles and Daily Life

Circle 2: Community Interactions and Support

Circle 3: Everyday Gender Conflicts

Circle 4: Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism

As shown in the figure, “Romantic Struggles and Daily Life” and “Community Interactions and Support”, located in the bottom-left third quadrant and with some overlap, indicate a closely related pair. While “Romantic Struggles and Daily Life” reflects the Sun Ba members’ emotional struggles related to love, friendship, and family, “Community Interactions and Support” captures the social support and community-based help requests. This overlap is particularly evident in the shared use of terms like “seek help”, “share”, “friends”, and “work”, which reflect both the need for emotional support and the reliance on community help. The overlapping region in the LDAvis shows Sun Ba members’ dual role as individuals who face personal challenges and community members who offer mutual aid.

“Everyday Gender Conflicts” is located in the top-left corner, and “Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism” is placed at the far right of the x-axis, suggesting that the two topics are distinct from other identified topics. Although both topics are related to gender conflicts, they conceptualize the conflicts in different ways. Moreover, nationalism emerges as a relatively independent theme.

PC1 (horizontal axis) represents a shift from personal, community-based issues to broader societal issues. On the left, “Everyday Gender Conflicts”, “Romantic Struggles and Daily Life”, and “Community Interactions and Support”, which are all related to personal or community-level interactions. On the far right, “Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism” represent more ideological, macro-level discussions.

PC2 (vertical axis) captures the shift from emotional and relational issues to discursive, analytical issues. “Romantic Struggles and Daily Life” and “Community

“Interactions and Support” are located in the bottom-left, which suggests they involve more emotional and support-seeking discourse. In contrast, “Everyday Gender Conflicts” is higher up, indicating that it may be more focused on interpersonal reflection, criticism, or analysis, rather than emotional support. “Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism” is also relatively high on the PC2 axis, reflecting its position as a more abstract and ideological topic.

“Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism” is located on the far-right end of the PC1 axis, distinct from all the other topics. This indicates that the discussions related to gender and nationalism are conceptually different from personal struggles, community support, or everyday gender conflicts. The language, themes, or tone of the posts in Topic 2 are likely tied to broader social discourse, unlike the more interpersonal nature of other topics.

### 5.2.1 Lambda comparison

In pyLDAvis, the  $\lambda$  (lambda) slider controls the balance between relevance and frequency when ranking terms for a topic. When  $\lambda = 1$ , terms are ranked purely by their frequency within a topic. It highlights the most frequent terms for the topic, regardless of their exclusivity. When  $\lambda = 0$ , terms are ranked by their relevance, which considers both their frequency and their exclusivity to a particular topic. This helps highlight terms that are more uniquely associated with the topic (Sievert & Shirley, 2014).

## 5.2.2 Topic 0: Everyday Gender Conflicts

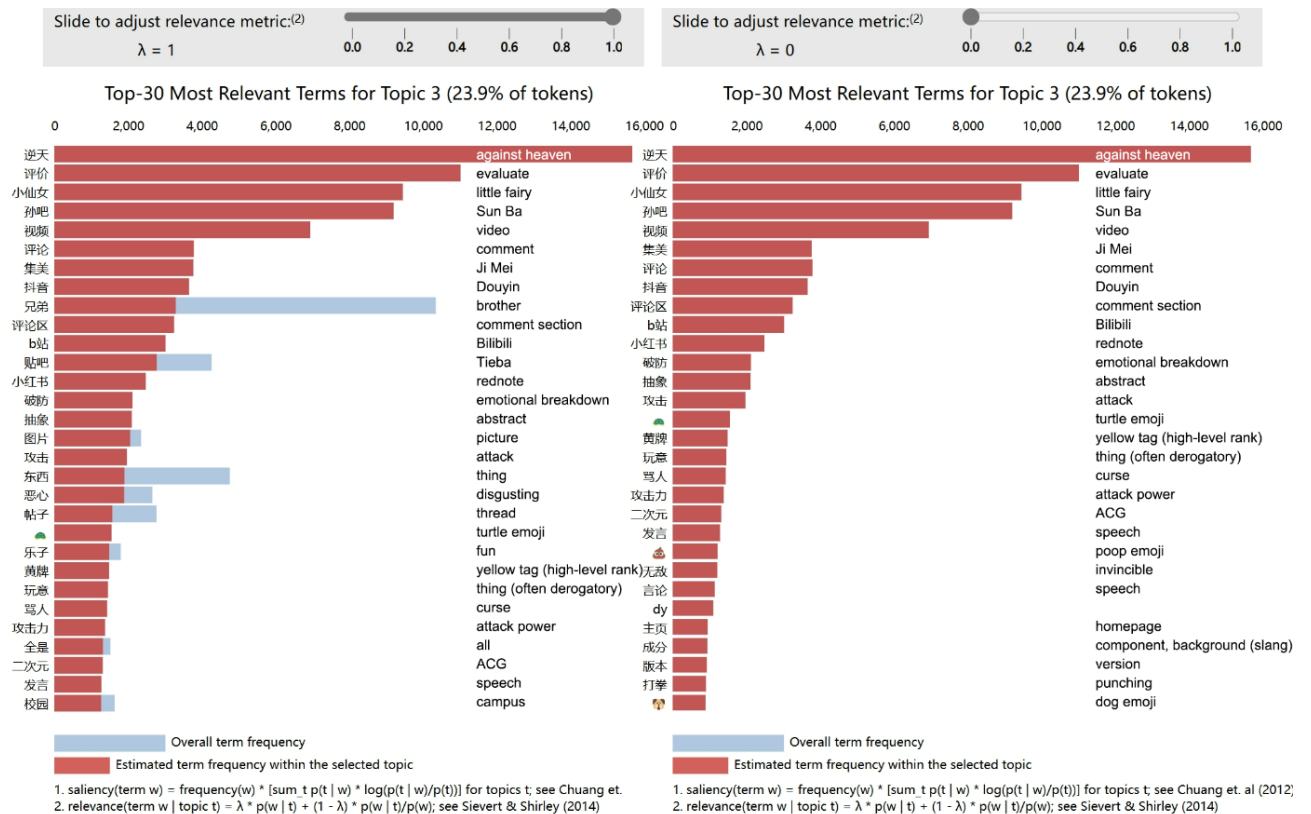


Figure 4. Visualization of topic 0 keywords under two relevance settings ( $\lambda = 1$  and  $\lambda = 0$ )

When  $\lambda = 1$ , the top keywords emphasize high-frequency, everyday language used in Sun Ba. The general terms reflect the broader social and cultural interactions of members. Platform critique is an important part of Sun Ba community interaction.

The terms “Douyin”, “Bilibili” and “rednote” show that these platforms’ video and comment sections serve as material for the Sun Ba community to comment on and reinterpret. Members often share videos, such as from rednote (a platform mainly for female users), to critique or satirize representations of women.

The terms “little fairy” and “jimei” (bestie) reflect a sarcastic tone in the Sun Ba community. Originally used among women to refer to each other, these terms were stigmatized by Sun Ba users, gaining negative connotations.

Words like “attack”, “disgusting”, and “insult” signal the rising tension in discussions. These terms reflect an escalation of hostility, often aimed at women, feminists, or other perceived “enemies” of the community.

When  $\lambda = 0$ , the focus shifts to subculture-specific language, revealing how Sun Ba members use slang to construct misogyny narratives. The ranking of aggressive language increases. Terms such as “attack”, “insult”, and emojis appear more frequently, showing a shift towards expressions of hostility and conflict.

Subcultural terms like “punching” and “version To” are encoded metaphors that frame social structures as a battleground between men and women. Punching is a term that employs homophony to depict feminists as aggressive and irrational. By comparing feminists to individuals “throwing punches”, this slang portrays feminism as combative, challenging the traditional worldview. Vision To, originally a game term, To refers to a character in a game being exceptionally dominant or “top-tier” in the current version. This term describes women as the perceived beneficiaries of societal systems, in alignment with anti-feminist ideologies within the community. It reflects the community’s perspective on gender dynamics and perceived inequalities, which describe themselves as the victim of feminism.

Beyond their critique of women, Sun Ba members also insult men who seek to please women in pursuit of romantic or sexual relationships. The turtle emoji, or the term “turtle man”, is used to ridicule men who are perceived as losing their dignity or masculinity in front of women. Green turtle, the color green in the Chinese context represents being cheated on by a partner, and the turtle represents tolerance. Turtle man is used in forums to generalize: men who still have sexual fantasies about women despite feminist oppression. Similarly, the dog emoji is frequently employed, often about the term “舔狗” (licking dog), which describes men who invest a lot of effort in pursuing women, with “lick” symbolizing acts of excessive flattery or servility. The usage reflects the community’s disdain for men who pursue women, especially when the effort appears one-sided or hopeless. The use of these terms reveals Sun Ba’s hierarchical view of gender relations, where men who maintain romantic illusion about women are placed at the lowest tier of the community’s symbolic social hierarchy.

The figure shows three key emojis frequently used in this topic: 🐢 (turtle), 🐶 (dog), and 💩 (poop). Compared to other topics, this one incorporates the most ingroup slang. It features a range of linguistic strategies, from homophonic puns to emoji, and

from satire to direct personal attacks. These elements form a core part of the incel subculture’s communicative practices.

### 5.2.3 Topic 1: Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism

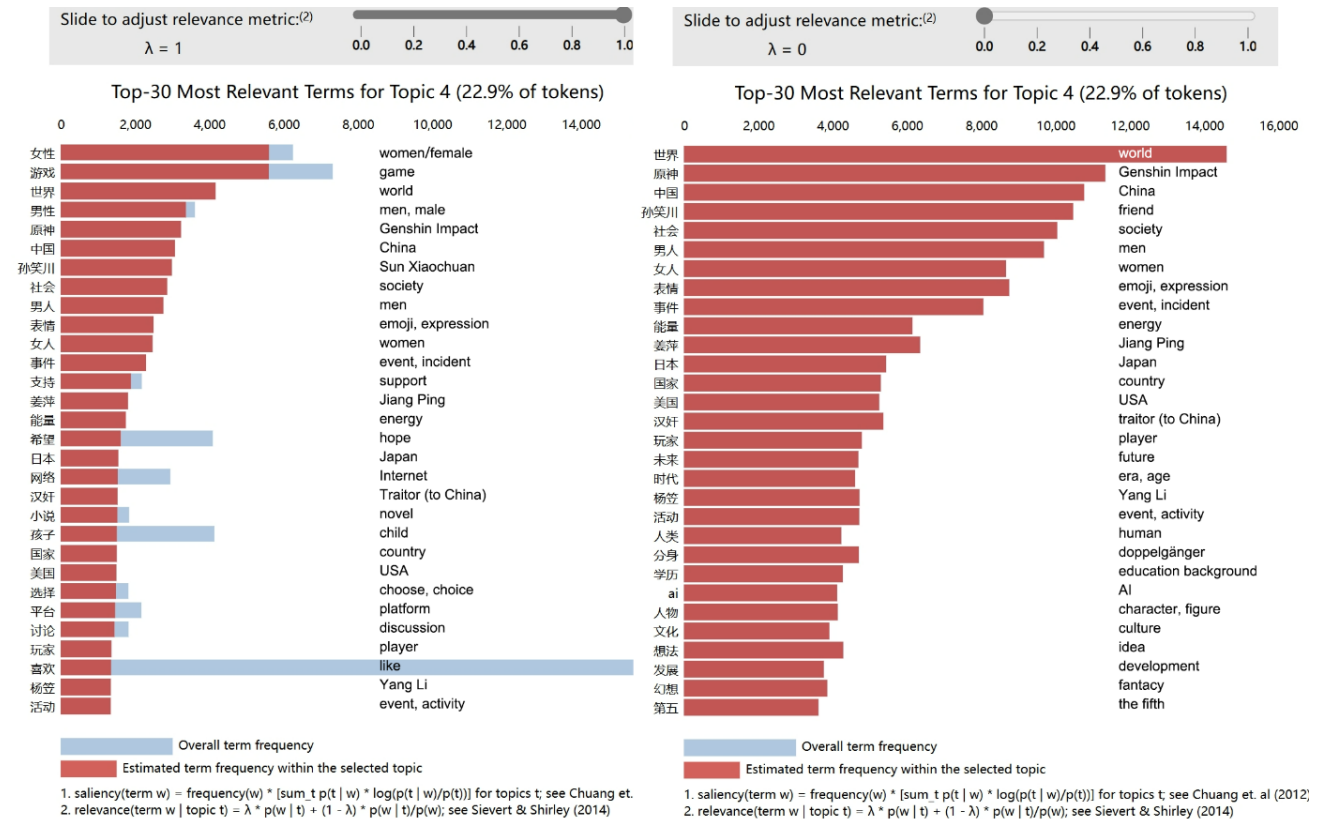


Figure 5. Visualization of topic 1 keywords under two relevance settings ( $\lambda = 1$  and  $\lambda = 0$ )

Unlike the “Everyday Gender Conflicts” topic, this topic shifts to a broader social context, as suggested by keywords such as “women”, “men”, “world”, “society”, and “incident”. While it still focuses on gender issues, the scope of the discussion appears to be more societal.

Notably, three names appear in the keyword lists. Besides Sun Xiaochuan, two other female figures stand out: Jiang Ping and Yang Li. The prominence of these names may be attributed to two factors. First, it reflects the influence of trending topics during the data collection period, as discussions on online forum are often shaped by contemporary events. Second, the presence of Sun Xiaochuan’s name is unsurprising, given that he is the namesake of the forum itself.

Jiang Ping is a teenage girl who was portrayed in Chinese media as a mathematical genius because she passed the Alibaba mathematical competition. However, a

controversy arose when she was proven cheating on that exam, which triggered extensive online criticism. Her case became a symbol of the “disillusionment” with young female role models, especially when the media’s portrayal of her shifted from “genius” to “fraud”. In Sun Ba, the discussion surrounding Jiang Ping reflects broader discontent with the media’s portrayal of women and the community’s distrust of female success stories.

Yang Li, on the other hand, is a feminist stand-up comedian known for her sharp critiques of men. Within Sun Ba community, Yang Li is often regarded as a symbol of feminist “aggression”, and discussions of her performances reveal the community’s anxieties and hostility towards feminist narratives.

The symbolic presence of Jiang Ping and Yang Li within this topic highlights how gender controversies become the focus of Sun Ba’s critique of women. Both figures represent larger societal issues—Jiang Ping as a “false symbol of female excellence” and Yang Li as an icon of feminist critique. These figures serve as discursive tools to express Sun Ba’s broader opposition to feminist narratives. During the data collection period, these two gender-related controversies were widely discussed, further amplifying their relevance to this topic.

In addition to the societal gender controversies, the presence of terms like “USA”, “Japan”, and “Traitor to China” reflects a nationalist sentiment within the forum. This reflects how incel’s misogyny usually overlaps with far-right ideologies (Wells, 2023), where critiques of feminism are often linked to broader anti-foreign and nationalist discourses. In Sun Ba, feminism is frequently labelled as a “foreign force” (境外势力), a framing that reflects a wider state-supported discourse portraying feminism as a Western import that threatens traditional Chinese values and national unity (Peng, 2020), further legitimizing anti-feminist sentiments within the forum.

## 5.2.4 Topic 2: Romantic Struggles and Daily Life

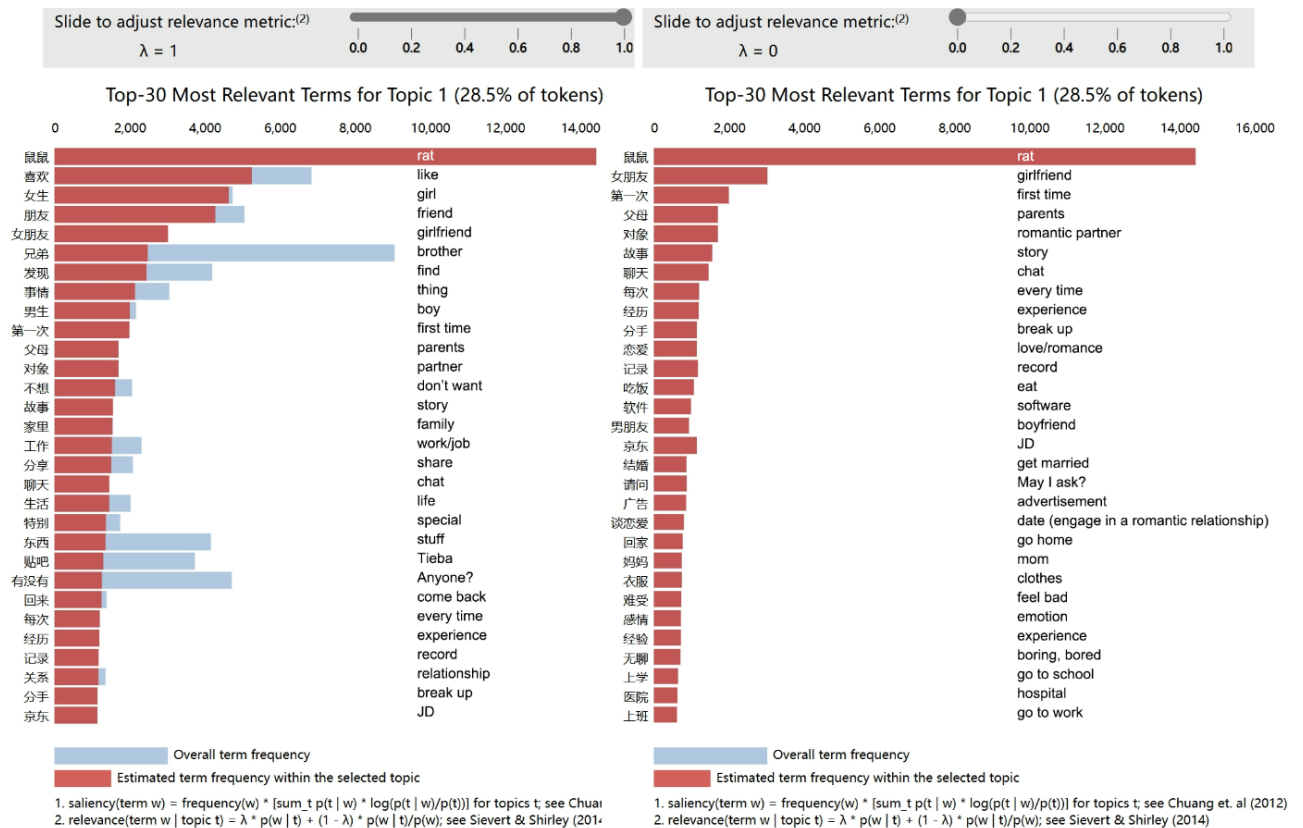


Figure 6. Visualization of topic 2 keywords under two relevance settings ( $\lambda = 1$  and  $\lambda = 0$ )

One of the most notable key terms in this topic is “鼠鼠” (rat), which members use as a self-referential label. Unlike the previous two topics that emphasize hostility towards others, the “rat” highlights self-deprecating humor and self-criticism. Sun Ba members metaphorically describe themselves as “rats” living in the sewers, embodying a sense of dissatisfaction with both their current circumstances and themselves. This form of self-mockery reflects a unique subcultural identity that combines humor with frustration – a defining element of Sun Ba incel subculture.

When  $\lambda = 1$ , the top salient keywords include “like” and “girl”, forming phrases like “the rat likes a girl” (“鼠鼠喜欢上了一个女生”, the rat has fallen in love for a girl)—a common expression in the forum. Notably, different from the topic “everyday gender conflicts”, this topic does not include derogatory terms for women. Instead, women are referred to more neutrally as “girl”, suggesting a shift in tone and attitude. Additionally, terms like “parents”, “work”, “story”, “life”, “experience”, and “record” suggest that members use this forum as a space to share personal experiences and life

stories. This reveals a more introspective and vulnerable aspect of the community, distinct from its usual confrontational stance.

When  $\lambda = 0$ , the focus shifts towards emotional and romantic relationships, as seen in keywords like “like”, “girlfriend”, “break up”, “romantic relationship”, and “marriage”. These terms suggest that, in this topic, Sun Ba members not only share their experiences but also express their emotional struggles in love. This stands in sharp contrast to the language used in the “everyday gender conflict” topic, where women and “turtle men” are targets of mockery and insult and chasing women is forbidden. Here, members display a more vulnerable and conflicted side, reflecting a deep-seated ambivalence towards women. On the one hand, they express contempt for women in other topics, but on the other hand, they reveal a longing for romantic connection and a desire for an idealized “good woman” who will fall in love with them. The paradox reflects one of the core tensions of the incel subculture—the simultaneous rejection of and yearning for intimacy.

The personal nature of this topic highlights Sun Ba as not only a site for ideological confrontation but also a platform for members to share, reflect, and seek emotional validation.

## 5.2.5 Topic 3: Community Interactions and Support

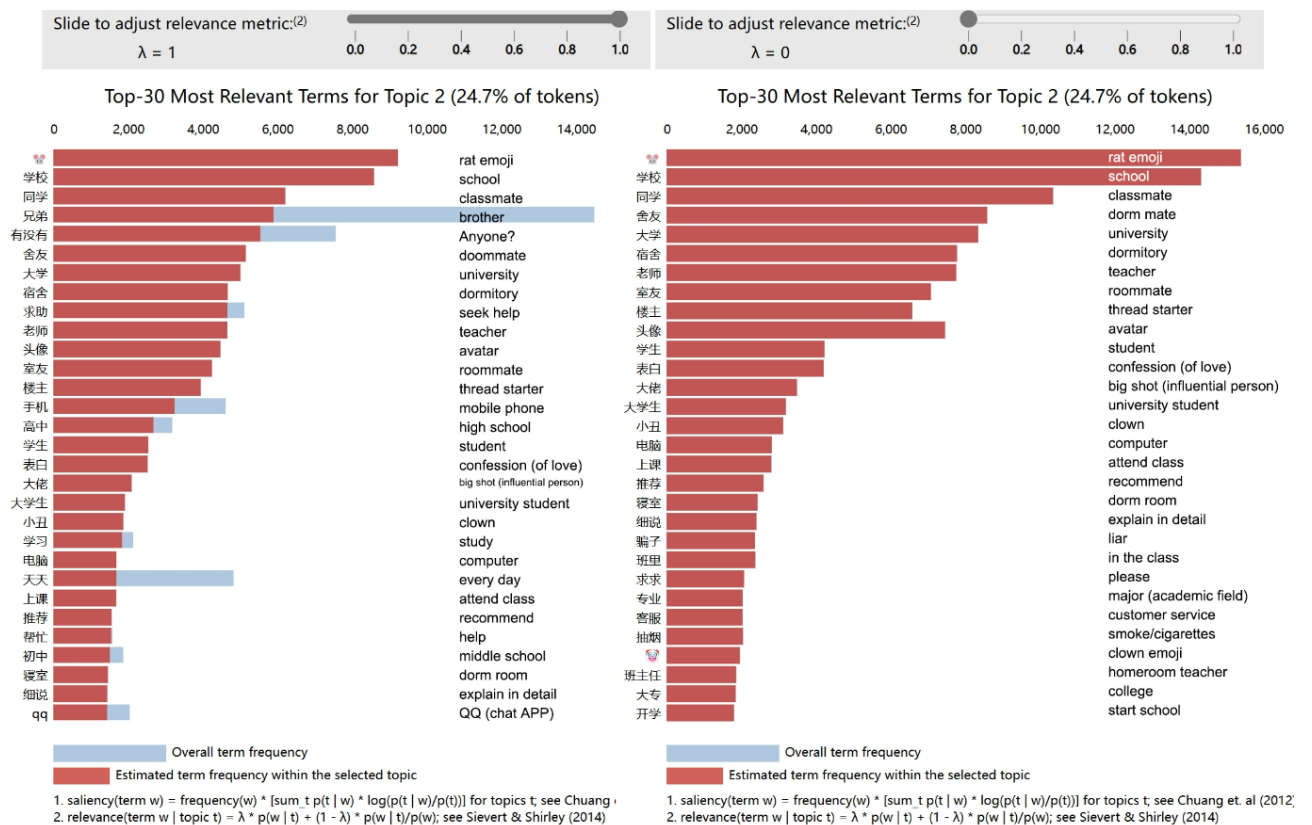


Figure 7. Visualization of topic 3 keywords under two relevance settings ( $\lambda = 1$  and  $\lambda = 0$ )

This topic overlaps with “personal struggles and daily life”, but it places a stronger emphasis on community support and interaction instead of just sharing daily life. Unlike the introspective tone of the previous topic, this one reflects the communal nature of Sun Ba, where members seek help, advice, and emotional support from one another. The topic highlights the role of the forum as a collective support network for users facing personal, academic, or technical challenges.

When  $\lambda = 1$ , the most prominent keywords include “school”, “classmate”, “university”, “roommate”, “dormitory” and “teacher”. These terms clearly point to the educational context as a dominant space for interaction, which shows that the age range of users are relatively young. Members discuss life on campus, share experiences related to dormitory life, and seek advice from peers.

Another set of keywords, such as “seek help”, “recommendation”, “anyone?” and “help”, indicates that members use the forum as a space to request assistance and recommendations.

Interestingly, the rat emoji appears again in this topic. As previously discussed, “rat” is a common self-referential term for Sun Ba members. Here, it reinforces the idea of community identity, as members continue to use “rat” to position themselves as part of a shared ingroup identity.

When  $\lambda = 0$ , the educational context becomes even more apparent, with terms like “class”, “supervisor” (班主任), “junior college” (大专), “school opening” and “smoking”. These terms reveal that school-related content plays a significant role in community interaction. Posts may focus on sharing daily school experiences, recounting events in the classroom, or even discussing vices like smoking in dormitories. The presence of clown emoji suggests a form of self-mockery or sarcasm which echo with “rat” emoji, a recurring tone in the Sun Ba community’s discourse. This aligns with the playful and informal communication style often observed in online forums where self-deprecating humor is used to cope with life’s difficulties.

This topic highlights that Sun Ba’s role as a mutual support network for its members. Members not only discuss their personal struggles but also offer help, advice, and recommendations to one another. The continued use of the rat emoji reflects an ingroup identification, which is crucial in building a sense of belonging.

Different from “Personal Struggles and Daily Life” which focuses on individual reflection and self-disclosure, this topic shifts attention to collective support and problem-solving. In essence, this “group-level” engagement reinforces the dual nature of Sun Ba as a place for both personal reflection and public interaction.



emojis are animalized metaphors, such as the rat emoji and turtle emoji. Homophone-based emojis, though less frequent, are more complex and nuanced. In terms of metaphorical usage, animalized or dehumanized metaphors serve both self-mocking and insulting purposes. As “rat” and “turtle” have been explained previously, the dog emoji provides another example. The dog emoji in Sun Ba has evolved beyond its original meaning, taking on multiple layers of significance, particularly in relation to social hierarchy and gender dynamics. A key aspect of the use of this emoji is in the phrase “licking dogs”, which describes men who relentlessly chase women. In this context, the emoji acts as a symbol of social inferiority and reinforces community norms about what behaviors are deemed acceptable or unacceptable.

By labelling certain behaviors with this “licking dog” metaphor, the Sun Ba community reinforces a hierarchy where men chasing after women are positioned as inferior or submissive. This becomes a form of social commentary and humor that serves to solidify gender dynamics. The dog emoji thus plays a crucial role in shaping the forum’s unspoken rules about masculinity and gender roles, illustrating how visual symbols are used to construct humor and hierarchies within the community. In this way, the turtle emoji serves the same function as the dog emoji.

In addition to metaphorical use, the dog emoji is also employed in phonetic wordplay, where “dog” (“犬”, quǎn) shares a similar sound to the Chinese character “权” (quán), which means “power” or “rights”, concepts central to the feminist movement. This phonetic similarity leads to its use as a dehumanizing symbol of Chinese feminism, often referring to feminists as “female dogs”. Similarly, punch emoji and circle emoji share the same phonetic sound with “权” (quán), but they are employed in different contexts. The punch emoji is usually used in contexts where feminism is portrayed as aggressive, further demonizing the feminist movement. The circle emoji, on the other hand, tends to be more neutral and less confrontational. Three types of emojis that refer to feminism show that feminism is a prominent topic discussed within the forum. Members take various strategies to avoid directly mentioning it, reflecting the sensitivity of this topic in the community. Interestingly, the prominence of feminism is not directly evident in the topic modeling result. In topic modeling, the term “feminism” does not appear as a high-frequency keyword. Instead, its presence is represented indirectly through the word “punch”, which emerges as a high-frequency

term within the “everyday gender conflict”. The use of emojis serves to fill in for the absence of explicit textual discussion. By opting for coded and indirect expression, forum members highlight the underlying tension and hostility when addressing feminism.

When it comes to homophone-based emojis, the circle emoji is a typical example. The coding process follows a specific logic: (1) the original character → (2) homophone character → (3) emoji. In more complex cases, regional dialects may be incorporated into this process, adding one more step. Compared to metaphor-based emojis, this type of coding is more intricate and harder to decipher. However, unlike traditional coded language used to evade censorship, most characters encoded in abstract culture are often meaningless or non-sensitive. This coding culture is closer to an inside joke used to differentiate the ingroup and outgroup. Within the broader Chinese online space, where subtle expressions are widespread, abstract culture stands out by isolating coded emojis and elevating them into a cultural phenomenon centered on the joy of the encoding process.

#### 5.4 Constructing the “good women”

Based on the analysis above, it is notable that there are negative and neutral descriptions of women shown in the high-frequency terms. A question is raised, how does the incel forum describe “good women”? Further thematic analysis was conducted to understand how the forum constructs the concept of “good women” and what the incels discuss when they refer to “good women”. A keyword search for terms such as “好女” (“good woman/women”, “good girl(s)”) yielded 58 posts. While this dataset is relatively small, it serves as an exploratory sample to provide contextual insights into the narratives and underlying values embedded in these discussions. Through manual coding, three recurring themes were identified.

##### 5.4.1 Theme 1: Idealized femininity and submissiveness

Table 8. Representative posts for theme 1

Post	Content	Translation
1	山西果任儿,这就是她的一生,才 25 岁, 这么漂亮孝顺能干, .....她的抖音号的简介还是	Shanxi Guoren'er, this is her life. Only 25 years old, so beautiful, filial, and capable. ... Her TikTok profile says “Filial piety is the foremost of all virtues.” Why do good women always meet bad men?

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	百善孝为先 为什么总是好女人 遇不到好男人	
18	怕吓到这个纯洁文静的好女孩捏	Afraid to scare this pure and quiet good girl
24	有钱真的有用吗,有用的话多少才算有钱呢? 真的好女孩是真不会因为你那点钱而去违背她内心的	Is it really useful to be rich? How much is rich if it's useful? A really good girl won't go against her heart just because of your money.
25	💞💞 梦到的同学是初中一个给人印象非常温柔,非常爱学习的好女孩捏	💞💞 dreamed of a classmate from middle school who left an impression of being very gentle, very studious, a good girl
53	这种好女孩真的存在吗,1.不抽烟喝酒纹身 不去酒吧 不追星(本鼠无任何不良嗜好,这么要求不过分吧) 2.会做家务会做简单的饭(我也会 轮流做不算过分吧) 3.工作稳定有上进心 4.一个月不收超过5个快递 5.空闲时间不逛微博淘宝小红书,看剧打游戏都行(可以买东西的时候偶尔逛) 6.没传染病(本鼠母胎solo24年,这么要求也不过分吧)	Does such a good girl really exist? 1. Doesn't smoke, drink, have tattoos, go to bars, or chase stars (I have no bad habits, so this requirement isn't excessive, right?) 2. Can do housework and cook simple meals (I can do it too, taking turns isn't too much to ask, right?) 3. Has a stable job and ambition 4. Doesn't receive more than 5 packages a month 5. In her free time, doesn't browse Weibo, Taobao, or rednote, watching dramas and playing games is fine (she can occasionally browse when buying things) 6. No infectious diseases (I've been single for 24 years, this requirement isn't too much, right?)

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These posts describe “good women” as aligning with traditional gender expectations. They are portrayed as “beautiful, filial, capable, pure, and quiet” (Post 1, Post 18, Post 25). Post 1 emphasizes filial piety, reinforcing the idea that a good woman’s value is not only tied to her romantic relationships but also to her role within the family. This reflects broader Confucian ideals, in which women are expected to exhibit obedience and devotion, not just to their husbands but also to their parents-in-law.

Moreover, “good women” are depicted as free from materialistic desires and impervious to financial temptation (Post 24, Post 53). This reflects an underlying anxiety, a fear of financial inadequacy and the potential loss of a partner to a wealthier man. This discourse highlights a broader masculine insecurity, wherein economic status is perceived as a key determinant of relationship stability.

Additionally, Post 53 constructs a highly specific and rigid set of criteria for what constitutes “good women”, outlining not only moral expectations but also behavioral restrictions (e.g., limiting online shopping and social media use). Such detailed prescriptions suggest an underlying desire for control over a woman’s lifestyle and habits. The portrayal of an ideal partner as someone who is modest in consumption, compliant in domestic labour, and emotionally restrained reflects a broader effort to regulate and discipline female behavior according to male-defined standards.

### 5.4.2 Theme 2: The contrast with “bad women”

Table 9. Representative posts for theme 2

Post	Content	Translation
4	纹身不代表不是好女人🙄你这是三观不正	Having a tattoo doesn't mean she's not a good woman. Your values are skewed.
5	现实中 xxn 多，还是好女人多？	Are there more little fairies or good women in reality?
6	给 8u 们讲讲我和五个好女人一个坏女人的故事	Let me tell you all a story about five good women and one bad woman.
23	去酒吧喝酒和经常 SPA 是好女孩吗？在我看来应该也只是一些道德不检点和想玩。	Is going to bars to drink and frequently getting spa treatments something a good girl would do? To me, it just seems morally loose and wanting to have fun.
7	“有过一夜情，就不算好女孩了吗？”逆天 xxn 口出狂言	“Does having a one-night stand mean she's not a good girl?” An outrageous statement from little fairy.
15	帮助同胞们对抗版本 T0 和保护自己和好女生不受 T0 迫害	Help fellow incels fight against T0 and protect themselves and good girls from T0's harm
32	好女孩莫辜负，坏女孩别浪费	Don't let down good girls, don't waste bad girls
48	在现实中遇到好女孩，要珍惜，碰到捞女要远离	In real life, you should cherish good girls and stay away from gold diggers
56	天天能看到 xxn，而有了个疑问，为什么现在的女孩都怎么了，感觉好女孩越来越少	I see little fairy every day and have a question: what's happening to girls nowadays? It feels like there are fewer and fewer good girls

This theme focuses on the negative stereotypes and stigmatization of women who do not fit the “good women” model. Posts judge women who smoke, drink, or have a tattoo to determine whether they are considered good girls/women. They also judge women who had a one-night stand, considering such action as disqualifying them from being regarded as good women (Post 4, Post 7, and Post 23).

Beyond personal behavior, this theme also reveals strong opposition to feminist discourse on sexual liberation. In particular, Post 7 directly criticizes the feminist argument against sexual double standards, which questions why men with multiple sexual experiences are forgiven easily, while women are condemned for the same behavior. The author of the post dismisses this feminist perspective as shameless, using dehumanizing language to reinforce the idea that a woman with a sexual history is inherently degraded. This reflects a strong slut-shaming discourse, where women's sexual autonomy is condemned, and the sexual double standard is actively defended.

In this theme, the “good woman” is contrasted with various negative figures, including “little fairy” (xxn), “version tier 0”, “bad women”, and “gold diggers.” These

labels serve to categorize women based on their perceived moral worth. It is notable that Post 32 states, “Don’t let down good girls, don’t waste bad girls”, suggesting that while “good women” should be cherished, “bad women” still hold utilitarian value—primarily in a sexual sense. This framing reinforces the idea that women’s worth is contingent on their morality and desirability, reducing them to objects of classification rather than individuals.

Ultimately, this theme reveals how forum members construct a rigid moral dichotomy between “good” and “bad” women and how this distinction is deeply intertwined with both moral judgement and sexualization. Additionally, the rejection of feminist ideals and the belief that feminism has “corrupted” women further strengthen their sense of victimization, reinforcing their perception that they are victims of feminism and social change.

#### 5.4.3 Theme 3: Incel anxiety: desire for “good women”

Table 10. Representative posts for theme 3

Post	Content	Translation
3	男人缺好女人，女人缺好男人。	Men lack good women, and women lack good men.
7	这个世界上还有好女人吗，初恋谈了一个标志走不出来了 😞😞😞	Are there still good women in this world? I can't get over my first love who was a real bitch 😞😞😞
26	现在的好女孩到底应该去哪里找啊？	Where can one find good girls these days?
32	孙吧人天天这女的不行那女的不行的，以后结婚咋办？你可以说你以后不结婚啊，但你过不了你父母那关，你父母现在跟你说的挺好，没事不急，我 28 岁前父母也没催，那是你年纪还没到，你像我一样现在到了 30 了就知道了。我现在为了躲都搬出去住了。你又说我可以找个好的，我承认好女孩是有，但是少，而且好的早让人挑走了，我都算要求很低的了，我不是因为家庭条件差，就是有很多女的各种毛病我看不上，但就你们天天在吧里发帖挂的说的某些 xxn 帖子，至少大部分帖子那些 xxn 毛病都是我可以接受	People in the forum are always saying this woman is no good, that woman is no good. What will they do when it comes to getting married? You might say you won't get married, but you won't be able to get past your parents. Your parents might say now that it's fine and there's no rush, but I wasn't pressured until I was 28 either. That's because you're not old enough yet. Once you hit 30 like me, you'll understand. I've even moved out to avoid the pressure. You might say that I can find a good one, and I admit there are good girls, but they are few and far between, and the good ones get picked early. I have pretty low standards. It's not because of my family situation; it's just that many girls have various issues that I can't accept. But those xxn issues you guys keep posting about in the forum, at least most of them are issues I can accept.
44	渣男配好女，好男配渣女	Bad men pair with good women, and good men pair with bad women.
49	吧友们追求一个好女生都是多久呢？我一个朋友，只会网上冲浪，不会追求女生，所以问问大家追求一个好女生要多久？	How long does it take for forum members to pursue a good girl? I have a friend who is only good at surfing the internet and doesn't know how to pursue

girls, so I'm asking how long it takes to pursue a good girl?

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This theme reflects the anxiety incels experience regarding relations, marriage, and societal expectations.

Take Post 32 as an example, the author describes their struggle with family expectations, admitting that despite the forum's general resentment towards women, they would still accept a "little fairy" if given the chance. This contradiction highlights a key tension within incel discourse: while they often criticize women, they simultaneously desire a relationship that conforms to their idealized standards.

Another common belief in the forum is that "good women" are paired with "bad men", while "good men" are left with only "bad women". This reflects a deep-seated resentment towards both so-called "bad men" and "bad women", as forum users feel that their access to desirable partners has been unfairly taken away. This grievance functions as a form of displaced frustration, shifting the blame for their struggles onto external forces rather than personal circumstances.

Ultimately, this theme reveals that incels do not reject relationships altogether—they reject relationships that do not align with their rigid expectations. Their frustration stem from the belief that they are unable to obtain the kind of women they deem worthy. This reinforces a victim mentality with the community, where incels perceive themselves as unfairly deprived of romantic opportunities, further fuelling their resentment towards society and gender dynamics.

To conclude, the distinction between "good women" and "bad women" serve as a mechanism to legitimize discrimination and misogyny. Forum users claim to reject only "bad women"—such as feminists or those labelled as "little fairy"—rather than all women, positioning themselves as rational critics rather than misogynists. However, this distinction lays on a male-defined moral hierarchy, where the standards of a "good woman" are imposed by centuries of patriarchy and its beneficiaries. By setting these criteria, they elevate themselves to a position of moral authority, using the rhetoric of virtue to justify judgement and bias.

Regardless of whether women are categorized as "good" or "bad", both classifications reduce them to their utility. A "good woman" is valued for her domestic labour and filial piety serving her husband and his family, while a "bad woman" is objectified

primarily in a sexual capacity. In both cases, women's autonomy and agency are erased, as they are defined not as individuals with independent desires and aspirations, but as objects to fulfil male expectations. The binary framework not only reinforces traditional gender hierarchies but also perpetuates the systemic objectification of women, reducing them to roles dictated by male interests.

## 6 Discussion

This research provides insights into the themes and linguistic patterns within the Sun Ba. The findings reveal that: (1) ambivalent attitudes towards women, marked by the coexistence of misogyny and a desire for ideal women; (2) contradictory constructions of masculinity, where users degrade both other men and themselves; (3) linguistic innovation, including the use of slang, homophones, and emojis, serves both as a tool for community bonding and as a means of expressing hostility; and (4) anti-feminist narratives in the forum intersect with nationalist sentiments, embedding gender discourse within broader ideological frameworks. These findings align with and extend existing research on online incel subcultures, victimhood masculinity, and digital extremism.

### 6.1 The ambivalence towards women

A striking finding is the ambivalent attitude towards women: in one topic they express hatred towards women, while in another, they long for love. This phenomenon aligns with the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy, in which incels perceive women as belonging to two distinct categories. On the one hand, Sun Ba members stigmatize feminism and behaviors such as tattoos, smoking and drinking, using degrading and sexually shaming language to denounce women who do not conform to their moral expectations. However, paradoxically, these same discussions often emphasize the “sexual utility” of such women, reducing them to objects of male desire. On the other hand, they construct an idealized image of “good women”, characterized by characterized by filial piety, obedience, loyalty, and domestic competence. This binary framework does not merely reflect moral judgments but serves to objectify women, reinforcing a male-centered sexual order that seeks to regulate female behavior.

This phenomenon can be explained through ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 2011). While Sun Ba members condemn women who have been “corrupted” by feminism, they simultaneously construct and promote the notion of “good women” who conform to traditional gender roles. The former reflects hostile sexism, wherein women who assert independence are perceived as threats to male dominance. The latter, however, does not fully align with benevolent sexism, which often includes a protective stance towards women. Instead, Sun Ba members express pity rather than

protection for “good women”, lamenting that they fall victim to unworthy men. This carrot-and-stick approach serves to reinforce patriarchal gender norms. By rewarding compliance and discouraging deviation, these narratives work to upload an idealized version of femininity that prioritizes subservience, restraint, and domesticity, discouraging women from challenging the status quo.

In discussions about romantic relationships, Sun Ba members emphasize materialistic standards to differentiate between women and strongly oppose men making substantial financial or emotional investments in pursuit of a partner. This tension can be understood through the lens of Sexual Economic Theory (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004), which conceptualizes heterosexual relationships as a marketplace where men invest resources (e.g., financial support) in exchange for sexual and emotional commitment. However, Sun Ba members reject this economic model not because they oppose transactional relationships altogether but because they believe that men should receive traditional female devotion without making equivalent investments. Rather than engaging in the “submissive” pursuit of women, they idealize a more dominant, “alpha” model of masculinity where men assert control over relationships without appearing emotionally or financially dependent. Their frustration with the perceived breakdown of this dynamic fuels both their resentment towards women and their continued longing for idealized feminine partner.

Additionally, their hostility towards feminism is rooted in the belief that feminism has “corrupted” women. They perceive feminism as a strategic tool that women use to increase women’s value, enabling women to demand greater financial and emotional investment from men in relationships. In Sun Ba discourse, women are often referred to as “Version To”, suggesting that women enjoy gender-based privileges in current society. From their perspective, feminism has disrupted traditional gender dynamics, placing incels at a disadvantage in the mating market and contributing to their exclusion from romantic and sexual opportunities. This belief is closely tied to broader anxieties about China’s skewed gender ratio and the competitive nature of the marriage market. Many Sun Ba members lament the rising cost of marriage (e.g., expensive bride prices), viewing it as an unfair burden placed upon men. However, the very structural imbalance they criticize—where women command higher value in the marriage market—is itself a product of gender discrimination, as son preference and gender-selective practices have led to a surplus of single men. This suggests that

their grievances, rather than challenging patriarchal structures, actually reinforce them by positioning men as the ultimate victims of gender inequality.

## **6.2 The ambivalence towards men and the self**

While many of the discussions in Sun Ba center on ambivalence towards women, an equally important yet often overlooked dynamic is the community's contradictory attitude towards men—both towards other men and towards the self. Masculinity within the forum is not celebrated as a coherent ideal, but rather marked by internal tensions and fragmented identities. On the surface, members often express disdain for men who actively pursue women, portraying romantic effort as a sign of weakness or humiliation. Yet, embedded in their discourse is also a sense of envy: they lament that “good women” are always with “bad men”. This reflects a deeper ambivalence—where contempt and longing exist simultaneously, shaping a conflicted masculine identity. Sun Ba members navigate these contradictions by mocking others and themselves.

Sun Ba members frequently employ dehumanizing metaphors to describe men, particularly those who still hold romantic aspirations (e.g., “turtle”). This language serves two functions: first, it acts as a form of social policing, discouraging members from romantic investment. By ridiculing men who express romantic interest or make efforts to pursue relationships, the forum enforces an implicit behavioral code that equates emotional attachment with weakness; second, it reinforces the forum's overarching victimhood narrative, in which members see themselves as casualties of an unfair romantic and social hierarchy. Within this framework, conventional dating behaviors are reframed as submissive acts that diminish male agency, while the romantic market is depicted as a hostile environment where incels are doomed to fail. This victimhood perception is further fuelled by the belief that “good women” are monopolized by “bad men”, leaving “good men” with only undesirable romantic options. This pattern reflects what Connell (1995) describes as hegemonic masculinity, where men enforce rigid gender norms not only on women but also on other men. In the case of Sun Ba, masculinity is defined by romantic withdrawal and emotional detachment, with those who fail to conform being ridiculed, mocked, and outright hostility. The act of labelling functions as a disciplinary mechanism,

regulating male behavior within the community and reinforcing an exclusionary form of masculinity.

Unlike Western incel forums, which often have a rigid hierarchical structure with clear distinctions between social tiers, Sun Ba does not establish such a formal structure. However, this does not mean that hierarchical thinking is absent. In Chinese incel discourse, women are seen as occupying the top of the social food chain, exploiting modern dating norms and reproductive rights. This pervasive sense of injustice fuels a strong victimhood narrative, which becomes central to their identity construction.

In response to this perceived imbalance, Sun Ba members attempt to reclaim a sense of superiority within their own community. Lacking institutional power in the outside world, they turn to symbolic strategies inside the forum: mocking women and ridiculing other men, particularly those labelled as “turtles” for those men raising women’s market value. These practices allow members to invert mainstream values and carve out an alternative hierarchy—one that affirms detachment, cynicism, and emotional withdrawal as sign of masculine authenticity.

Yet this internal hierarchy is marked by deep ambivalence. While they mock others to assert dominance, they also frequently engage in self-deprecating language, referring to themselves as “rats”. Such expressions of self-deprecation serve as a form of emotional release—giving voice to their own perceived powerlessness. Rather than resolving their contradictions, the forum sustains them, offering a space where superiority and self-loathing coexist, and where masculinity is shaped by a constant cycle of blaming others and putting themselves down.

### **6.3 The role of language in subculture formation**

The self-identification as “rat” reflects forum members’ perception of themselves as social outcasts. Both topic modeling and emoji results confirm that this term holds significant weight in the forum’s discourse. Calling oneself a “rat” is often the first step for new members to integrate into the community, functioning as a symbolic act of group inclusion. From a theoretical perspective, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) provides insight into this phenomenon. The theory suggests that individuals derive self-esteem and a sense of belonging from their group

memberships. In Sun Ba, embracing the rat identity serves as a means of solidifying group cohesion, reinforcing the idea that members share a common social and emotional experience as marginalized individuals.

Sun Ba constructs its internal culture through a distinct linguistic system that includes emoji, homophones and abbreviations. These elements collectively function as both an expressive tool and a boundary marker, shaping the way members communicate while reinforcing group identity.

On a practical level, these linguistic markers facilitate engagement. The playful and often cryptic nature of emoji makes conversations more dynamic, while homophones and abbreviations create efficient, shorthand expressions of shared experiences and attitudes. Beyond their communicative function, these linguistic features also serve as a form of social gatekeeping. Their meanings are often opaque to outsiders, creating a symbolic barrier that distinguishes insiders from those unfamiliar with the forum's discourse.

Additionally, this internal linguistic encoding serves another crucial function: it softens the explicitness of hateful rhetoric, making hostility appear less aggressive and more acceptable within the community. By embedding derogatory messages within emojis, homophones and coded expressions, members mask their antagonism in a seemingly playful or ironic tone. Those strategies also help evade platform moderation, allowing such narrative to spread more easily without triggering content bans or censorship.

The exclusivity strengthens ingroup cohesion—to fully participate in discussions, new members must learn the forum's unique vocabulary, a process that reinforces their integration into the community. Over time, mastering this internal language becomes a marker of belonging, solidifying the forum as a subcultural space with its own norms and identity.

The forum serves both a space for seeking emotional support and a potential breeding ground for ideological reinforcement. LDA analysis reveals a substantial number of posts related to personal struggles and life experiences. This confirms that the forum is not solely focused on gender discourse but also acts as an outlet for broader social frustrations.

However, within this structure of mutual support lies an echo chamber effect, where forum norms subtly shape individual attitudes and reinforce extreme narratives. Members entering the forum in search of emotional relief often unconsciously adopt the dominant discourse. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of deindividuation, where individuals in a collective setting experience a diminished sense of personal responsibility and critical thinking, making them more susceptible to adopting the group's prevailing beliefs. The need to integrate into the community compels members to internalize forum norms, even if those norms include hostility and resentment towards certain groups.

#### **6.4 The overlap between incel ideology and right-wing nationalism**

Findings from the LDA modeling reveal that topic “Societal Gender Conflicts & Nationalism” contains discussions on international affairs, with certain expressions reflecting right-wing tendencies, such as the use of the term “汉奸” (traitor). This suggests a degree of ideological overlap between incel discourse and right-wing nationalism, a phenomenon also observed in Western incel communities. The incel rhetoric has often been associated with the Red Pill movement, which itself is deeply embedded in right-wing ideologies (Kelly et al., 2021). The Sun Ba community exhibits a similar pattern, where anti-feminist beliefs intersect with nationalist sentiment, further reinforcing the forum's exclusionary atmosphere.

One of the distinct characteristics of Chinese incel is the framing of feminism as a foreign threat. Feminism is frequently labelled as a “Western infiltration” or a tool used by foreign forces to divide China, positioning anti-feminism as a patriotic stance rather than mere gender antagonism. This not only legitimizes their rejection of feminism but also ties their misogynistic views to a broader nationalist narrative, making their ideology more resistant to external criticism.

The overlap between incel and right-wing ideologies contributes to the radicalization of discourse within the community. As members engage in discussions about international politics, they integrate nationalist rhetoric into their gendered grievances, reinforcing the belief that both personal and national struggles are linked to external threats. This fusion of anti-feminism and nationalism serves to strengthen ingroup cohesion, as members align themselves against perceived common enemies, whether they be women, progressive movements, or foreign influences.

## 7 Conclusion

This research employs LDA topic modeling and qualitative analysis to explore the primary discussion themes and linguistic patterns of Sun Ba, an online forum with incel characteristics. The findings reveal key aspects of the forum's discourse, including its focus on gender conflicts, the construction of community identity, and tendencies towards ideological extremism.

First, discussions on Sun Ba are highly centered on gender-related topics, particularly the evaluation and judgement of women's behavior. The LDA results indicate two distinct themes focused on criticizing women: one at an interpersonal level, where emojis are frequently used, and another at a societal level, where members express strong anti-feminist sentiments, often in response to social events. While misogyny and anti-feminism are dominant narratives in the forum, the discussions are not only about rejecting women. Instead, they reveal an underlying desire to regulate and control women's behavior, aligning with the broader pattern of male grievance discourse. Members do not simply advocate for separation from women but rather seek to establish a social order where women conform to their expectations and desires.

Second, the language used in the forum reflects how members construct their identities. Members employ metaphors to dehumanize both themselves and others, reinforcing the forum's hierarchy and internal norms. For example, they commonly refer to themselves as "rats", emphasizing their position as social outcasts. The frequent use of derogatory terms for both men and women illustrate how Sun Ba members enforce behavioral norms within the community (hegemonic masculinity) and establish a collective identity through shared linguistic practices.

Third, the forum extensively utilizes encoded language, including abbreviations, homophones, and emojis, to create an exclusive in-group culture and enhance community cohesion. These coded forms of communication not only reinforce group identity but also serve a strategic function: they make hostility appear less explicit, allowing members to evade platform censorship and making their discourse more easily disseminated. This encryption of language contributes to the forum's insularity, forming an echo chamber that amplifies misogynistic and extremist viewpoints.

Additionally, discussions about everyday life, such as campus experiences, gaming, and requests for advice, are prominent in the forum. This suggests that the primary user base consists of younger individuals who are actively navigating gender anxieties and personal identity formation. While the forum provides an outlet for emotional expression and mutual support, this support system can also intensify shared grievances, leading to further radicalization.

Finally, the research reveals a tendency towards right-wing nationalism within the forum. Some members use terms like “traitor” in discussions about international affairs, and there is a belief that feminism is a “foreign force” aiming to weaken men and destabilize China. This rhetoric legitimizes their anti-feminist stance by framing it as a defence against external threats. This pattern aligns with previous research on Western incel communities, where “Red Pill” ideology depicts modern gender structures as manipulated by progressive or feminist agendas, positioning men as victims who must “awaken” to reclaim their power.

#### *Contribution of the research*

This research contributes to the understanding of Chinese incel culture by examining incel tendency forum’s topics and characteristics. The term “incel” has only recently gained traction in China, introducing a new interpretative framework for analyzing gender discourse. Chinese incel discourse is deeply intertwined with structural gender imbalances in the marriage market, traditional patriarchal ideologies, and the unique dynamics of online communication in China. These intersecting factors have fostered the emergence of a distinct online subculture characterized by “abstract culture” where humour, metaphor, and coded language play crucial roles in reinforcing group identity and facilitating ideological transmission.

#### *Limitations of the research*

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this research. First, data limitations pose certain constraints. This research lacks demographic data on forum users, as the analysis is based on textual content. This absence of user profiles makes it difficult to determine the specific background and social positioning of Sun Ba members. Given the sensitivity of the topic, user-level data collection was deliberately avoided, but this inevitably limits the research’s ability to analyze individual motivations and interactions beyond textual patterns.

Second, the dataset covers a three-month period (August to November 2024), which may impact the generalizability of the findings. Some discussion topics, particularly those within the “Societal Gender Conflicts” theme in the LDA results, may be temporally specific rather than representative of long-term trends. A more extended data collection period would provide a clearer picture of recurring patterns and shifts in discourse over time.

Third, LDA topic modeling has inherent limitations. The selection of four topics was based on interpretability and alignment with the research’s focus. While the results provided meaningful insights, a finer-grained topic distribution might have captured additional nuances. To address overlapping topics, the research analyzed the high-frequency words at  $\lambda = 0$ , which emphasizes topic exclusivity. However, some degree of overlap between topics remains unavoidable, showing the challenge of applying automated topic modeling to complex social discourse

Fourth, qualitative analysis is interpretative, relying on close reading and contextual understanding of forum discussions. Additionally, the thematic analysis of the “good women” discourse was conducted on a relatively small subset of data, which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within the forum. Expanding the dataset and incorporating additional qualitative methods could provide deeper insights into the underlying ideologies of Sun Ba members.

In the end, what emerges in the Chinese incel community is not a coherent ideology but a state of ambivalence—towards women, towards other men, and ultimately towards themselves. Members of Sun Ba oscillate between a need to feel superior and deep self-doubt, between resentment and longing. This emotional turbulence leaves them suspended in a space where they feel alienated from society yet unable to fully withdraw from it. The forum offers a temporary ground on which to land, a space to articulate grievance and construct identity. But this is not a space of resolution—it is a shelter built from contradiction, not a path to escape it.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Supplementary materials

To ensure transparency and reproducibility, all supplementary materials related to this study have been made publicly available on GitHub. These materials include:

- Python code used for data cleaning, topic modeling, and visualization;
- Figures generated for the analysis (e.g., word clouds, topic distributions);
- Both raw and processed versions of the dataset collected from Baidu Tieba;
- Custom dictionaries used for Chinese text preprocessing, including:
  - A merged stop word list compiled from four public sources and extended with user-defined terms;
  - A custom dictionary for word segmentation;
  - A synonym replacement list reflecting forum-specific vocabulary.

All materials are accessible at the following repository:

<https://github.com/Yanran-Lio804/Thesis-appendix>

These resources are intended to support further exploration, validation, or replication of the research.