

"Re-Tell the Fortune so I Can Believe It": How Chinese User Communities Engage with and Interpret GenAI-based Fortune Telling

ANONYMOUS AUTHOR(S)

People traditionally divine the future by interpreting natural phenomena as oracular signals, especially in societies adhering to traditional beliefs like China. With the advent of Generative AI (GenAI), people gain access to new ways of probing digital oracles for predicting the future. To understand how people use and interpret GenAI for divination in China, we interviewed 22 participants who habitually use GenAI platforms for fortune-telling, complemented by a three-week digital ethnography with 1,842 community posts. Qualitative analysis showed that people who seek psychological comfort are particularly receptive to GenAI-based decision-making. Users valued GenAI's accessibility, convenience, and efficiency while perceiving its lack of spiritual mystique. We observed community dynamics forming around GenAI tools, where users reinforce interpretations by sharing and discussing with each other, repeating queries until responses align with expectations. Our work uncovers how AI technologies change the way people and communities engage in traditional cultural practices while yearning for the same goals.

CCS Concepts: • Human-centered computing → Collaborative and social computing.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Generative AI, Fortune-Telling, Divination

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1 Introduction

Fortune-telling, or divination, have deep historical roots in Chinese communities, functioning not only as a means of predicting outcomes but also as a cultural practice for navigating uncertainty and maintaining social bonds. Oracle bone divination in China's Shang Dynasty, where diviners interpreted heat-induced cracks in bones to predict the future, represents one of humanity's earliest systematic fortune-telling practices [95]. This practice exemplifies how early divination merged religious beliefs with proto-scientific observation. Nowadays, traditional Chinese divination practices, such as *BaZi* (the Four Pillars of Destiny), *Ziwei Doushu* (Purple Star Astrology), *Feng Shui* (Chinese geomancy), *Physiognomy* (face reading), and *Oneiromancy* (dream interpretation), continue to hold significant cultural resonance. Meanwhile, imported divinatory systems like tarot and astrology are gaining increasing popularity among younger generations [51, 91]. The ongoing interplay between these distinct traditions has fostered the emergence of a diverse Chinese spiritual divination landscape. While the methods have evolved, studies have shown that in Chinese communities, consulting fortune-tellers remains a common practice in moments of uncertainty such

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as relationships, career changes, and business ventures, reflecting an enduring quest for spiritual guidance, emotional stability, and decisional clarity across historical epochs [51].

More recently, Chinese communities have absorbed new forms of divination through the adoption of generative AI (GenAI) [72]. Thanks to its conversational and generative capacities, GenAI can imitate the listening and dialogic styles of human fortune-tellers, making it increasingly common for people to turn to AI for guidance [49]. Importantly, these systems are not simply transplanted technologies but are culturally localized. Large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek are adapted to perform practices with strong Chinese cultural significance, including *BaZi* readings, palmistry, and physiognomy. Beyond mere simulation, the use of AI divination introduces new interactive features and social affordances, giving rise to emergent community ecologies. For instance, CeCe, a widely used Chinese fortune-telling platform, allows users to exchange divinatory outcomes, debate interpretations, and collectively reflect on spiritual meanings within online spaces. At their core, both fortune-telling and GenAI aim to impose order on uncertainty by uncovering hidden patterns and generating predictions. While traditional divination is rooted in natural symbolic interpretation and metaphysical worldviews, GenAI operates through data-driven inference and statistical modeling.

Although their forms may appear similar, the underlying trust logic has shifted. Unlike traditional divination, where authority resides in the practitioner and is reinforced by communal norms, GenAI systems shift trust onto models that lack moral judgment and community accountability, creating both novel affordances and potential risks. The ease and accessibility of GenAI readings can encourage overreliance, altering spiritual practices, social interactions, and everyday decision-making. These dynamics are particularly significant in China, where divination remains a culturally rooted, communal practice, and where GenAI adoption reshapes emotional, social, and spiritual engagement. Understanding this shift is also critical for research on algorithmically mediated communities, culturally situated GenAI, and the interplay of trust, emotion, and social validation.

Within HCI and CSCW, growing attention has been paid to the emotional and spiritual dimensions of human-AI interaction. Prior work has explored how religious leaders adopt digital tools in spiritual practices [8, 82, 94], how visualization tools can strengthen spiritual support networks in health contexts [36], and how users attribute spiritual authority to AI agents, such as in the cases of the robotic Buddhist priest Mindar and the Spirituality Chatbot [47], demonstrating how AI transforms emotionally-driven and spiritual interactions. Moreover, Graves [30] has also called for an emergentist view of AI spirituality, highlighting how human-AI spiritual interaction challenges traditional boundaries between computation and transcendence. However, little is known about how users engage with GenAI-based fortune-telling and how these spiritual experiences shape their trust and usage patterns, especially in culturally specific contexts like China, where divination remains both personal and collective. This gap is significant given the emergence of AI divination tools and their influence on both individual and community practices. Therefore, this study focuses on three core research questions:

RQ1: *By what practices do Chinese people utilize GenAI tools to read their fortunes?*

RQ2: *How do they perceive the effectiveness of the fortunes told by GenAI tools? To what extent do they trust the prediction?*

RQ3: *What are their relationships with others who use GenAI fortune-telling tools, and how does that affect the perceived competence of these tools?*

To answer these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 participants whose experience with GenAI-based fortune-telling ranged from one-time experimentation to frequent use, spanning casual users to seasoned divination practitioners. Among them, 9 participants had used ChatGPT for divinatory purposes, 9 had used the Chinese platform CeCe, and 4 had just engaged with other specialized GenAI tools. These tools were used for various divination methods,

99 including astrology, *BaZi*, tarot, face reading, etc. Based on the communities most frequently
 100 mentioned in the interviews, we conducted a three-week digital ethnography with 1,842 posts
 101 to gain more contextualized and authentic insights into community interactions. This involved
 102 observing online GenAI fortune-telling communities on WeChat, Xiaohongshu, and Cece, focusing
 103 on how users engaged with divinatory content in social settings. These observations offered insight
 104 into emerging norms, vocabularies, and cultural meanings surrounding AI-mediated divination
 105 practices in China. Our interview protocol discussed 7 key topics: background information, workflow
 106 and user experience, challenges and misunderstandings, ethical considerations of GenAI fortune-
 107 telling, cognitive and psychological impact, collaborative social interaction, and future perspectives.
 108 Through qualitative analysis, three researchers independently coded the interview and online
 109 Ethnography data and iteratively developed themes through collaborative discussion.

110 Our findings reveal that users' trust in and acceptance of GenAI-based fortune-telling tools
 111 vary significantly depending on their motivations. Those who seek entertainment or psychological
 112 comfort tend to embrace these tools more readily, whereas individuals making major life decisions
 113 remain cautious, often treating AI predictions as supplementary input rather than authoritative
 114 guidance. Users valued GenAI's accessibility, convenience, and efficiency while perceiving its lack
 115 of spiritual mystique. Surprisingly, Chinese users often view the absence of human judgment as
 116 a privacy advantage rather than a limitation. However, this absence of ethical discretion raises
 117 significant concerns as the GenAI divination tools cannot decline potentially harmful requests that
 118 traditional practitioners would ethically refuse to perform. Moreover, the formation of commu-
 119 nities around these tools plays a crucial role in reinforcing beliefs and validating interpretations,
 120 with diviners actively sharing results and seeking feedback, often repeating queries with slight
 121 modifications until they receive "satisfactory" results that align with their expectations. Finally,
 122 based on these interview findings and observations, we discuss and summarize the typical process
 123 by which Chinese users engage with GenAI-based fortune telling.

124 This study motivates additional research on the complex dynamics between GenAI and traditional
 125 divination practices by revealing how diviners navigate between technological convenience and
 126 spiritual authenticity while demonstrating how online communities form around these tools to
 127 collectively validate and reinforce divinatory practices.

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129 2 Background

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131 2.1 Chinese Fortune-Telling Practices and Cultural Significance

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In Chinese cultural life, divination methods such as *BaZi*, *Ziwei Doushu*, the *I Ching*, *Feng Shui*,
 133 and physiognomy operate not only as a comprehensive worldview but also as practical tools for
 134 coping with uncertainty. Rooted in Daoist, Confucian, and folk traditions, these systems draw on the
 135 symbolic regimes of heavenly stems and earthly branches, the Five Phases, and hexagrams to analyze
 136 destiny, personality traits, interpersonal relationships, and auspicious timing [67, 76, 84]. Some
 137 example is shown in Fig.1. These systems embody a distinctly Chinese metaphysical worldview,
 138 one that sees fate as shaped through the interaction of Heaven, Earth, and human action. While
 139 destiny may be partially predetermined, individuals are encouraged to make informed adjustments
 140 based on divinatory insights, reflecting a philosophy that values balance, timing, and harmonious
 141 alignment [76]. Scholars observe that these practices are as much symbolic and ritualistic as they
 142 are predictive, helping individuals impose meaning and order on an uncertain world [34, 74].

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Framed through the lens of "Distributed Cognition" and "Symbolic Interactionism", traditional
 144 divinatory systems can be interpreted as culturally embedded tools that scaffold reasoning, meaning-
 145 making, and emotional regulation in the face of uncertainty [5, 35]. These systems operate by
 146 externalizing cognitive processes into shared symbolic artifacts, such as hexagrams, astrological

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charts, or BaZi matrices, allowing users to interact with and interpret encoded cultural knowledge [61, 96]. As such, these divinatory logics can be seen as early forms of systematic, symbolic reasoning, positioning fortune-telling as a proto-computational cultural interface long before digital technologies emerged [16]. This theoretical grounding offers a critical foundation for examining how contemporary GenAI platforms inherit, simulate, or diverge from these longstanding epistemic practices.

Historically, divination was not only a philosophical tool for the elite, but also pervaded everyday life among ordinary people [74, 85]. The spatial arrangements of buildings and interiors according to *Feng Shui* [39], the reading of facial features in physiognomy [10], and the use of *BaZi* charts to predict marriage and fertility all reflect a Chinese cosmology in which destiny is at once predetermined and subject to individual influence through ritualized action [32, 74].

In recent years, younger generations have re-engaged with traditional divination practices through online fortune-telling, tarot readings, and astrological analysis. Although the mediums have shifted significantly, from religious temples to social media platforms, and from paper-based charts to mobile applications, the underlying cultural motivations and interpretive logics remain remarkably persistent. These practices serve as a means for young people to explore personal identity, alleviate emotional stress, and cultivate a sense of community belonging [65].

Sociological and anthropological studies suggest that this “network fortune-telling” subculture among youth is far from mere superstition, it represents a cultural strategy for resisting anxiety and reshaping self-narratives in a complex society (An Examination of the Worldviews and Practices of Contemporary Chinese Astrologers; Early Chinese Divination and Its Rhetoric). Individuals here display pronounced cognitive multiplicity, embracing modern scientific rationality alongside enduring metaphysical beliefs [41, 45].

Taken together, these Chinese divination practices constitute more than a body of knowledge; they represent a trans-temporal cultural mechanism that, across historical, social, and psychological dimensions, provides tools for meaning-making, emotional regulation, and identity formation [74]. The study builds on this rich background to examine how contemporary AI-driven fortune-telling platforms inherit, reconfigure, or contest these deep cultural logics, especially as users engage in algorithmic negotiation, seeking to align machine-generated outputs with longstanding cultural epistemologies like *BaZi*.



Fig. 1. Traditional Chinese divination methods examples: (a) Hexagram divination with coins, (b) Lot-Drawing divination with bamboo sticks, (c) Bagua diagram for *Feng Shui*, (d) Physiognomy chart for face reading.

197 2.2 Why Do People Turn to Fortune-Telling?

198 Why do people still turn to fortune-telling in a technologically mediated age? From a psychological
 199 perspective, the Barnum effect offers a critical explanation: individuals tend to perceive vague yet
 200 positive statements as highly personal, particularly under the influence of the self-referential ef-
 201 fect [15, 24]. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in interpretive systems such as astrology and
 202 Feng Shui [53]. Working in tandem with confirmation bias, individuals selectively absorb informa-
 203 tion that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs while disregarding contradictory evidence [22, 28, 58].
 204 These cognitive tendencies, intertwined with emotional needs, drive people to seek psychological
 205 certainty in moments of anxiety or ambiguity, making mystical practices like fortune-telling persist
 206 as a meaningful form of self-assurance.

207 However, fortune-telling is not merely a product of individual cognitive bias or illusion. Research
 208 in technology and sociology suggests that such practices are deeply embedded in shared cultural
 209 logics and community rituals [86]. Perceptions of “luck” or “fate” are continuously reinforced
 210 through collective narratives, symbolic resonance, and ritualized synchronization, phenomena
 211 often conceptualized as collective effervescence [34, 63].

212 At the social level, traditional religious or spiritual rituals function not only as personal coping
 213 mechanisms but as collective sensemaking infrastructures. Ritual synchrony fosters a sense of
 214 belonging and “collective effervescence”, which is particularly salient in collectivist cultures [34,
 215 63]. Studies have shown that in collectivist societies like China, in-group trust and conformity
 216 pressures are 27% stronger than in individualist cultures [60]. In collectivist societies like China,
 217 such trust-building mechanisms are particularly pronounced [60]. As digital media enters this
 218 space, from spiritual apps and live-streamed divinations to GenAI-powered fortune-telling systems,
 219 technological affordances increasingly shape how mystical beliefs are performed and perceived [7,
 220 33]. In this context, fortune-telling is no longer just a form of emotional regulation, but a socio-
 221 cultural mechanism through which uncertainty is collectively negotiated and meaning is co-
 222 constructed via human–technology interaction.

223 At the level of cultural and cognitive processing, the temporary suppression of analytical thinking is a crucial precondition for the formation of
 224 mystical beliefs [6, 26]. Gervais et al. and Bronstein et al. suggest that analytical suppression
 225 enhances intuitive receptivity to supernatural ideas, while Pennycook et al. further demonstrate
 226 that under cognitive load, individuals’ acceptance of mystical explanations increases by 38% [68].
 227 These findings help explain behavioral patterns such as users turning to AI fortune-telling apps
 228 late at night when decision fatigue is high and intuitive reasoning (System 1) dominates [14, 19, 57].
 229 This intuitive reliance also opens space for affective heuristics and self-serving interpretations, as
 230 noted in dual-process theories of cognition [2].

231 However, GenAI systems challenge this structure by becoming both technological actors and
 232 cultural intermediaries. On one hand, large language models carry epistemologies embedded in their
 233 training data, which are often dominated by Western norms and rationalities [46, 89]. This creates
 234 a potential mismatch with non-Western spiritual frameworks and may result in cultural erasure
 235 or distortion. On the other hand, GenAI tools also offer novel modes of trust construction, where
 236 algorithmic opacity is not necessarily a drawback, but becomes part of the mystical allure [3, 59].
 237 The “stochastic parrot” critique reminds us that these tools may simulate understanding without
 238 semantic depth, yet users continue to engage with them in ways that are emotionally resonant and
 239 culturally adaptive [3, 59].

240 In this sense, explainability becomes not just a technical challenge, but a cultural design prob-
 241 lem [69]. Work by Peters et al. reveals that user trust in AI explanations depends heavily on the
 242 alignment between system behaviors and culturally familiar metaphors of agency. Thus, GenAI
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fortune-telling interfaces that incorporate zodiac, I Ching, or Tarot imagery are not trivial, they function as bridges between algorithmic logic and symbolic meaning.

From a contemporary perspective, With the rise of GenAI-driven fortune-telling tools (such as tarot robots, horoscope-based GPTs, or personality analysis AIs), the concept of “superstition” is being profoundly reshaped. Recent studies show that users increasingly perceive these tools as forms of digital emotional companionship and devices for emotional exploration, rather than traditional “prediction mechanisms” [1].

As Banerjee et al. point out, these AI-powered divination practices blur the boundaries between the rational and the irrational, repackaging previously stigmatized behaviors as legitimate forms of self-understanding [1]. Rather than eliminating superstition, AI recontextualizes it through its customizable, depersonalized, and instant interaction format, freeing it from a rigid binary of belief vs. disbelief and turning it into a more flexible emotional practice [9].

Notably, many users are aware of the computational logic behind these tools, yet still project genuine emotional meaning onto the interaction [13, 56]. This willingness to “play along” despite knowing the artificiality reflects a kind of postmodern gamified belief, a conscious “performance of faith” through which users seek psychological comfort, social connection, and identity construction.

Therefore, the reconstruction of superstition through GenAI is not a simple process of “technology replacing tradition.” Instead, it reflects a deeper negotiation between cultural, cognitive, and social mechanisms. In this process, belief becomes a designed interactive structure, and superstition transforms into a new kind of socio-psychological infrastructure, supported by intelligent systems. This raises new questions for HCI research: should we design belief into AI systems, or at least understand how people assign faith-like meaning in their interactions with AI?

2.3 Algorithmic Divination with Cultural Alignment, Participation, and System Design

Recent advances in GenAI-powered divination systems reveal three interconnected dimensions of inquiry. Technically, researchers have explored diverse algorithmic implementations to bridge data-driven prediction and spiritual symbolism. McNutt [52] developed Sortilège, a visual analytics system that maps algorithmic outputs onto tarot card metaphors, while Pichlmair’s procedural generation tools [70] semi-automate tarot deck creation through rule-based algorithms requiring human semantic refinement. Narrative generation models, such as Sullivan’s tarot-to-story system [87], leverage NLP to transform divinatory symbols into cinematic predictions, whereas Shin’s cross-modal framework [79] translates academic concepts into tarot-inspired design cards. Lustig’s machine learning experiments [50] further demonstrate how training models on historical tarot datasets enables personalized deck generation. These technical approaches collectively grapple with balancing algorithmic pattern recognition with human interpretative frameworks.

Psychologically, users engage with AI divination through complex belief dynamics. Lee’s studies [43, 44] identify “rational superstition,” where users validate AI predictions via pre-existing astrological beliefs, selectively accepting positive outcomes as personalized insights. Shein’s work [77] highlights cognitive polyphasia, users’ simultaneous adherence to scientific rationality and spiritual practices, necessitating ethical safeguards in prediction delivery. Historical analyses by Pooley [71] and Tost [90] contextualize card-based divination as enduring tools for emotional processing, a role modern systems like Tarotoo [50] enhance through iterative feedback loops. This creates a paradox: users demand AI’s perceived objectivity while insisting on cultural-psychological alignment of outputs.

Contextually, tarot and card-based systems permeate diverse domains. In design, Chung’s interaction cards [11] and Michelson’s world-building frameworks [54] repurpose tarot for creative ideation, while Skovbjerg’s gamified system [83] adapts divinatory logic for teacher training. Artistic reinterpretations, such as Sarah’s batik adaptations [75] and Short’s installations [80],

295 aestheticize spiritual symbolism. AI-augmented tools like Ntelia's Manifesting [62] and Pichlmair's
 296 procedural generators [70] hybridize traditional divination with computational creativity, enabling
 297 rapid prototyping of culturally-grounded spiritual interfaces.

298 Some Classic works [17, 31, 73] warn that design failures often stem from a mismatch between
 299 technical mechanisms and actual user needs, particularly when a system fails to align with users'
 300 cultural expectations and social contexts. For GenAI fortune-telling tools, algorithmic accuracy alone
 301 is insufficient; their interactive flows, feedback loops [17], and recommendation architectures [73]
 302 must embed cultural and spiritual symbols familiar to users, or they will face significant adoption
 303 barriers.

304 Two critical gaps emerge from this body of work. First, existing research predominantly focuses
 305 on Western divination traditions (e.g., Tarot, astrology) and their HCI applications [54, 77], while
 306 non-Western spiritual practices, despite their distinct epistemological foundations and societal
 307 influence, remain underexplored. This omission is particularly significant given that both GenAI
 308 and many traditional divination systems operate through data pattern recognition, yet their cultural
 309 legitimacy and user acceptance mechanisms may vary drastically. Second, the perceptual landscape
 310 of GenAI divination users remains poorly mapped. While studies address belief dynamics [44] and
 311 cognitive polyphasia [77], there is limited empirical understanding of 1) how different demographics
 312 reconcile AI's data-driven predictions with pre-existing spiritual beliefs, and 2) whether users
 313 perceive GenAI as a continuation of traditional divination logic or a distinct technological paradigm.
 314 This gap is compounded by the lack of comparative studies analyzing how cultural context mediates
 315 trust in AI-generated spiritual guidance, especially in regions like China where divination practices
 316 are deeply intertwined with local cosmologies.

317 This study aims to address critical gaps in existing literature, particularly the lack of non-Western
 318 perspectives and limited understanding of user perception, through field interviews and cultural
 319 analysis. We systematically explore how Chinese users engage with GenAI-powered fortune-telling
 320 tools in practice, how they evaluate these tools' accuracy and effectiveness based on personal
 321 experience, and how they construct trust and meaning through community interactions. By linking
 322 algorithmic generation mechanisms with users' cultural expectations, cognitive judgments, and
 323 social contexts, this study reveals how GenAI fortune-telling is emerging in the Chinese context
 324 as a novel form of "algorithmic cultural practice" that negotiates between technology, belief, and
 325 emotion.

326 3 Methods

327 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 participants through Tencent Meeting, WeChat,
 328 Zoom, and in-person sessions. The objective was to explore how individuals engage with GenAI
 329 fortune-telling tools and the interpretive or spiritual meanings they derive from these interactions.
 330 We also conducted a three-week digital ethnography with 1,842 posts. This involved observing
 331 and analyzing user interactions, community discussions, and platform features on popular GenAI
 332 divination platforms, such as CeCe and related WeChat groups and forums. All research procedures
 333 were reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics committee, with strict adherence to protocols
 334 for informed consent and data privacy.

335 3.1 Participants and Recruitment

336 We conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 participants (14 female, 8 male) aged 18-52 with
 337 an average age of 27.2 (see Table.1). Participants were recruited through direct outreach and public
 338 social media posts on WeChat and RedNote. Eligibility was based on having used at least one GenAI
 339 tool or platform for divination. The final sample included individuals from diverse professional
 340 backgrounds, including industrial design (5), art (4), technology-related fields (3), and others such
 341 as

as law, accounting, and early childhood studies. Their experience spanned across different GenAI platforms, from general LLMs like ChatGPT and DeepSeek to specialized GenAI fortune-telling platforms, with popularity using CeCe for divination. Only 4 participants reported experience with specialized GenAI fortune-telling tools (Craple Myrtle GenAI, Quin GenAI, TianGong AI, etc.), and no experience with LLMs. These tools were used for various divination methods, including astrology, *BaZi*, tarot, face reading, and *Feng Shui*. Participants' engagement levels varied, with 6 being frequent users, 13 being occasional users, and 3 having used these tools only once.

While our sample captures diverse perspectives in terms of age, gender, educational and professional background, it has some limitations. Only six participants were frequent users, which may constrain understanding of long-term engagement patterns. The sample was also skewed toward younger adults and female participants, reflecting, to some extent, the demographic tendencies of GenAI fortune-telling adoption in China. Consequently, experiences of older adults or infrequent users may be underrepresented.

Throughout the study, ethical integrity was maintained throughout the study, with informed consent obtained from all participants and strict protocols followed as per institutional Internal Review Board (IRB) requirements. Participants were compensated with 50 CNY for their time and contribution to the study.

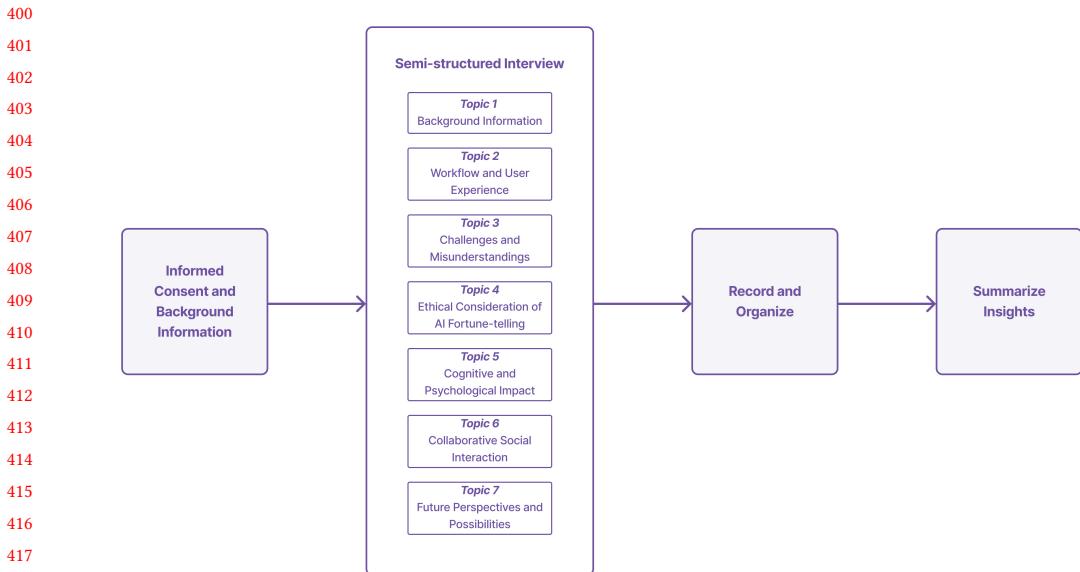
Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

ID	Gender	Age	GenAI Platforms (Fortune-telling Methods)	Usage Frequency	Major and Domain
P1	Female	24	CeCe (Astrology, BaZi)	Frequent	Law
P2	Female	24	CeCe (Tarot)	Frequent	Art
P3	Female	24	ChatGPT (Dream Analysis)	Occasional	Industrial Design
P4	Male	22	ChatGPT (Astrology, BaZi, Face and Palm Reading, and Tarot)	Once	Industrial Design
P5	Male	22	ChatGPT (Astrology)	Once	Industrial Design
P6	Female	29	CeCe(Astrology, Tarot)	Frequent	Industrial Design
P7	Female	24	ChatGPT (Tarot)	Occasional	Art
P8	Male	22	ChatGPT (BaZi)	Once	Industrial Design
P9	Female	23	ChatGPT (BaZi)	Occasional	Art
P10	Female	22	WenZhen (BaZi)	Occasional	Accounting
P11	Female	24	ChatGPT (Astrology, Face & Palm Reading, Tarot)	Occasional	Architecture
P12	Female	26	CeCe (Tarot, Liu Yao); ChatGPT (Tarot, Liu Yao)	Frequent	Administrative Management
P13	Female	30	CeCe (BaZi, Tarot, Liu Yao); WenMoTianJi(Astrology)	Frequent	Early Childhood Studies
P14	Male	18	TianGong AI (Astrology, BaZi, Face and Palm Reading, Feng Shui, and Tarot)	Occasional	Art
P15	Female	27	ChatGPT (BaZi); CeCe (Astrology)	Occasional	Computer Information Management
P16	Male	21	Craple Myrtle GenAI(Astrology); FateTell(Feng Shui); Quin GenAI(Tarot)	Occasional	Architecture
P17	Female	24	CeCe(Astrology)	Occasional	Computer science and Technology
P18	Female	26	CeCe(Tarot); Ernie Bot(Tarot)	Occasional	Electronic Information Engineering
P19	Female	32	CeCe(BaZi); Deepseek(BaZi)	Frequent	Education
P20	Male	34	Deepseek(BaZi); Ernie Bot(BaZi)	Occasional	Product Management
P21	Male	48	Deepseek(BaZi)	Occasional	Architecture
P22	Male	52	WeChat Mini Programs(BaZi, Palmistry); Deepseek(BaZi)	Occasional	Business Management

3.2 Interview Procedure

We designed semi-structured interviews on Tencent Meeting, WeChat, Zoom, and in-person sessions, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes. Participants were informed beforehand that the entire discussion would be recorded and transcribed. Following a structured protocol, we first collected background information about participants' experience with various GenAI fortune-telling applications, their usage patterns, and the reasons they started using GenAI fortune-telling. During the interviews, the researcher guided participants to reflect on their workflow and user experience with GenAI fortune-telling tools, followed by discussions about challenges and misunderstandings they encountered. The researcher then encouraged the participants to discuss the ethical considerations of GenAI fortune-telling and its cognitive and psychological impact on the participants. For example, the researcher might ask participants how they interpreted and acted upon GenAI-generated predictions. Additionally, participants were encouraged to share their collaborative social interactions around GenAI fortune-telling, such as how they shared and discussed predictions with others.

393 The interviews concluded with discussions about future perspectives and possibilities for GenAI
 394 fortune-telling (see Fig.2). All interviews were conducted in Chinese, and the recordings were
 395 transcribed via online meeting rooms and translated into English by the research team for subse-
 396 quent analysis, with all personal identifiers removed during the process. This systematic interview
 397 approach helped reveal the multifaceted relationship between users and GenAI fortune-telling
 398 through participants' detailed feedback on both practical usage and social implications.
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 419 Fig. 2. Interview Flowchart: We conducted semi-structured interviews with seven topics (Background Infor-
 420 mation, Workflow and User Experience, Challenges and Misunderstandings, Ethical Consideration of GenAI
 421 Fortune-telling, Cognitive and Psychological Impact, Collaborative Social Interaction, and Future Perspectives
 422 and Possibilities).

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425 3.3 Digital Ethnography Procedure

426 In addition to conducting interviews, we employed a three-week digital ethnography (from March 4
 427 to March 25, 2025) to gain deeper insight into how users interact with GenAI-based fortune-telling
 428 tools in real-world contexts. This approach involved systematically observing user behaviors,
 429 discourses, and cultural practices across multiple online platforms where such interactions are
 430 frequently shared and discussed. Based on insights from the interviews, we identified WeChat,
 431 Xiaohongshu, and user communities embedded within GenAI apps like CeCe as the most frequently
 432 mentioned spaces for discussion and engagement. During the observation period, we focused on
 433 both public-facing posts and semi-public interactions such as comment threads, discussion forums,
 434 and experience-sharing notes, with particular attention paid to how users describe, interpret, and
 435 evaluate their divination experiences. To ensure analytical consistency, we applied inclusion and
 436 exclusion criteria when selecting posts. Posts were included if they documented users' direct
 437 engagement with GenAI fortune-telling tools—such as sharing AI-generated readings, reflecting
 438 on their accuracy, or narrating emotional responses. General horoscopes (e.g., “Taurus weekly
 439 forecast”) that were non-interactive, not AI-generated, or lacked evidence of personal engagement
 440 were excluded. Similarly, purely promotional content, reposted memes, or materials unrelated to
 441

442 divination practices were omitted. This allowed us to focus on data that demonstrated meaningful
443 user-tool interaction, interpretation, and community discussion.

444 Specifically, we manually archived a total of 1,842 posts and interactions, including 803 Xiao-
445 hongshu notes, 112 WeChat articles, 589 user-generated posts from CeCe community forums, and
446 338 comment threads and replies extracted from in-app discussion features. All collected content
447 was documented through anonymized screenshots, totaling over 450 visual records, which were
448 analyzed to identify recurring themes, metaphors, affective responses, and platform-specific dis-
449 cursive norms. These records served to complement the interview data by offering rich ecological
450 context and highlighting how GenAI fortune-telling is embedded in users' everyday social and
451 emotional lives. Given the public or semi-public nature of the platforms observed, we did not
452 perceive significant ethical risks in conducting online participant observation. To ensure the pro-
453 tection of user privacy, all personally identifiable information—including usernames, avatars, and
454 chat handles—was removed, and only anonymized excerpts were used in analysis. All procedures
455 adhered to institutionally approved ethical guidelines, and no identifiable data were retained.

456 3.4 Data Analysis

457 We employed a combination of open coding, thematic analysis [12], and network ethnographic
458 methods [38] to interpret the interview transcripts, following principles of grounded theory [27].
459 Open coding and thematic analysis helped organize recurring patterns in participants' narratives
460 into coherent themes across cases, and network ethnography provided a lens to situate individual
461 experiences within the wider socio-technical and cultural ecologies of GenAI divination.

462 In the first step, three researchers independently coded the interview transcripts and screenshots
463 of social media posts to ensure analytical rigor and minimize bias. Initial codes were derived
464 inductively from participants' descriptions of their experiences with GenAI-based fortune-telling
465 tools and online collected data about comment threads, discussion forums, and experience-sharing
466 notes.

467 Subsequently, the findings were organized into seven main themes that aligned with the semi-
468 structured interview framework: (1) Background Information, examining participants' motivations
469 and initial encounters with GenAI fortune-telling; (2) Workflow and User Experience, analyzing
470 how participants interacted with different platforms; (3) Challenges and Misunderstandings, identi-
471 fying common issues users faced; (4) Ethical Consideration of GenAI Fortune-telling, exploring
472 participants' moral perspectives; (5) Cognitive and Psychological Impact, examining how GenAI
473 predictions influenced users' thinking and emotions; (6) Collaborative Social Interaction, investi-
474 gating how users shared and discussed AI-generated predictions; and (7) Future Perspectives and
475 Possibilities, gathering user insights on potential developments.

476 Following this, the team engaged in reflexive dialogue and used iterative discussions to identify
477 and refine themes within the data, analyzed in conjunction with the ethnographic findings. This
478 process facilitated the categorization of the interview data into three core themes: "Perceptions
479 of Effectiveness and Trust", "Social Interactions in Online Community", and "Common GenAI
480 Fortune-telling Process". These themes were then collaboratively reviewed and further refined by
481 the full research team to ensure their consistency, relevance, and alignment with both the interview
482 content and the broader ethnographic context.

483 4 Results

484 We examined the utilization, perception, and communal influence of GenAI-based fortune-telling
485 among Chinese users. The findings illuminate how users navigate these tools to meet their personal
486 and cultural expectations in fortune reading, their perceptions of the effectiveness and accuracy of
487 AI-generated divinations, and the role of GenAI divination within their communities, especially

491 in shaping trust and social dynamics. Based on the findings from the interviews and network
 492 ethnography, we summarized the process of GenAI fortune-telling.
 493

494 4.1 Perceptions of Effectiveness and Trust

495 4.1.1 *Motivation for fortune-telling is the key factor influencing acceptance.* Users' motivations for
 496 engaging with GenAI divination play a significant role in shaping their level of acceptance and
 497 response to the results. Five different motivations lead to varied attitudes toward the interpretations
 498 provided by the GenAI tool, influencing the depth of users' engagement and the likelihood of their
 499 reliance on these divination results.



500
 501 Fig. 3. Under the five different divination motives, the influences received by users and their acceptance
 502 levels vary.
 503

504 Some users approach GenAI divination purely as a form of lighthearted **entertainment**. For
 505 instance, one participant noted, "*It's just a fun activity; I don't take it too seriously. I often use it after*
 506 *making decisions rather than before*" (P2). They maintain a superficial attitude toward the results,
 507 engaging with the divination more as casual amusement.

508 For others, GenAI divination serves as a source of **psychological comfort**. These users seek
 509 emotional reassurance rather than strict accuracy. For instance, one participant shared that they
 510 "*use it for emotional release, like venting to the AI when feeling frustrated*" (P16), while another
 511 mentioned, "*It gives me peace of mind, not necessarily an accurate answer, but a quick way to ease*
 512 *my mind*" (P3). This motivation drives some users to repeatedly engage with the GenAI, subtly
 513 adjusting their questions each time, aiming to receive a response that offers the reassurance or
 514 encouragement they seek. As P22, a business owner and manager, said, "...When I'm not satisfied
 515 with the divination result, I just make it tell again and again until I'm happy with it."

516 In addition, another major theme for users to use GenAI divination is to assist in **decision-making**.
 517 and the size of the matter to be decided also brings about a huge difference in attitude.
 518 Some users utilize GenAI divination for minor, everyday choices. One participant mentioned, "*I*
 519 *sometimes let it decide small things, like the 'lucky food' of the day*" (P12). In this context, the results
 520 serve as playful routine decisions, adding an element of fun to daily life without deeply affecting
 521 major decision-making. Another participant shared, "*I find it helpful for quick, low-stakes guidance.*
 522 *It adds a bit of amusement to small decisions like what to wear*" (P16).

523 For decision-making purposes, the other group of people in a smaller size turns to GenAI
 524 divination for guidance on major life events or significant decisions. Although they seek insights,
 525 they often remain cautious, with one participant noting, "*AI isn't something I'd rely on for big*
 526 *decisions, but it can offer a different perspective*" (P14). Interestingly, some users return to GenAI after
 527 a decision has been made, using it to reinforce and validate their choices. In this post-decision phase,
 528 they seek confirmation from GenAI results to reassure them of their chosen path. Participant P14
 529

elaborated on this practice, sharing that she often consults GenAI to "reconfirm decisions whenever doubt arises, especially in high-stakes situations". This post-decision use of GenAI divination reflects a desire for responses that align with their existing perspective, thereby strengthening their confidence and sense of certainty in the choices they've made.

Finally, some users engaged with GenAI divination primarily out of a desire to **learn and compare** it with traditional practices. These individuals tended to approach the tool with a more critical lens. As one participant put it, "*I'm interested in understanding the differences, but I find AI lacks the depth of a real human fortune-teller*" (P9). These individuals are often more skeptical of the AI's capabilities, perceiving it as a limited learning tool. Another remarked, "*It's insightful to some extent, but it feels like AI can't capture the same intuition that humans do*" (P3). Their acceptance level remains relatively low, as they view GenAI divination as a supplementary rather than a fully reliable guide.

4.1.2 GenAI divination results are readily available but overly standardized and without mystery. Users hold contrasting views on the results generated by GenAI divination tools. While many appreciate the ease and speed of access, others express concerns about the lack of personalization and emotional depth. This subsection unpacks these nuanced perspectives, highlighting how convenience often comes with a trade-off in perceived authenticity or mystical value. Fig.4 summarizes the key positive and negative perceptions identified through our interviews and online observations, offering an overview of how users interpret GenAI-generated predictions.

😊 GenAI Results	Convenience	Easy to use at home for quick, short-term predictions.
	Low cost	Self-drawn tarot with AI interpretation saves money.
	Straightforward guidance	Suitable for simple divinations, effective for beginners.
	More objective	Unbiased by personal factors like income or culture.
	Greater customization	AI can handle sensitive topics without ethical limits.
	Lack of personalization	Results are too generic, lacking individual flexibility.
	Lack of mystery	Too logical, missing traditional divination's mystique.
	Technical bottleneck	AI struggles with complex knowledge, affecting accuracy.

Fig. 4. Users' views on the advantages and disadvantages of GenAI divination results.

One key advantage of GenAI divination is its **convenience**. Many users appreciate the accessibility it offers, allowing them to access daily or short-term forecasts at home without scheduling an in-person consultation. For instance, participant P1 notes, "*It's faster and more cost-effective compared to offline services, especially for things like Tarot, which I typically consult when I'm under stress or facing life issues.*" (p1). Second, the **low cost** of GenAI platforms also makes them attractive. By facilitating self-drawn tarot readings and AI-generated interpretations, users can engage with divination without incurring the expense of professional fortune-tellers. As P2 mentions, "*AI fortune-telling allows me to save money, especially when I need reassurance without spending a lot on traditional services.*" (p2). Third, GenAI has proven especially praiseworthy for users seeking simple divination results, as it effectively meets their needs for **straightforward guidance**. For instance, P9 noted that AI provides "*satisfactory results for simple questions and everyday guidance, enough to replace a basic level of human interpretation*" (P9). Forth, GenAI's **objectivity** appeals

589 to users who prefer unbiased analysis free from external influences. Participant P5 noted, "AI's
 590 *approach felt more neutral and objective... a human practitioner might try to appeal to what clients*
 591 *want to hear*" (p5). Similarly, P8 described this neutrality as beneficial, noting that it "*makes the*
 592 *communication feel more genuine because it isn't influenced by my own expectations*" (p8). In addition,
 593 GenAI enables **greater customization**, allowing users to select specific topics they want to
 594 explore, rather than being limited to the subjects a human diviner might prioritize. This flexibility
 595 includes a **wider range of topics**, even those that traditional diviners might avoid due to ethical
 596 concerns. Participant P11 pointed out that AI does not hesitate to address questions related to
 597 privacy or life-and-death matters—areas where human diviners often exercise caution. They noted,
 598 "*a fortune-teller with professional ethics might refuse certain questions, but AI seems unrestricted*"
 599 (P11), highlighting the extensive and customizable scope AI brings to divination.

600 However, participants also pointed out disadvantages, particularly around GenAI's **lack of**
 601 **personalization**. For example, P5 notes, "*AI lacks the human touch that makes traditional readings*
 602 *unique to the individual. The responses feel like they come from a preset model, not tailored to me*"
 603 (p5). P14 further criticized the rigid nature of AI interpretations, stating, "*The results often seem too*
 604 *templatized and miss the nuance that an experienced fortune-teller might capture.*" (p14).

605 Another common criticism is the **conformity to expectations** and **lack of mystery** inherent
 606 in GenAI readings, which can make the experience feel too logical or formulaic. P6 remarked,
 607 "*Fortune-telling with AI doesn't have that mysterious aura—it's missing the spiritual ambiance that I*
 608 *associate with divination.*" (p6). P11 echoed this sentiment, adding, "*When AI gives me a reading, it*
 609 *feels flat and unexciting. There's no ritual or mystique, which is part of what I enjoy about traditional*
 610 *methods.*" (p11).

611 In addition to this lack of ritual, some participants noted that GenAI divination responses tend
 612 to conform to general positivity and avoid unsettling content, leading to a lack of depth. As P19
 613 commented, "The results calculated by GenAI are too 'normal'. It always says 'stay hopeful', 'you are
 614 worthy of love'...which is of course good, but it doesn't really arouse my real emotions." This sense
 615 of predictability diminished their emotional engagement with the tool. As a result, the divination
 616 feels less meaningful, even if it's emotionally comforting.

617 Finally, participants cited a **technical bottleneck** in GenAI's capacity to interpret complex or
 618 highly personalized divination. P8 shared an experience, saying, "*ChatGPT can't handle intricate*
 619 *BaZi calculations accurately; it lacks the depth needed for multi-layered interpretations*" (p8). P13
 620 agreed, adding, "*When it comes to nuanced, contextual insights, AI just doesn't compare to a seasoned*
 621 *fortune-teller who can read between the lines.*" (p13).

622
 623 4.1.3 *Compared to traditional fortune-telling, GenAI feels safer to users, yet ethical concerns remain.*
 624 For many Chinese users, GenAI divination seems to alleviate some privacy concerns typically
 625 associated with traditional human diviners. Users often feel more at ease providing personal
 626 information to AI systems, likely due to the perceived anonymity and reduced need to directly
 627 share sensitive details with a human practitioner. For instance, participant P8 noted, "*I'm not too*
 628 *concerned about birth dates, but when it comes to sharing personal thoughts or concerns, privacy*
 629 *issues might arise (with human fortune-tellers)*" (p8). Similarly, participant P18 observed that using
 630 GenAI divination poses relatively low privacy risks, commenting, "*in daily life, privacy is already*
 631 *compromised in so many ways, one more instance doesn't make a big difference*" (p18).

632 However, participants remain cautious, particularly in cases involving deeper personal details.
 633 While some feel they can safely use GenAI for minor inquiries, such as daily guidance, they avoid
 634 it for more complex issues. As P2 remarked, "*I use AI for smaller queries and when I want quick*
 635 *results, but for something more personal or emotional, I still prefer face-to-face sessions*" (p2).

Importantly, participant P10 emphasized a critical ethical gap in GenAI divination: unlike human practitioners, AI lacks the discernment to reject requests that may infringe on others' privacy. This distinction raises concerns about GenAI's potential to inadvertently facilitate privacy violations, as it cannot differentiate between benign queries and those that could infringe upon privacy boundaries. Unlike traditional diviners, who are often selective about the types of questions they answer, particularly on sensitive issues like privacy, health, or life-and-death matters, GenAI divination lacks similar ethical constraints but enlarges the scope of divination. Participant P11 noted this concern, explaining, *"A fortune-teller with professional ethics might refuse certain questions, like those about life and death or others' privacy, but AI seems unrestricted"* (p11). Similarly, P17 commented on the boundaries human diviners set, such as refusing readings for younger users or those with mental health issues, adding, *"Some older fortune-tellers won't read for people under 20, but AI doesn't have these ethical considerations"* (p17).

While this unrestricted access may allow users to explore a broader range of topics, it also opens the door to ethical risks. As P10 illustrated with an example, a user might ask, *"Should I agree to a doctor performing surgery on my child to save his life? What is the success rate?"* A human fortune-teller would likely refuse such a sensitive question due to its serious implications, whereas GenAI might simply offer comforting but uninformed responses. This lack of ethical judgment could lead to decisions with potentially harmful consequences.

Another example we observed in fortune-telling communities involves users turning to GenAI to predict the future of their relationships or to judge the rightness or wrongness of certain actions within friendships or romantic relationships. Common questions include, "How long will this relationship last?", "Can I get along harmoniously with a Scorpio boy?", or "Is it right or wrong for a partner not to give a gift on a birthday?" Responses to such questions are highly impactful; while most users may not strictly follow GenAI's advice, the answers can still leave negative psychological impressions, potentially leading to irreparable harm in their relationships.

Thus, it is crucial to recognize the importance of ethical considerations in GenAI fortune-telling. Without a framework for responsibly navigating sensitive topics, GenAI risks providing guidance that lacks the empathy and caution typically exercised by human diviners. This gap in ethical oversight highlights the need for careful regulation and user awareness in GenAI-driven divination practices.

4.1.4 Chinese GenAI models elevate cultural specificity in divination, balancing versatility and ritual. Following the rise of interest in GenAI-based fortune telling, we observed a notable boom in the use of DeepSeek for divination purposes. According to our online ethnographic observations, after DeepSeek's popularity surged, more than 2 million posts on China's largest social platform WeChat mentioned "DeepSeek Divination" in February 2025 alone. This surge reflects not only the accessibility of GenAI tools but also users' enthusiasm for culturally resonant applications. Two key findings emerge from this trend.

Chinese GenAI models show distinct advantages in supporting traditional Chinese divination practices. These models are better attuned to the symbolic systems, linguistic nuances, and cultural logic embedded in Chinese metaphysics. For example, Participant P21 highlighted that *"tools like DeepSeek can generate more detailed and culturally accurate interpretations for systems like Ziwei Doushu, which involves intricate symbolic elements that require contextual understanding."* Participant P20, a new-generation parent, emphasized the value of Chinese-developed GenAI for generating meaningful baby names rooted in the *Five Elements* and tonal harmony purpose. He said that *"We wanted something special, but still meaningful. AI gave us options with good explanations."* He also emphasized his preference for Chinese-developed AI tools, believing they better capture the cultural nuances embedded in Chinese naming traditions, with non-localized models like ChatGPT

falling short. "Things like character meanings, the Five Elements, or tonal harmony—foreign tools just don't get them. Even though overseas AI is powerful, when it comes to naming a Chinese baby, I trust the ones that understand the culture". Moreover, some users reported that DouBao (a Chinese GenAI Tool) can generate aesthetically compelling visual imagery based on one's *BaZi*, adding a unique layer of personalization which is shown in Fig.5. These culturally embedded capabilities make Chinese GenAI particularly effective for supporting traditional divinatory frameworks.

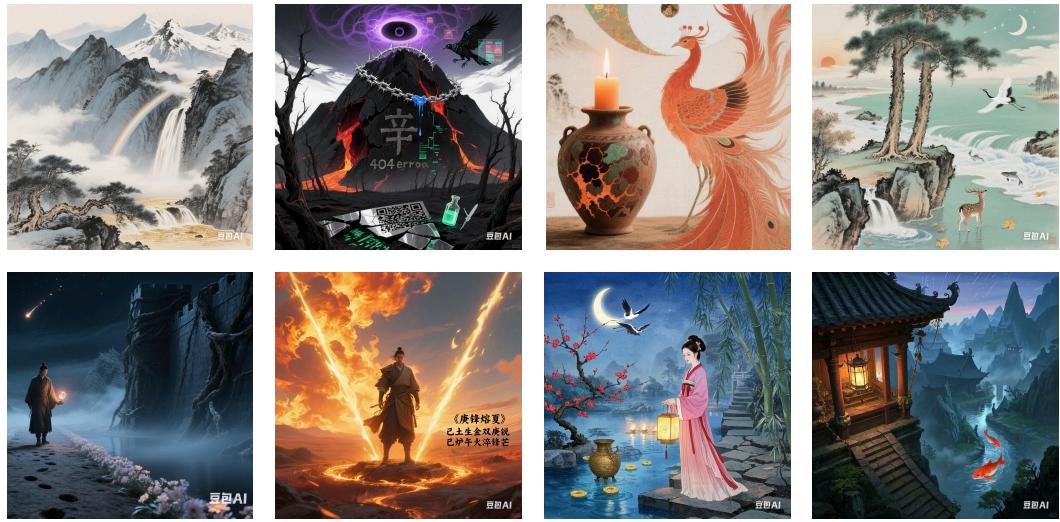


Fig. 5. DouBao AI can generate visual divination results based solely on *BaZi* of one's birth chart.

4.2 Social Interactions in Online Community

GenAI-based divination platforms have evolved into rich social environments where users not only consume personalized predictions but also engage in meaningful exchanges with others. Drawing on our netnographic observations and participant interviews, we identified that social sharing, belief reinforcement, and identity expression are central to how users interact with GenAI divination in online communities. We organize our findings into three interrelated themes: (1) content sharing and social motivations, (2) recipient dynamics and relationship-building, and (3) communal belief reinforcement and identity performance.

These interactions take place across a range of socio-technical platforms, each affording distinct modes of sharing. On private messaging platforms such as WeChat, divination results are exchanged in one-to-one or small-group conversations, particularly when users share synastry readings with partners or close friends. On interest-based social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, users post AI-generated predictions under tags like "fortune" or "emotions," which are then circulated through algorithmic recommendation to audiences with shared interests, creating semi-public discussions among strangers. Finally, dedicated divination applications such as Cece integrate social features directly into the platform, matching users based on "compatible" or "similar" astrological attributes and encouraging interaction through gamified mechanisms.

In these communities, users' sharing of AI-based divination content transcends simple information exchange, becoming a process of transforming abstract AI outputs into social artifacts. This content—often presented as "visual charts" or "interpretative explanations"—is easily displayed and understood, providing a tangible basis for social interaction. While these posts are typically

straightforward, they underpin a collaborative process of sense-making. For instance, one participant noted that sharing daily readings helped them "track their moods and outcomes over time" (P8), highlighting how sharing functions as a tool for self-reflection and personal narrative construction. Another user found that "seeing others' interpretations can give me new perspectives on my own results" (P15), which reveals the crucial role of collective interpretation in an individual's meaning-making. By inviting others to engage with these results, users turn a private AI divination experience into a public platform for social validation and analysis.

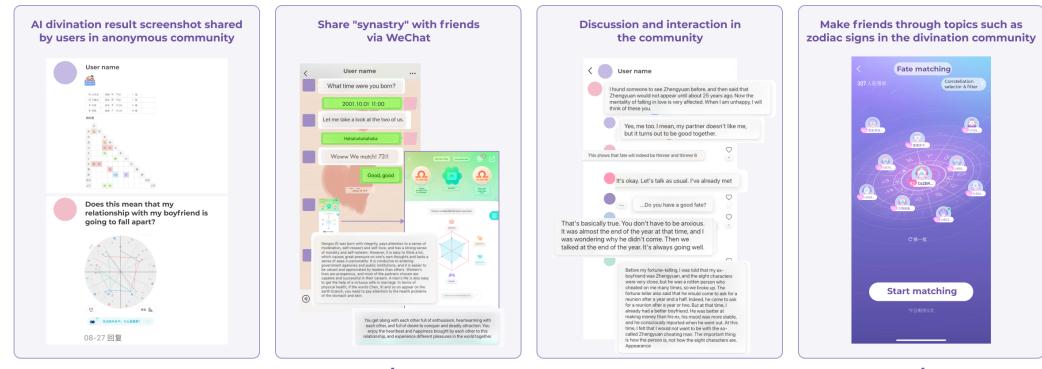
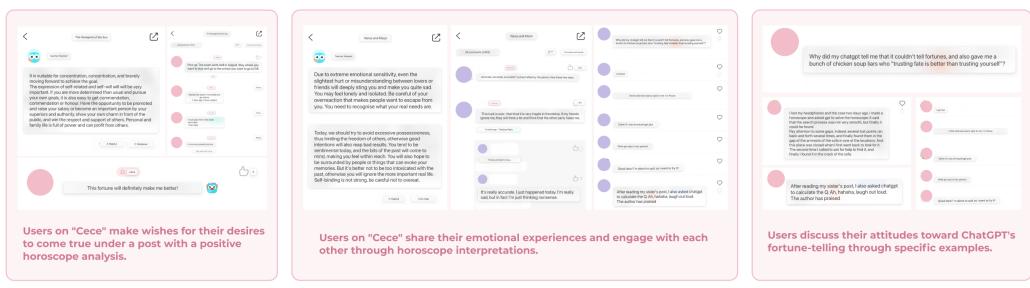


Fig. 6. Screenshots of Sharing: (a) Anonymous sharing of AI-powered divination results (e.g., a natal chart interpretation from the "Cece" platform) on online communities like Xiaohongshu to initiate discussions. (b) Sharing "Cece's" interpretation of a compatibility chart ("synastry") with a friend via WeChat. (c) On user communities like Xiaohongshu, members discuss interpretations of specific emotional topics to find resonance and support. (d) Users connect and build friendships on "Cece" based on shared interests like astrology.

This process of turning private insights into a public platform for social analysis is defined by the specific audiences and relationships involved. The recipients of this shared information include romantic partners, individuals with similar interests, or friends. Users often discuss "synastry" (astrological compatibility) with these recipients, examining personal relationships and compatibility in romantic or friendship contexts. This creates an interactive and socially engaging environment where users exchange insights on relationships. As one participant shared, "*I like to check compatibility between me and my friends and then share the results to get their reactions*" (P3). Another noted the appeal of sharing these insights within close social circles, commenting, "*It's interesting to see how compatible I am with my partner based on our signs, and it opens up conversations about our relationship*" (P11).

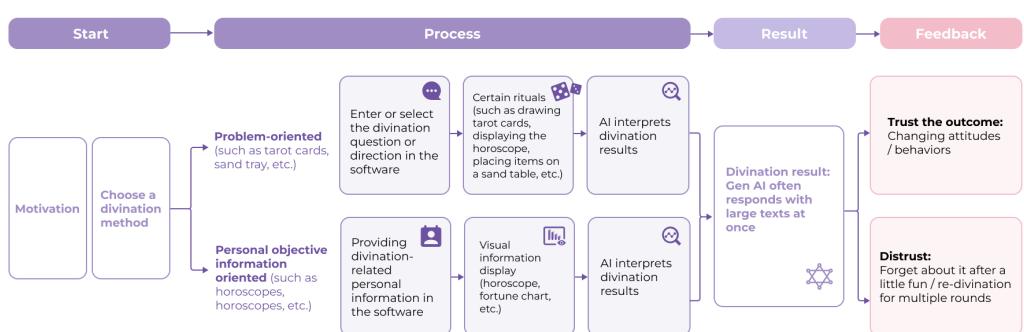
The motivations for sharing divination results are diverse, but they primarily revolve around three key behaviors: seeking social validation, fostering collaborative interpretation, and building relationships. Many users share to gain social validation and affirmation from the community. As P16 shared, "*I post to get reactions and to validate if others interpret the signs similarly*," demonstrating a need for communal consensus on the AI's output. This act of sharing also serves as a way to "*get other people's interpretations*" (P13), providing an opportunity for users to collectively make sense of the results and find emotional support or alternative insights. For many users, the content itself is not as important as the opportunity to connect with others, highlighting a deeper intent of building friendships and relationships. Thus, the shared content functions as a social currency that facilitates connection, making the platform a space for meaningful social interaction.



834 extend beyond individual predictions, providing a collaborative arena for belief reinforcement,
 835 identity formation, and shared meaning-making. As users collectively negotiate and affirm their
 836 interpretations, the GenAI platform transforms into a communal space for social bonding, emotional
 837 support, and mutual validation, offering novel insights into how online communities mediate and
 838 reinforce belief systems.

839 4.3 Common GenAI Fortune-telling Process

841 Through interviews, we explored the procedural stages involved in GenAI fortune-telling across
 842 various platforms. Participants were encouraged to provide in-depth descriptions and share screen-
 843 shots of each step in the process. Based on data collected from 18 participants, we synthesized the
 844 workflow into four primary stages: Start, Process, Result, and Feedback, as shown in Figure 8.
 845



848 Fig. 8. Workflow of GenAI Divination: Starting from user motivation, selecting a divination method and
 849 process, and receiving AI-generated results, with user feedback varying based on trust in the response.
 850

851 **4.3.1 Stage I: Motivation and Method Selection.** The process begins with users' diverse motivations
 852 and the selection of an appropriate divination method. Users come to GenAI divination with a
 853 range of intentions, such as seeking entertainment, finding psychological comfort, guiding minor
 854 decisions, or making informed choices about significant events. Depending on their specific goals,
 855 they choose a divination method that aligns with their needs. For instance, one interviewee, P2, was
 856 motivated by "anxiety and uncertainty in her environment" and often used AI late at night; therefore,
 857 she selected CeCe because "she finds it accessible and available during late hours, which supports
 858 her need for immediate psychological comfort and short-term guidance." Another interviewee,
 859 P12, expressed a preference for drawing tarot cards herself, as she felt "the process retained the
 860 spirituality of divination." Consequently, she opted to use ChatGPT, as its general-purpose model
 861 allows her to upload images and questions freely, making the interaction feel more personalized
 862 and responsive.

863 **4.3.2 Stage II: Process.** After selecting a divination method, users proceed by focusing on their
 864 question or providing relevant personal information, leading to two primary types of process steps,
 865 which are illustrated in Fig.9.

866 *Question-Oriented.* This approach is driven by a specific question from the user, like "Will I find
 867 a new job soon?" To make the experience more immersive, the system guides them through a
 868 "divination ritual." For instance, a tarot reading might involve virtually "shuffling" and "drawing"
 869 cards, or a sand tray divination might have them arranging digital objects. After the ritual, the
 870 GenAI interprets the results and provides an answer.

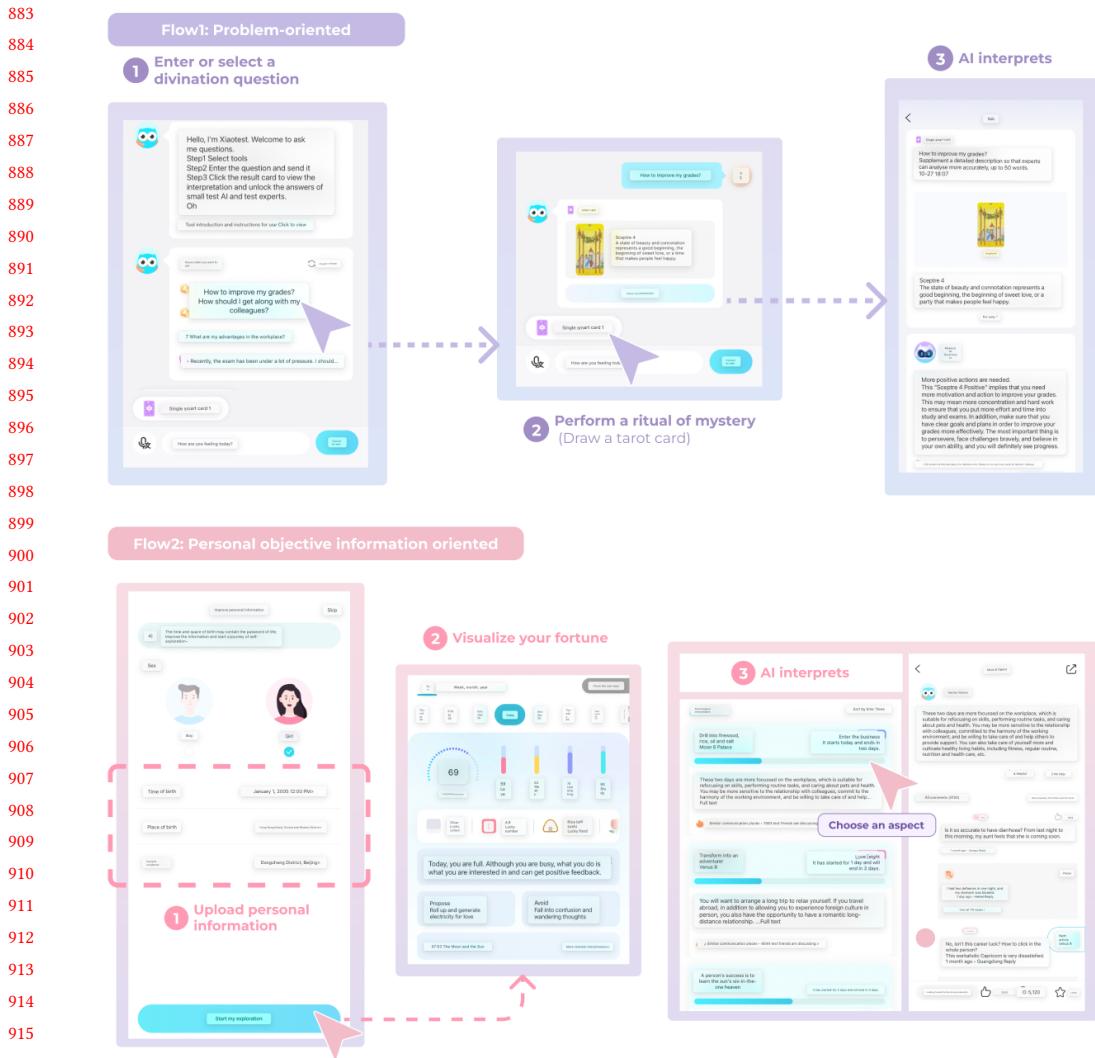


Fig. 9. Examples for problem-oriented and personal information-oriented flows. The Problem-Oriented Flow involves entering a question, performing a ritual, and receiving AI-generated results; the Personal Information-Oriented Flow requires users to input personal information, visualize their fortune data, and receive interpretive answers from GenAI.

Personal Information-Oriented. In contrast, this type of divination relies on objective personal data, unique to the individual, such as birth date and time for astrology, or facial photographs for physiognomy. Users need to provide these details to the system, and in some cases, certain information might already be pre-filled from their account registration. Unlike the question-oriented approach, this workflow usually lacks ritualistic elements; however, the application may enhance the experience with visual aids. For instance, if the user's constellation is Pisces, two cartoon fish

icons might appear on the page. Following these introductory visuals, the GenAI then generates and displays the interpretation based on the provided data.

932 icons might appear on the page. Following these introductory visuals, the GenAI then generates
933 and displays the interpretation based on the provided data.
934 **4.3.3 Stage III: Prediction Outcome Perception.** This is the stage where GenAI responds with
935 the divination outcome. Typically, the GenAI provides a detailed, text-heavy answer, sometimes
936 spanning multiple paragraphs, to cover all aspects of the query. For instance, participant P2
937 appreciated the emotional comfort provided by GenAI's responses and shared, "*GenAI tends to*
938 *comfort me and rarely gives negative results. The overall score can affect my mood for the day, creating a*
939 *sense of pre-judgment about life events.*" However, some users find limitations in GenAI's interaction
940 style. Participant P5 noted a lack of personalized engagement, saying, "*The responses often feel*
941 *templated, and when I ask follow-up questions, they can sometimes contradict the earlier answers.*"
942 These varied perspectives on GenAI's response quality and personalization will be discussed in
943 more depth in the following sections.
944

945 **4.3.4 Stage IV: Feedback.** In the final stage, users assess the divination results and determine how
946 to respond. For some, the reading resonates deeply with their current life circumstances, prompting
947 them to adjust their mindset or behavior. For example, p6 noted that when GenAI predictions
948 discouraged certain actions, she would "*hesitate and think twice about its suggestion*" for that day,
949 subtly aligning her behavior to the fortune's advice, especially for small daily choices. Conversely,
950 others approach the results with skepticism, viewing the experience as lighthearted entertainment
951 and moving on without further engagement. Notably, some users do not settle for a single divination
952 session; instead, they return to the tool multiple times, subtly modifying their questions to see if
953 the responses change or offer new insights, continuing until they feel satisfied with the answers.
954 For example, participant P2 shared that, "*If I feel there's a slight deviation, I'm not satisfied, I might*
955 *recalculate.*" Another participant, P6, echoed this practice, noting that she would sometimes ask
956 the same question multiple times until the answers felt "right" or believable, reflecting a desire for
957 responses that resonated with her current emotional state.
958

959 5 Discussion

960 Our study situates GenAI divination within the broader HCI and CSCW conversations on human-AI
961 interaction, cultural adaptation, and algorithmic trust. Whereas prior work on digital spirituality
962 has primarily focused on Western contexts or generalized forms of algorithmic influence [37, 42],
963 our findings highlight how GenAI fortune-telling is embedded in culturally specific practices that
964 reshape both individual and communal engagements with technology. In China, divination has
965 long functioned as a way to manage uncertainty and sustain collective meaning. When mediated
966 by GenAI, this practice becomes a site where technological systems are appropriated into existing
967 cultural logics, producing new forms of psychological reliance and collective trust. Through RQs,
968 we investigate both the ways users interact with GenAI divination tools and how they evaluate
969 their effectiveness, revealing why AI-based predictions are selectively trusted or integrated into
970 traditional practices [25, 37, 42].
971

972 5.1 Key Findings on Trust, Agency, and Ritual in GenAI Divination

973 The integration of GenAI into divination marks not just a technological upgrade but a paradigmatic
974 shift in how spiritual knowledge is accessed, interpreted, and trusted. Rather than simply
975 digitizing existing rituals, GenAI reframes the divinatory encounter into a more transactional,
976 hyper-personalized, and algorithmically mediated experience. This transformation generates new
977 possibilities—expanded accessibility, customizable content, and perceived objectivity—but also
978 raises pressing concerns about emotional depth, ethical responsibility, and the commodification of
979 uncertainty [20, 23].
980

981 A widely discussed psychological theory known as "automation bias suggests" that people tend
 982 to trust computer-generated outputs, even when they may be flawed or biased [4]. This may help
 983 explain why many participants perceived GenAI's algorithmic neutrality as more trustworthy than
 984 human fortune-tellers, who may—consciously or unconsciously—tailor their responses to meet
 985 social expectations. Participant P8 observed, "AI feels more genuine because it isn't influenced
 986 by what I want to hear." This perception aligns with broader sociotechnical discourses around
 987 algorithmic authority and "machine objectivity" [42], where users equate lack of emotion with
 988 epistemic purity. Yet, this trust in AI's neutrality may obscure the fact that GenAI responses are
 989 ultimately shaped by training data, prompt templates, and system biases, rather than spiritual
 990 insight. What is framed as "objective" may in fact be unacknowledged algorithmic authorship,
 991 detached from the cultural intuition and symbolic literacy that traditional practitioners cultivate
 992 over years of practice.

993 Participants' trust in GenAI thus stems not only from technical novelty but also from a deeper
 994 cognitive inclination to conflate emotionlessness with truth [48]. However, this epistemic illusion
 995 overlooks the fact that GenAI responses are ultimately shaped by training data, prompt templates,
 996 and system biases, rather than spiritual insight. What is framed as "objective" may in fact be
 997 unacknowledged algorithmic authorship, detached from the cultural intuition and symbolic literacy
 998 that traditional practitioners cultivate over years of practice [78].

999 Another significant shift lies in the user-driven customization GenAI enables. Rather than
 1000 submitting to a practitioner's guidance or symbolic framing, users can dictate topics, pace, and
 1001 interpretation scope—an inversion of the traditional hierarchical relationship. Participant P7 re-
 1002 flected, "With AI, I can generate results on any topic I want without worrying about what a
 1003 fortune-teller might think." While this user agency appears empowering, it also risks flattening
 1004 the divinatory experience into a preference-based consumption model, where users selectively
 1005 engage with content that aligns with existing beliefs, even generating for many times to get "a
 1006 good fortune", thereby reinforcing confirmation bias. The dialogic, sometimes uncomfortable
 1007 nature of traditional divination—where clients are challenged, not just reassured—is often absent in
 1008 algorithmic interactions.

1009 As P6 described, the experience is "too logical or formulaic, missing the mysterious aura and
 1010 spiritual ambiance of traditional divination." This echoes a wider concern: GenAI lacks "embodied
 1011 rituality", the multisensory context and emotional dramaturgy that anchor spiritual meaning. While
 1012 efficient in content delivery, GenAI systems often fail to provide the existential containment that
 1013 rituals afford.

1014 Another risk is the emotional shallowness of GenAI interactions. Traditional fortune-telling
 1015 often incorporates ritual, empathy, and atmosphere, elements that lend depth to the experience and
 1016 create a therapeutic, immersive environment. Many users report that GenAI, while efficient, lacks
 1017 this emotional resonance. Participant P6 described it as feeling *"too logical or formulaic, missing the
 1018 mysterious aura and spiritual ambiance of traditional divination."* This lack of depth can lead to a
 1019 transactional, impersonal experience that may fall short of fulfilling the complex emotional needs
 1020 that users bring to divination.

1021 To improve GenAI fortune-telling, future systems should support emotionally adaptive, dialogue-
 1022 based interactions rather than static templates, incorporate immersive elements that restore the
 1023 ritualistic and affective depth of traditional practices, and embed ethical safeguards to prevent harm
 1024 in sensitive scenarios. Together, these strategies call for a reimaging of GenAI divination not as
 1025 a tool of replacement, but as a new cultural interface—one that respects the spiritual textures of
 1026 traditional practices while innovating with care and accountability.

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1030 5.2 Key Findings for Collective Belief and Identity Formation in GenAI Divination 1031 online Communities

1032 Our ethnography extends this lens to show that GenAI fortune-telling not only mediates personal
1033 meaning-making but also fosters new forms of digital community and social connection among
1034 those sharing similar beliefs [40, 66]. This process could be driven by classic sociological concepts
1035 like "Social Identity Theory" [88] and "Collective Effervescence" [18]. "Social Identity Theory"
1036 suggests that individuals define themselves by belonging to social groups, drawing self-esteem
1037 from shared beliefs.

1038 GenAI divination platforms like Cece serve as social spaces where these individual beliefs are
1039 collectively validated and amplified. Our ethnographic research on these communities shows that
1040 sharing AI divination results is a key practice for building group identity through what can be
1041 described as distributed self-justification. When a user posts a positive astrological reading with a
1042 wish to pass an exam, other members quickly echo and amplify this belief, forming a powerful,
1043 community-supported belief loop. This synchronized interaction is more than a simple exchange
1044 of information; it becomes a form of digital ritual. Through this ritual, members experience a
1045 strong sense of emotional resonance and shared energy, known as "Collective Effervescence" [18].
1046 This shared positivity strengthens group cohesion and reinforces each member's trust in the
1047 divination results. In emotionally sensitive contexts, such as a user sharing distress caused by a
1048 "Venus square Moon" alignment, the community's rapid empathy fosters a group narrative that
1049 validates the individual's experience. This reduces feelings of isolation and increases faith in the
1050 AI's interpretation.

1051 This belief reinforcement process also serves as a means of "identity presentation" [29], where
1052 users align their interpretations with community-supported norms, building a sense of belonging. By
1053 sharing interpretations and aligning with common views, users craft a public persona in Goffman's
1054 Dramaturgy that resonates with the group's shared values, combining both reliance on and a
1055 playful critique of GenAI's capabilities [92]. The deeper implication is that GenAI platforms act as
1056 both belief amplifiers and community incubators [21]. The design of these platforms, including
1057 features for sharing and commenting, is not value-neutral. They create a powerful social validation
1058 system that can efficiently turn individual, uncertain beliefs into collective, endorsed facts. These
1059 findings extend prior work on algorithmic influence by illustrating how GenAI facilitates both
1060 individual belief validation and collective identity formation within culturally resonant frameworks,
1061 offering insights into how Chinese cultural contexts shape users' trust in AI-driven predictions.
1062 This raises a critical question for the CSCW field: how should we design and govern platforms that
1063 shape collective belief and identity? The challenge is to foster social connection while avoiding the
1064 creation of "polarizing echo chambers" [64], a task faced by all researchers dedicated to building
1065 healthy online communities.

1066 5.3 Design Implications

1067 *5.3.1 Adapting GenAI to Cultural Beliefs.* Our research provides a contemporary example of
1068 "techno-cultural domestication" [81]. This is especially evident in the cultural embedding of algo-
1069 rithmic systems. This theory suggests technology is not passively accepted. Instead, users actively
1070 integrate and adapt it to fit local cultural values and practices. We found that users strongly prefer
1071 AI models capable of performing localized forms of divination. For instance, they use tools like
1072 DeepSeek, which are trained on Chinese corpora, for complex practices like BaZi or Ziwei Doushu.
1073 Participants noted that non-localized models struggle with the intricate cultural symbols found in
1074 Chinese metaphysics. In contrast, DeepSeek produces more culturally authentic and contextually
1075 appropriate interpretations. The deeper implication here is a challenge to the assumptions of
1076
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1079 technological universalism and cultural neutrality. For the CSCW field, this serves as a reminder.
 1080 System design cannot be detached from the cultural contexts it serves. Future collaborative systems
 1081 must prioritize cultural adaptability. They should develop algorithms that respect diverse cultural
 1082 logics rather than imposing a single rationalist framework on all users.

1083 *5.3.2 Balancing Objectivity and Mysticism.* Our study also reveals the prevalence of "cognitive
 1084 polyphasia" [55] among users. This theory describes how individuals can simultaneously hold and
 1085 apply contradictory belief systems, such as scientific rationality and metaphysical beliefs. This
 1086 concept explains the core epistemic tension we observed. On one hand, users perceive AI as an
 1087 objective and neutral product of science. They believe it is not influenced by a desire to please them.
 1088 On the other hand, they eagerly seek metaphysical comfort and guidance from this same scientific
 1089 tool. This tension is clear in their behavior. They appreciate the AI's objectivity yet repeatedly push
 1090 it to produce results that meet their cultural and emotional expectations. This dynamic upends the
 1091 simple model of the user as a purely rational agent. For HCI and CSCW, it is crucial to recognize
 1092 that users do not make a binary choice between science and superstition. They navigate fluidly
 1093 between these two frameworks based on context. Design should not aim to correct this perceived
 1094 irrationality. Instead, it should focus on creating safe spaces that support users' self-exploration
 1095 and meaning-making within this tension.

1096
 1097 *5.3.3 GenAI as a Tool for Emotional Regulation.* Finally, our research highlights the key role of AI in
 1098 users' emotional and psychological regulation. This phenomenon can be explained by the "Barnum
 1099 Effect" [24] and "confirmation bias" [93]. GenAI's outputs are often vague and general. This quality
 1100 allows them to provide effective emotional comfort as users perceive them as personally accurate.
 1101 Stronger evidence comes from a unique interaction pattern we observed. Users who are unhappy
 1102 with a result will repeatedly rephrase their questions until they receive a desirable answer. This
 1103 behavior is the core insight behind our paper's title. It is a clear manifestation of confirmation bias.
 1104 The user's goal is not to find an objective truth. It is to construct a narrative that provides emotional
 1105 relief in times of uncertainty. This reframes how we should define success for such AI systems. The
 1106 system's value is not measured by its predictive accuracy but by its effectiveness in meeting users'
 1107 psychological needs. This presents a profound ethical and design challenge for the HCI and CSCW
 1108 fields. Are we designing tools for truth or tools for comfort? Balancing authenticity with emotional
 1109 support is a critical issue when creating systems intended to improve user well-being.

1110 1111 **5.4 Limitations**

1112 *5.4.1 Demographic Limitations.* The study's participant demographics were predominantly limited
 1113 to young, educated Chinese individuals, with a gender imbalance (14 female, 8 male) and concen-
 1114 tration in design-related majors (8 out of 22 participants). These limitations arose primarily from
 1115 our recruitment methods through university networks and social media platforms popular among
 1116 young adults in China. While this approach enabled the efficient recruitment of participants ac-
 1117 tively engaged with GenAI fortune-telling tools, it inadvertently excluded significant demographic
 1118 segments, for instance, participants with non-academic backgrounds and seniors. The absence of
 1119 these perspectives means our findings may not fully represent the broader spectrum of GenAI
 1120 fortune-telling users, particularly those who might approach these tools with different cultural,
 1121 educational, or socioeconomic contexts. For instance, while some Chinese users describe GenAI
 1122 divination as offering a heightened sense of emotional safety than a fortune-teller, users in other
 1123 regions may feel insecure about issues such as data privacy or algorithmic transparency. Future
 1124 research would benefit from actively recruiting participants from these underrepresented groups
 1125 to provide a more comprehensive understanding of GenAI fortune-telling adoption and use across
 1126 diverse communities.

1127

1128 5.4.2 *Experience Level Distribution.* The study's participant experience levels showed an uneven
1129 distribution, with 5 frequent users compared to 10 occasional users and 3 one-time users. This
1130 skewed distribution emerged largely from the nascent nature of GenAI fortune-telling technology
1131 and its recent introduction to the market, making it challenging to find long-term, experienced users.
1132 Our research focused on this particular distribution as it reflected the current adoption pattern of
1133 GenAI fortune-telling tools, where most users are still in the exploratory phase of engagement.
1134 However, this approach meant we could not thoroughly examine the long-term effects, evolved
1135 usage patterns, or deeper insights that might come from sustained engagement with these tools. The
1136 limited number of frequent users in our sample restricted our ability to understand how prolonged
1137 use might influence trust development, decision-making patterns, or the integration of GenAI
1138 fortune-telling into daily routines. We were unable to include more frequent users partly due to the
1139 timing of our study coinciding with the early stages of GenAI fortune-telling adoption, and partly
1140 due to the difficulty in identifying and recruiting users who consistently engage with these tools
1141 over extended periods. This gap in our research suggests that longitudinal studies tracking users'
1142 evolving relationships with GenAI fortune-telling tools would be valuable for future research.

1143 5.4.3 *Platform Coverage.* The study's platform coverage primarily focused on ChatGPT, DeepSeek,
1144 and CeCe, with a few participants having experience with alternative GenAI fortune-telling plat-
1145 forms. This concentrated coverage reflected the market dominance of these platforms in China
1146 during our research period. While this focus allowed us to conduct an in-depth comparison between
1147 a general-purpose GenAI tool (ChatGPT) and a specialized divination application (CeCe), providing
1148 rich insights into how users adopt different types of GenAI platforms for fortune-telling purposes,
1149 it also limited our understanding of the broader GenAI fortune-telling landscape. Although the
1150 study touches on emerging tools like Crapple Myrtle AI, Quin AI, and TianGong AI, these represent
1151 only a small part of the broader landscape of GenAI divination tools. This limitation arose from the
1152 rapid evolution of the GenAI field, making it challenging to include all relevant platforms during
1153 our research period [92]. Future research would benefit from examining a wider range of GenAI
1154 fortune-telling platforms to understand how different technical approaches and design philosophies
1155 influence user experiences.

1156
1157 5.4.4 *Self-Report Data.* While our study primarily relied on self-reported data through interviews,
1158 we did incorporate some direct observations by asking participants to demonstrate their interactions
1159 with GenAI fortune-telling tools during the interview. Participants' accounts may have been
1160 influenced by social desirability bias, particularly regarding their reliance on GenAI for decision-
1161 making and spiritual practices. Due to privacy concerns, participants might have withheld sensitive
1162 information about personal questions asked to GenAI fortune-telling tools. Memory-related biases
1163 could have affected their recall of historical experiences, especially for occasional users. Although
1164 demonstration sessions helped validate current usage patterns, these controlled scenarios might not
1165 fully capture natural, unprompted interactions with these tools. While the combination of interviews
1166 and demonstrations provided valuable insights, the study could have benefited from systematic
1167 observational data over time to further validate self-reported experiences. Future research could
1168 explore implementing diary studies where participants document their real-time interactions with
1169 GenAI fortune-telling tools, or develop privacy-preserving methods to analyze user-AI conversation
1170 logs, providing more authentic insights into user behaviors and decision-making patterns.

1171 6 Conclusion

1172 Through 22 semi-structured interviews with GenAI fortune-telling users, we explored how individ-
1173 uals engage with AI-based divination tools, how they perceive and trust the generated results, and
1174 how these tools influence their beliefs and interactions within communities. Participants selected
1175

1177 GenAI methods that aligned with their personal motivations, using them for entertainment or
 1178 psychological comfort, or as supplementary guidance for major life decisions. While some valued
 1179 GenAI's objective responses, others criticized its lack of mystical elements and ethical discretion,
 1180 particularly when addressing sensitive or potentially harmful questions. Our findings suggest that
 1181 GenAI fortune-telling tools should be enhanced to offer more personalized and interactive experi-
 1182 ences, incorporate immersive design elements to create a ritualistic atmosphere, and implement
 1183 ethical safeguards to responsibly manage high-stakes inquiries, thus fostering both engagement
 1184 and user trust.

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A Interview Questions

A.1 Background Information

How long have you been involved in fortune-telling? What methods do you usually use?

How long have you been using AI for fortune-telling? Which AI platform(s) do you use?

Do you use paid AI fortune-telling platforms?

How much do you pay or are willing to pay per month?

How did you initially come across generative AI in the context of fortune-telling?

Why did you choose to use AI for fortune-telling?

Were there any surprises when you first started using generative AI for fortune-telling?

What is your educational background? What was your major? What is your current occupation?

A.2 Workflow and User Experience

Can you describe your typical process for an AI-driven fortune-telling session?

What input do you provide to the AI, and how is the output presented?

Compared to traditional fortune-telling, what differences do you observe in your AI fortune-telling process?

Which method do you prefer? Why?

What aspects of AI fortune-telling attract you?

- 1373 Are there any parts of the process that you find particularly challenging?
 1374 In your opinion, what improvements could generative AI make to enhance the fortune-telling
 1375 experience?
 1376 What meaning or impact do AI-generated fortune-telling results have for you?

1377

1378 **A.3 Challenges and Misconceptions**

- 1379 What common misconceptions or biases about AI fortune-telling do you think exist in society?
 1380 Have these misconceptions affected your experience?
 1381 How do you feel about the accuracy of AI-generated fortune-telling results? Why?
 1382 Compared to traditional fortune-telling, which do you find more accurate? Why?

1383

1384 **A.4 Ethical Issues in AI Fortune-Telling**

- 1385 What are your thoughts or concerns about the ethics of AI fortune-telling?
 1386 Do you think generative AI can replace traditional human fortune-tellers? If not, what are the
 1387 gaps?
 1388 Do you have privacy concerns when using AI for fortune-telling?
 1389 How important are data security and privacy protection to you?
 1390 Would you have any reservations if AI fortune-telling involved more personalized information?

1391

1392 **A.5 Cognitive and Psychological Impact**

- 1393 How does generative AI fortune-telling affect your emotions or mindset?
 1394 Does it make you more inclined to believe in the results, or do you become more skeptical?
 1395 Do you think AI fortune-telling can understand your personal emotions and needs?
 1396 How do you feel about this kind of “understanding”?
 1397 Do AI-generated fortune-telling results influence your life, behavior, or decision-making? Could
 1398 you provide an example?

1399

1400 **A.6 Social Interaction**

- 1401 During interactions with generative AI, do you feel it acts as a fortune-teller or more like a tool?
 1402 Have you ever used AI fortune-telling with friends or in a group setting? If so, could you provide
 1403 an example?

1404

1405 **A.7 Future Prospects and Potential**

- 1406 What is your view on the development potential of AI fortune-telling?
 1407 What new features or experiences would you like it to offer?
 1408 In what ways do you think AI fortune-telling could be applied in psychological support or other
 1409 fields?

1410

1411 **A.8 Additional Questions**

- 1412 Do you think generative AI fortune-telling aligns with your belief system or cultural background?
 1413 Why?
 1414 Has generative AI fortune-telling content on social media influenced your views on your own life
 1415 or the lives of others?

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