

AI Made in China: Innovation, Gender, and the Global Reshaping of Film Production Content

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Abstract

Questo articolo esplora come l'intelligenza artificiale (IA) stia rimodellando il panorama della produzione cinematografica e video, con particolare attenzione all'inclusività di genere e geografica. Analizzando le recenti innovazioni lungo l'intero processo produttivo, dalla sceneggiatura alla regia, dalla post-produzione alla distribuzione, si evidenzia come gli strumenti di IA riducano le barriere all'entrata e ridefiniscano il lavoro creativo. Un'attenzione particolare viene data al ruolo della Cina nel progresso delle tecnologie di IA generativa, in particolare attraverso piattaforme open source e a basso costo che rendono gli strumenti video di livello professionale accessibili ai creatori indipendenti. L'articolo esamina anche le implicazioni di genere di questi cambiamenti, considerando come l'IA possa supportare le registe allentando i vincoli di tempo, offrendo flussi di lavoro flessibili e potenzialmente mitigando alcune delle disuguaglianze strutturali di lunga data del settore. Sebbene l'IA offra significative opportunità per democratizzare l'accesso e amplificare le diverse voci, l'articolo affronta anche i principali rischi etici e creativi, come il bias algoritmico, l'omogeneizzazione dei contenuti e la sostituzione del lavoro. Basandosi su recenti casi studio e sviluppi politici, l'articolo sostiene che affinché l'intelligenza artificiale possa promuovere davvero l'inclusione e l'innovazione, deve essere sviluppata e adottata tenendo al centro i valori umani, assicurando che la tecnologia potenzi piuttosto che sostituire l'azione creativa.

This article explores how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the landscape of film and video production, with particular attention to gender and geographical inclusivity. By analyzing recent innovations across the entire production pipeline, from scriptwriting and directing to post-production and distribution, it highlights how AI tools reduce barriers of entry and redefine creative labor. A special focus is given to China's role in advancing generative AI technologies, especially through open-source and low-cost platforms that make professional-grade video tools accessible to independent creators. The article also examines the gendered implications of these changes, considering how AI can support female filmmakers by easing time constraints, offering flexible workflows, and potentially mitigating some of the industry's long-standing structural inequalities. While AI presents significant opportunities for democratizing access and amplifying diverse voices, the article also addresses key ethical and creative risks, such as algorithmic bias, homogenization of content, and labor displacement. Drawing on recent case studies and policy developments, the article argues that for AI to truly foster inclusion and innovation, it must be developed and adopted with human values at its core, ensuring that technology empowers rather than replaces creative agency.

Parole chiave/Key Words

Intelligenza artificiale; Produzione cinematografica; Genere; Cina; Democratizzazione.

Artificial Intelligence; Filmmaking; Gender; China; Democratization.

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1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping film and video production, driving a cultural shift that affects both workflows and creative labor (Davenport, Kirby, 2016). Once confined to speculative fiction, AI now permeates all stages of filmmaking, from scriptwriting to distribution. Advocates highlight its potential to democratize production by lowering costs and enhancing accessibility for diverse creators (Lobato, 2019, pp. 243-257). Critics, however, raise concerns about authorship, originality, and equity in an industry already marked by structural inequalities.

This article examines how AI tools are transforming the creative pipeline, with particular attention to gender and geographic inclusion. It highlights how AI-driven systems streamline time-consuming tasks and reconfigure creative roles, allowing new voices, especially women and independent filmmakers from the Global South, to enter the cinematic space (Bloom, 2024). Considering the Global South perspective, this article gives special focus to China's growing leadership in developing open-source and low-cost AI platforms, which are increasingly shaping global creative production. Rather than positioning China solely as a technological superpower, the paper frames its role as a complex Global South actor, whose innovations reflect both geopolitical ambition and alternative models of creative development. By analyzing China's AI-driven tools and policies, the article argues that these developments are not peripheral but central to understanding the global restructuring of media and cultural economies. At the same time, the article foregrounds how gender shapes access to these technologies, examining the structural and cultural barriers faced by women in China's film and media industries. By addressing key risks (including algorithmic bias, creative homogenization, labor displacement, and gendered exclusions) the article argues that AI is neither a neutral tool nor an unproblematic instrument for democratization. Rather, its deployment must be guided by ethical considerations in order to genuinely foster both innovation and inclusion, even as structural constraints may continue to limit its democratic potential.

2. AI in Scriptwriting and Pre-Production

AI is reshaping early filmmaking stages by supporting idea generation, script development, and visual planning. Tools like ChatGPT and Sudowrite act as creative partners, offering prompts, character outlines, and scene drafts. These systems help writers overcome blocks and accelerate workflows (Schwartz, 2024). Yet, AI-generated scripts tend to repro-

duce clichés and lack nuance (Vaswani et al., 2017, pp. 1-11), showing that while useful for structure, they fall short of capturing complex human emotion (Dayo et al., 2023, pp. 24-38). Writers' guilds have responded by allowing AI-assisted writing but rejecting AI-only content, reaffirming the primacy of human creativity (WGA, 2023).

AI systems like ScriptBook and Cinelytic analyze scripts to predict commercial performance, pacing, and character balance (Kent, 2025). Though controversial, these tools offer data-driven validation, particularly for unconventional narratives. Some even include gender metrics, suggesting how AI could assist in promoting representational equity (Townsend, 2024).

Pre-production is also accelerating through AI image generators like Midjourney and DALL·E, which produce instant concept art from text prompts. This expedites visual planning and reduces reliance on artists for early sketches (Ashe, 2022). Independent filmmakers use such visuals to communicate ideas and pitch projects. While efficient, this raises concerns about aesthetic homogenization, as popular AI models may generate similar visual styles.

Casting and location scouting are also evolving. Studios use AI to simulate how casting choices affect market appeal (Cinelytic, 2025), and visual overlays help envision settings under different conditions. Though these tools enhance efficiency, they also prompt debate over algorithmic influence on creative judgment.

3. AI in Shooting and Directing

AI is also transforming the production phase, influencing how directors shoot scenes and what can be achieved on set. The adoption of game-engine technology, such as Unreal Engine, for virtual production is revolutionizing filmmaking. Instead of relying on green screens and costly on-location shoots, filmmakers use large LED walls, or “the Volume,” to display photorealistic backgrounds that respond to camera movement in real time (American Cinematographer, 2024). This technology, seen in productions like *The Mandalorian* (2019), enables directors to adjust settings dynamically, making real-time changes to lighting and environments. With the technology becoming more affordable, even independent filmmakers are experimenting with virtual production setups, which allows for more creative control and cost savings (Calawerts et al., 2024).

AI is also enhancing camera work and directing. Smart camera systems track subjects and adjust settings automatically, ensuring that the right shots are captured. For example,

drones like the Skydio 2 use onboard AI to follow moving subjects with remarkable precision (Skydio, 2025). This technology enables filmmakers to obtain complex aerial shots without requiring expert operators. Some systems can also suggest optimal lighting and camera angles based on scene content, offering new creative possibilities.

AI has further expanded possibilities with digital humans. Virtual actors or aides, such as MetaHuman avatars from Epic Games, can now perform with lifelike realism (Epic Games, 2025). These avatars can be used as stunt doubles or extras, allowing directors to explore new ways of storytelling. Additionally, AI technologies like deepfake tech can be employed to generate realistic actor performances in real time, raising new ethical concerns regarding representation and consent (Quinn, 2023).

In managing film production logistics, AI-powered scheduling software optimizes time management, ensuring that shooting schedules run efficiently. AI tools can adjust the daily schedule based on real-time issues, such as actor delays or changing weather conditions, minimizing downtime (Sun, 2024, pp. 1-5). These tools not only improve operational efficiency but also help manage the logistical complexity of film production.

4. Editing and Post-Production

The post-production phase has experienced significant transformation with the adoption of advanced tools that streamline labor-intensive tasks. Editing software, such as Adobe Premiere Pro's Sensei features and Descript, is revolutionizing video editing workflows (Elkadi, 2023, pp. 1-3). These tools can transcribe footage, identify the best clips, and even assemble rough cuts automatically. For example, Descript creates a text transcript of video content, allowing editors to modify the video by simply editing text. This intuitive process reduces the time spent on manual splicing, enabling editors to focus more on storytelling than technical tasks (Chedraoui, 2025, pp. 1-4).

In visual effects (VFX), new software is lowering the barriers for creators by simplifying complex tasks (Needhi, 2024). Programs can now handle rotoscoping, motion tracking, and object removal automatically, saving hours of work. For instance, RunwayML allows creators to eliminate unwanted objects or backgrounds using machine learning, a tool previously accessible only to major studios (RunwayML, 2025). This democratizes high-end VFX work, making it available to smaller studios and independent creators. Runway's tools can gener-

ate entirely new visuals from text prompts or rough sketches, enabling indie editors to create sci-fi or fantasy sequences without big render farms (Vincent, 2023).

Sound editing is another area where technology is improving efficiency. Tools can now clean up dialogue, remove background noise, and enhance voice clarity with remarkable precision. Additionally, there are AI-driven solutions for dubbing and music generation, which allow filmmakers to streamline localization and soundtrack creation. These innovations ensure that even small creators can achieve a professional-level sound mix without a large team (Leermakers, 2025).

5. Distribution and Recommendation Systems

The final stage of the filmmaking process is also undergoing transformation through algorithmic technologies that affect how films reach audiences. Platforms like Netflix rely on advanced recommendation systems that analyze user behavior to personalize suggestions (Netflix Technology Blog, 2017). These algorithms determine not only which titles appear in a user's feed but even the artwork shown for each title, shaping content visibility and audience engagement (Gomez-Uribe, Hunt, 2015, pp. 1-29).

For independent filmmakers, these systems offer both opportunity and constraint. On the one hand, personalized recommendations help niche films find their audiences without relying on costly marketing. On the other hand, algorithmic curation can influence creative decisions. Filmmakers are increasingly aware that platform algorithms may favor content that ensures viewer retention, which may lead to uniform storytelling styles optimized for algorithmic success (Federal Trade Commission, 2024, pp. 3-10) .

Promotional strategies are also evolving. Trailer creation can be partially automated, with software identifying emotionally impactful moments to include in previews (Wondershare Filmora, 2025). Some studios use chatbots to promote films through character-based interactions on social media, while predictive analytics guide optimal release schedules and locations (Cinelytic, 2025). These tools reduce marketing costs and improve targeting, but they must be carefully balanced with human creativity. Recent failures of overly automated campaigns have shown that emotional resonance cannot be entirely outsourced to machines (Liukonyte et al., 2024).

6. Democratizing Access and Reducing Production Costs

One of the most promising effects of recent technological innovation lies in the accessibility it offers to emerging creators. High-quality filmmaking, once limited to those with access to industry resources (Kinder, 2024), is now within reach for individuals and small studios. With the support of integrated digital tools, it is possible for one person to manage writing, visual design, editing, and even music production (Malloy, 2025). This evolution mirrors earlier shifts sparked by affordable digital cameras and online platforms, now extended to more advanced aspects of filmmaking such as visual effects and localization.

Independent artists can now generate complex backgrounds, animated sequences, and soundtracks with intuitive, cost-effective tools. An animator, for instance, can develop entire scenes using image generation models and compositional software, bypassing the need for large teams or external service providers. These efficiencies make it easier for diverse and underrepresented voices to enter the field and bring unique perspectives to the screen.

Financially, the impact is substantial. Instead of hiring a full crew or renting expensive gear, creators can simulate camera movement with AI drones, produce visual effects with automated platforms, and manage post-production with simplified editing interfaces. Projects that once required substantial budgets can now be realized with minimal resource (Sinai, 2025). A strong example is *The Frost* (2023), a 24-minute film created by a small team using AI tools for nearly every shot, achieving results that would have been cost-prohibitive just a few years ago (Evans, 2024, pp. 5-33).

By lowering both economic and technical thresholds, new technologies are reshaping the structure of the industry. This not only allows more stories to be told but also changes who gets to tell them.

7. Generative AI for Video Production in China

In recent years, China has emerged as a key player in generative video technologies, adopting a distinctive approach by releasing many tools as free or open-source platforms. This strategy fosters accessibility and experimentation, enabling students, independent creators, and small studios to work with professional-grade systems at no cost. Notable examples include OmniHuman, developed by ByteDance (ByteDance, 2024), which transforms a single image and voice recording into a lifelike animated figure, and Seaweed, created in col-

laboration with PixelDance (36Kr English, 2024), which generates dynamic video scenes from images and text. Both tools are already in use across marketing and education, exemplifying China's effort to expand access to advanced video production technologies and reshape global creative participation.

Wan 2.1, developed by Alibaba (Alibaba Group, 2024), further exemplifies China's commitment to inclusive innovation. Scheduled for open-source release, the tool enables users to generate both video and still images from multimodal prompts. Platforms like Wan 2.1, which prioritize usability and affordability, are broadening global access to visual storytelling and amplifying underrepresented voices. Yet the impact of these technologies extends beyond their technical capabilities. Fully assessing their democratizing potential requires close attention to the social contexts in which they operate, particularly in relation to gender. A focus on gender dynamics is important, as it exposes how systems that appear accessible and inclusive may still reproduce deep-rooted inequalities. This lens reveals that although tools such as OmniHuman, Seaweed, and Wan 2.1 create new opportunities for independent creators, access to them remains uneven, as women in China's film and media industries continue to face structural and cultural barriers that shape how and whether they can fully benefit from such innovations. Their experiences underscore the need to critically evaluate the promises of AI-driven democratization, especially as they intersect with gender norms, algorithmic design, and platform governance. The following section explores these tensions in greater detail.

8. Gendered Dimension: Addressing Inequalities through AI

Women working in China's film industry continue to face entrenched inequalities, shaped by structural, cultural, and ideological forces. Despite their contributions across creative and technical domains, female filmmakers remain underrepresented in leadership roles, funding access, and decision-making spheres. Wang (2023) identifies how Chinese media reinforce narrow ideals of femininity, often emphasizing appearance, restraint, and moral uprightness, which influences not only the stories women are expected to tell but also how they are perceived as workers. These discourses shape algorithmic recommendations and audience engagement metrics on Chinese platforms, creating systemic biases that hinder women's visibility and professional advancement.

Against this backdrop, AI technologies offer new – if complex – opportunities for women in the industry. Intelligent tools such as automated editing software, generative script assistants, and scheduling algorithms can ease the burden of repetitive tasks, reduce the reliance on large teams, and support more flexible workflows. These features are particularly helpful for women juggling caregiving duties and creative careers (Duester, 2024; Jahan & Zaman, 2023). In the context of China’s informal digital labor market, where many women pursue freelance creative work, such tools lower entry barriers in traditionally male-dominated sectors like photography and digital media production.

While the academic literature on Chinese women filmmakers and AI remains sparse, articles from adjacent domains – including digital art, photography, and non-academic industry commentary – can help us to foreground how intelligent tools might assist or constrain female creators. For instance, Duester (2024) explores how female artists in China use AI as both a production and networking tool in informal creative economies. These insights, while not film-specific, resonate with similar dynamics in independent filmmaking – particularly the blending of aesthetic innovation with precarity, and the use of AI to navigate unstable markets.

Other studies from global research help shed light on the potential benefits of AI for gender inclusion. Automated mentoring systems, for example, have been used to expand access to career guidance and resources, especially in under-resourced regions (Radu & Radu, 2025). Similarly, AI’s role in democratizing production by making high-quality outputs achievable without expensive infrastructure has been celebrated by industry experts (Bloom, 2024; Collett et al., 2022).

However, the relationship between AI and women’s empowerment in China’s film industry is far from straightforward. The same tools that offer creative flexibility may also embed forms of control. Filters and aesthetic algorithms often reinforce platform-specific norms of hyper-femininity, pressuring creators to conform to visual standards shaped by both market dynamics and state-endorsed values (Wang H., 2023). As Duester (2024) notes, women’s creative outputs are often devalued or dismissed as decorative, in contrast to male-coded “strategic” innovation.

The Chinese platform ecosystem further complicates the picture. State-endorsed goals for cultural productivity frame AI as a vehicle for soft power and ideological dissemination (Chow, 2020), prioritizing content that aligns with official values over personal or feminist ex-

pression. Within this logic, women's creative labor is celebrated only when it conforms to normative scripts, excluding narratives of dissent, experimentation, or gender critique.

Moreover, algorithmic bias and opacity remain serious concerns. As outlined by Öztaş Y. E., Arda B. (2025), the data used to train generative tools often reflect existing social hierarchies. This can disadvantage creators whose work departs from mainstream conventions, many of whom are women or come from marginalized communities. Without inclusive design and gender-conscious governance, intelligent systems risk reproducing the very exclusions they claim to solve.

Thus, we can see that the promise of AI as a democratizing force for women in China's film industry must be understood within the broader ecosystem in which these tools operate, an issue that we will further debate in the following section.

9. Paradoxes of Access and Structural Limitations in China's AI Ecosystem

While intelligent technologies may offer flexibility, efficiency, and new forms of creative expression, they are embedded in digital infrastructures governed by powerful platform corporations and state-aligned agendas. The very systems that claim to empower independent creators – including women – are simultaneously structured around mechanisms of algorithmic gatekeeping, data extraction, and content control. As such, the transformative potential of AI is constrained not only by gendered cultural norms but also by the political economies of Chinese platforms. These tensions reveal a conflict that lives at the heart of digital creativity in China: the expansion of access can occur alongside the reinforcement of structural limitations, raising urgent questions about who truly benefits from technological innovation – and on what terms.

Therefore, there is a profound tension at the heart of China's platform (and consequently AI) environment. Platforms such as Tencent, Alibaba, and ByteDance construct expansive digital ecosystems that appear participatory but embed mechanisms of control aligned with corporate and state agendas. Scholars have shown that these ecosystems rely heavily on algorithmic gatekeeping, data-driven user control, and surveillance-aligned governance (Zhang & Chen, 2022; Liu, 2019). For instance, Tencent's eSports platform involves direct collaboration with state agencies (Zhao & Lin, 2020), while Alibaba's trajectory reveals a shift from market disruptor to symbiotic state partner (Zhang, 2025). ByteDance, in turn, practices regulatory

arbitrage to expand internationally while selectively conforming to domestic political frameworks (Li, 2024). Despite their inclusive rhetoric, these platforms often reinforce platform lock-in and limit transparency over content moderation, data use, and access pathways.

These dynamics extend directly into the realm of AI development. Chinese tech giants – especially Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent (BAT) – employ what Jia et al. (2018) call a “Platform Business Group” strategy: a model in which vast amounts of user-generated data are harvested across interconnected services to train and refine AI systems. While such systems expand access to AI-driven production tools, they also concentrate infrastructural control in the hands of a few dominant actors. In sensitive domains such as facial recognition, Beraja et al. (2020) show how formal data-sharing agreements with state agencies grant commercial firms privileged access to surveillance data, further embedding state-corporate alignment into the core of AI innovation. These interdependencies shape not only the availability of creative tools, but also the conditions under which creative labor is imagined, monitored, and valued. The democratizing potential of AI is thus compromised not only by monetization strategies but also by political rationales that dictate who gets to create, what gets seen, and under what terms.

These structures also carry significant implications for the nature of creative output and labor conditions. Because most generative models are trained on existing media corpora, they risk reinforcing dominant stylistic conventions and social biases, producing content that is aesthetically generic or even retrogressive. Without strong human oversight, the automation of writing, editing, and design can reduce creative complexity and originality (Quinn, 2023). This issue is compounded by labor concerns: as AI takes on tasks traditionally performed by background actors, editors, or junior writers, unresolved questions of authorship, credit, and compensation emerge. The 2023 WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes underscored the urgency of these debates worldwide, highlighting the need for safeguards against unauthorized use of likenesses, digital replicas, and AI-generated performances.

Moreover, these challenges disproportionately affect marginalized creators. Research shows that women and underrepresented groups often express skepticism toward AI-mediated creative processes, fearing that algorithmic systems may replicate historical exclusions or erode collaborative dynamics (Radu & Radu, 2025). In this context, digital literacy becomes essential, not just for using these tools, but for shaping their ethical and cultural di-

rection. Without inclusive design and intentional governance, AI tools produced all over the globe risk codifying inequality into the very architectures meant to disrupt it.

10. Conclusion

The integration of intelligent tools into filmmaking represents more than a technological evolution; it signals a shift in how stories are conceived, produced, and shared. By simplifying complex tasks and reducing production costs, AI tools are opening doors to new voices and making cinematic expression more accessible. They offer creative independence to small teams and individuals, disrupting traditional hierarchies that have long restricted participation in the industry.

The role of China in these AI driven transformations is particularly noteworthy. By promoting open access platforms, Chinese developers are expanding the reach of innovation and challenging global norms that tie creativity to capital. This model supports a more equitable vision of cultural production, where talent and imagination rather than funding alone define success. However, the social, political, and economic contexts in which these platforms operate also shape the very terms of this potential democratization.

Crucially, democratization is not a purely technological outcome but a political and cultural process. As the gendered analysis has shown, access to intelligent tools does not automatically translate to empowerment. Without careful attention to algorithmic bias, platform governance, and local social norms especially those related to femininity, labor, and authorship the promises of inclusivity risk reproducing old exclusions in new digitized forms.

AI's potential to reshape cinema, then, hinges on how systems are trained, governed, and used. Technical design must go hand in hand with inclusive policy, ethical oversight, and participatory cultural frameworks. Only through deliberate and critical engagement can AI support not only faster production, but richer storytelling enabling a cinematic future where more creators, more visions, and more imaginaries can thrive.

Thus, rather than framing China solely as a techno authoritarian power or a passive consumer of Western innovation, this article has highlighted the complexity of its AI ecosystems. These platforms offer alternative though ambivalent models of creative accessibility. While they extend powerful tools to previously excluded creators, they also operate within corporate state structures that delimit expression and reinforce digital gatekeeping. This underscores the

need to examine not just technologies themselves, but the broader systems political, economic, and cultural that shape their development and use. Ultimately, the path to empowerment through AI will depend not only on innovation, but on the values and structures that guide it.

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