

The Doctrinal Landscape of Generative AI Evidence in China: Concepts, Classification, and Evidentiary Qualification

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Abstract

Advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI) have extended machine involvement from identifying and predicting existing information to generating new text, images, audio, and video. Such materials are increasingly entering judicial fact-finding and raising new questions for established classifications of evidence and theories of evidentiary qualification. Through a thematic review of representative Chinese scholarship, this article examines the conceptualization of generative AI evidence, its relationship with adjacent categories of evidence, and its qualification as evidence. Existing studies approach the subject through the evolution of machine evidence, the operation of generative models, the internal classification of AI evidence, the evidentiary competence of generated information, and the composition of large language model materials. Although generativity has emerged as a relatively stable point of convergence, no consistent view has formed regarding the scope, evidentiary use, or superordinate category of such materials. Generative AI evidence overlaps with digital evidence, electronic data, big data evidence, algorithmic evidence, machine evidence, and scientific evidence in terms of medium, data scale, generation mechanism, the role of machines in its formation, and method of proof. Chinese scholarship addresses evidentiary qualification primarily through relevance, authenticity, reliability, lawfulness, and legally recognized forms of evidence, but remains divided over the generation process, human-machine collaboration, the allocation of technical risks between admissibility and the assessment of probative value, and the need for an independent evidentiary category. Future research should distinguish generated materials, generative tools, and technical materials used to examine AI systems, and should test existing theories against judicial cases and normative practice.

Keywords

algorithmic evidence, digital evidence, evidentiary qualification, generative AI evidence, legal classification

1 Introduction

Generative AI can produce new text, images, audio, and video on the basis of training data and input information. Its role in judicial proceedings has therefore expanded beyond recording, storing, and identifying existing information to include the generation of content and the formation of judgments. Unlike traditional forms of evidence that primarily depend on human expression or objective traces left by events, such materials are produced through multiple stages, including data input, model computation, and algorithmic output. Their

authenticity, reliability, and legal classification cannot be determined solely from the appearance of an electronic file. Risks arising from algorithmic bias, model hallucination, data contamination, deepfakes, and opaque operating processes have consequently made the evidentiary qualification of generated materials an issue that requires attention in evidence law.

Chinese scholarship expressly employing the term “generative AI evidence” remains limited. Relevant studies have instead developed around such concepts as AI evidence, large language model materials, machine evidence, and information generated by generative AI. Existing research has recognized differences between generated content and conventional electronic data in the mechanisms by which they are formed. Nevertheless, no consistent view has emerged regarding the scope of the relevant materials, their superordinate category, their evidentiary functions, or the conditions governing their qualification as evidence. A systematic review of these conceptual approaches and their differences is therefore necessary within the framework of evidence law.

This article adopts a thematic literature review. It primarily examines representative Chinese studies that directly address generative AI evidence, AI evidence, and large language model materials, while drawing on scholarship concerning digital evidence, electronic data, big data evidence, algorithmic evidence, machine evidence, and scientific evidence as supporting points of reference. The article first reviews the principal conceptualizations of generative AI evidence. It then compares generative AI evidence with adjacent categories of evidence and, finally, identifies the principal positions, disagreements, and limitations in Chinese scholarship concerning its legal classification and evidentiary qualification.

2 Conceptualizations of Generative AI Evidence in Chinese Scholarship

Generative AI evidence has only recently entered Chinese evidence-law scholarship as a doctrinal concept. Because relatively few studies have defined the term directly, the existing literature has not produced a uniform definition. Instead, scholars have identified the subject of inquiry from several perspectives, including the technological evolution of machine evidence, the operation of generative models, the internal classification of AI evidence, the evidentiary competence of generated information, and the composition of materials associated with large language models.

One approach situates generative AI evidence within the generational evolution of machine evidence. It differentiates stages in the development of machine evidence according to the degree of machine intelligence, the mechanism of data generation, and the form in which the resulting materials are presented. Information and decision-making activities produced through machine learning and driven by intelligent algorithmic models are accordingly classified as third-generation generative AI evidence. In earlier forms of machine evidence, devices primarily record or transmit external facts in accordance with predetermined procedures. By contrast, in the case of generative AI evidence, a machine uses input information to produce new expressions or conclusions through processes involving learning, inference, and human-machine interaction.



A second approach proceeds directly from the technical operation of generative models and the content they produce. It treats materials automatically generated by large generative models and potentially capable of proving facts in issue as generative AI evidence. Conventional electronic devices can store, reproduce, or transmit existing text and images, while discriminative algorithms can identify or classify information by selecting among existing alternatives. Generative models, however, produce new text, images, audio, or video on the basis of their trained model structures and particular inputs. This approach therefore relies principally on three elements: model-driven formation, automatic generation, and the generative character of the resulting output.

A third approach locates generative AI evidence through an internal classification of AI evidence. Based on the technological distinction between discriminative and generative AI, it divides AI evidence into discriminative AI evidence and generative AI evidence. Facial-recognition evidence is placed in the former category, whereas virtual text, images, and audiovisual content automatically generated by generative AI are placed in the latter and are further incorporated into the broader category of digital evidence. This approach explains the concept by comparing adjacent technological types. Discriminative AI primarily identifies objects, determines categories, or predicts outcomes from existing data, whereas generative AI uses a trained model and specified inputs to create new expressive content.

Other studies do not directly define “generative AI evidence.” Instead, they begin with information generated by generative AI and then consider whether that information possesses evidentiary competence. Under this approach, information generated by generative AI is examined through the requirements of reliability, relevance, and lawfulness. The approach thereby draws a preliminary distinction between information produced as a matter of technology and materials capable of participating in judicial proof. Generative AI may produce a large quantity of information, but questions of evidentiary competence arise only when particular materials relate to facts in issue and are introduced into the process of proof.

A related strand of research employs the concept of “large language model materials” and extends the object of inquiry beyond final outputs to the use and operation of the model. In its broad sense, this concept encompasses human–machine interaction materials, materials relating to the model itself, and information concerning the model’s operating environment. User inputs and model responses may document the process of human–machine interaction. Training data, algorithms, models, and specific AI products may describe the system’s technical foundations. Information such as dates, product versions, operating systems, and network environments may help reconstruct the conditions under which a particular interaction occurred. Although this concept captures multiple layers in the formation of generated content, it is broader than model outputs introduced to prove facts in issue. The evidentiary function of each type of material must therefore be assessed separately.

A comparison of these approaches shows that generativity is the most stable point of convergence in the existing conceptual literature. Whether generative AI evidence is understood as a third generation of machine evidence, a subtype of AI evidence, or the output of a generative large model, the relevant studies seek to explain a common technological change: machines no longer merely record, store, or transmit existing information, but participate in producing new content on the basis of training data and input con-

ditions. The literature nevertheless remains divided over whether the concept is limited to final outputs, whether it also encompasses input records, materials relating to the model itself, and operating-environment information, and whether the relevant materials must perform the function of proving facts in issue. These unresolved questions provide the basis for examining the relationship between generative AI evidence and adjacent categories of evidence.

3 Generative AI Evidence and Adjacent Categories of Evidence

Digital evidence, electronic data, big data evidence, algorithmic evidence, machine evidence, and scientific evidence explain the evidentiary attributes of technologically produced materials from different perspectives. These include their digital form, the scale at which data are processed, the involvement of algorithms, the role of machines in their formation, and their reliance on scientific knowledge. Because these concepts are based on different classificatory criteria, Chinese scholarship has not developed a uniform account of their scope or their relationship with generative AI evidence.

3.1 Digital Evidence and Electronic Data

Within an open system of digital evidence, conventional electronic data, blockchain evidence, big data evidence, AI evidence, and virtual-simulation evidence have been identified as five forms of digital evidence. AI evidence is then divided into discriminative and generative AI evidence according to the technological distinction between discriminative and generative systems. Under this framework, generative AI evidence constitutes a subtype of digital evidence through the intermediate category of AI evidence.

Electronic data, by contrast, has a relatively well-defined normative background in Chinese law. It is commonly understood as data created in the course of events giving rise to a case, stored, processed, or transmitted in digital form, and capable of proving facts in issue. Existing studies offer different accounts of whether generative AI evidence can be incorporated directly into this category. One position treats generative AI evidence as electronic evidence in substance. Another places conventional electronic data and AI evidence alongside each other within a broader, open system of digital evidence, thereby emphasizing the distinctive role of intelligent technologies in the formation of evidence. The fact that model outputs have the digital form and modes of transmission associated with electronic data does not, therefore, mean that the concept of electronic data fully explains how those outputs are generated.

3.2 Big Data Evidence

Big data evidence is principally defined by the scale of the data involved, the methods used to analyze them, and the identification of regular patterns. Relevant studies describe it as evidence based on massive quantities of electronic data from which regularities are derived through statistical analysis, data matching, mining, or machine learning. It ordinarily performs an evidentiary function in the form of an analytical result or report. The e-Zubao case illustrates this mode of proof. The case involved billions of financial transactions and approximately 30 terabytes of data obtained from numerous financial institutions, payment platforms, and accounts. Because judicial personnel could not examine every transaction individually, statistical analysis, data matching, data mining, and machine learning were used to produce analytical reports.



The relationship between big data evidence and generative AI evidence has been characterized in different ways. One position regards generative AI evidence as an advanced form of big data evidence, emphasizing generative models' dependence on extensive training data and their capacity for data processing. Another places big data evidence, algorithmic evidence, and informational or decisional outputs autonomously produced by intelligent algorithmic models within the broader scope of generative AI evidence. The former constructs a hierarchical relationship on the basis of the models' training foundations, while the latter expands the category of generative AI evidence by reference to intelligent machine generation.

Their respective mechanisms of proof nevertheless remain distinguishable. A financial-analysis report that identifies relationships among accounts by processing large volumes of case data has the characteristic features of big data evidence, but it need not be produced by a generative model. Conversely, although a particular output from a generative model may technically depend on extensive training data, its evidentiary function in a particular case may be limited to documenting a specific human-machine interaction or the formation of particular content, rather than demonstrating patterns in the case data as a whole. Big data evidence principally derives regularities from large-scale data, whereas generative AI evidence principally concerns the production of new content by a model. The two categories are technologically connected but cannot be equated solely on the basis of the scale of the training data involved.

3.3 Algorithmic Evidence

The scope of algorithmic evidence is itself unsettled. Some definitions focus on automated interpretations of case scenarios and inferential results produced through the computational integration of large quantities of case information. Broader definitions encompass both algorithms involved in the events giving rise to a case and results obtained when algorithms analyze data from within or beyond the case. Narrower definitions concentrate on evidence formed through algorithmic analysis of big data. Another approach limits algorithmic evidence in criminal proceedings to machine-learning evidence produced through a "machine-led and human-assisted" process and classifies it as a report on specialized issues. These approaches respectively concern the algorithm itself, its operation, its output, or the resulting written report. The mere involvement of an algorithm therefore cannot establish a uniform relationship between algorithmic evidence and generative AI evidence.

The use of predictive algorithms demonstrates that algorithmic involvement does not necessarily entail the generation of new content in the generative-AI sense. Investigative authorities may compare behavioral data from a particular case with models of conduct associated with a category of crime, thereby identifying anomalies and indicating potential risks. Such outputs ordinarily operate first as investigative leads rather than as direct proof of criminal facts. Although the algorithm produces a new risk assessment, its primary function is to classify or predict by reference to a statistical model, not to generate new text, images, or audiovisual content.

Recognition algorithms provide an even clearer counterexample. Facial-recognition systems may compare facial information extracted from surveillance footage with database records to verify identity, locate fugitives, or identify victims. This process relies on AI and machine learning and may produce an output

relevant to a case. Its purpose, however, is to identify an existing person rather than to create a new representation of a face. Algorithmic evidence may therefore overlap with generative AI evidence when a generative model and its outputs are involved, but algorithmic evidence as a whole is not defined by generativity.

3.4 Machine Evidence

Machine evidence is principally understood by reference to the entity that forms or communicates the material and the extent of machine involvement in that process. Relevant research characterizes it as data or information communicated or generated by machines and distinguishes among semi-mechanized evidence, fully mechanized or programmed evidence, and third-generation generative AI evidence. Under this framework, generative AI evidence is a subtype of machine evidence, while the scope of machine evidence is broader.

A comparison of different machine-produced materials illustrates this hierarchical relationship. An automotive system that records a vehicle's operating condition in accordance with a predetermined mechanism primarily documents an external fact. A predictive model analyzes existing data and produces a risk assessment. A large language model, by contrast, uses an input to generate text or images and thus participates in the creation of new expressive content. Machines contribute to the formation of all three types of material, but they do so through different mechanisms: recording, prediction, and generation. A common machine source is consequently insufficient to place them in the same evidentiary category.

This generational account usefully distinguishes automatic records from generative outputs. Its understanding of generativity is nevertheless relatively broad because it brings big data analytical reports, machine opinions, and intelligent decision-making activities within the same field of inquiry. If the concept is limited strictly to new content produced by a generative model, data automatically recorded according to a fixed procedure and comparison results produced under predetermined rules may remain forms of machine evidence without constituting generative AI evidence.

3.5 Scientific Evidence

Scientific evidence is principally defined by the knowledge and methods on which the process of proof depends. It has been described as evidence produced through scientific technology, scientific principles, or scientific instruments and used to prove facts in issue. Typical forms include expert opinions, reports on specialized issues, and specialized content in accident investigation reports. Its examination accordingly focuses on whether the underlying scientific principles are reliable, whether the method is appropriate for the particular case, and whether the method has been properly applied.

Unlike digital evidence or machine evidence, scientific evidence does not necessarily depend on a digital medium or on formation by a machine. Its defining concern is the involvement of specialized knowledge in the process of proof. The probative value of DNA matching or medical diagnostic materials, for example, may depend both on the operation of machines and algorithms and on the reliability of the relevant scientific principles and methods. Such materials may therefore possess scientific, machine-produced, and algorithm-dependent characteristics at the same time.



Text, images, and audiovisual content generated by AI during the events giving rise to a case may intersect with scientific evidence when their process of formation requires specialized technical explanation. The same materials may instead be introduced simply as digital traces of conduct occurring during those events. In the latter situation, they may document a human–machine interaction or an act of content generation without requiring the court to accept a scientific conclusion. The substantive examination associated with scientific evidence becomes more directly relevant only when an output is introduced as a machine opinion, a technical analysis, or a reconstruction of facts whose probative value depends on model principles and specialized explanation.

Some research treats AI evidence as a whole as a new form of scientific evidence and examines the reliability of the relevant technology, data, and conclusions. The object of that research, however, does not necessarily encompass every form of generative AI evidence. When the probative value of a generative output depends on scientific principles, model technology, and specialized explanation, the material may also possess the attributes of scientific evidence. When it serves only as an expression or digital trace produced during the events giving rise to a case, it need not be treated as scientific evidence.

In summary, generative AI evidence overlaps with different categories of technologically produced evidence in different respects. Within particular theoretical frameworks, it has been placed within digital evidence, electronic evidence, big data evidence, or machine evidence. The literature has even proposed opposing hierarchical arrangements for generative AI evidence and big data evidence. Its relationship with algorithmic evidence is complicated by the unsettled object of that concept, while its relationship with scientific evidence arises principally from the use of specialized knowledge and methods. At the present stage, the more defensible synthesis is not to impose a single conceptual hierarchy, but to recognize that these terms respectively illuminate the medium, scale, forming entity, generation mechanism, or method of proof associated with a material. Because the classifications employ different criteria, the legal status of generative AI evidence cannot be derived from any single adjacent category.

4 Legal Classification and Qualification of Generative AI Materials as Evidence

Legal classification and evidentiary qualification address different questions. Legal classification asks how generative AI materials fit within the existing categories of evidence. It also asks whether these materials have independent value as a subject of research and classification. Evidentiary qualification asks when a specific item of generated material may enter the process of proof. The studies reviewed do not treat a material as evidence merely because generative AI produced it. However, they have not resolved two further questions. The first is whether generative AI evidence should become an independent statutory category of evidence. The second is whether courts should address its technical risks at the admissibility stage or during the assessment of probative value.

Existing research presents two main approaches to legal classification. The first approach incorporates generative AI evidence into an existing category. It treats such evidence as electronic evidence in substance

and applies the existing framework for electronic data. The second approach classifies AI evidence separately from conventional electronic data within an open system of digital evidence. This approach highlights the distinct mechanism through which intelligent technologies produce evidentiary materials. Both approaches suggest that generative AI evidence has independent research value. Neither approach, however, establishes that the law must create a separate statutory category for it.

Research on relevance focuses on three types of connection. The first is the connection between generated content and a fact in issue. The second is the connection between the material and a particular system or generation process. The third concerns the difference between an investigative function and a probative function. Generated content may participate in judicial proof only when it supports or challenges a fact in issue. A judicial authority may also use generative AI to examine existing evidence or assist an investigation. Such use does not automatically give the resulting material evidentiary qualification. Research on predictive algorithms provides a useful comparison. It usually treats the identification of abnormal behavior as an investigative lead. This function may help investigators discover facts, but the output does not itself prove that a crime occurred.

Research on authenticity draws first on the technical authentication of electronic data. Such authentication can determine whether a submitted file has retained its identity and integrity. It cannot, by itself, prove that the content generated by a model corresponds to the facts of a case. Research on electronic evidence also examines authenticity at the levels of the medium, the content, and the material's connection to its alleged source. This framework helps distinguish formal authentication from an assessment of content. However, electronic-evidence research does not focus on generative models. Its application to generated materials therefore requires additional attention to the model and the generation process.

Generated materials also raise questions about source and process. A party may need to show that a particular system produced the material under specified input and operating conditions. Existing studies therefore examine the source of the model, records of user inputs, and the process that produced the output. Research on deepfakes also identifies the risks of technical manipulation and the limits of unaided human perception. These findings can assist the examination of generated images and audiovisual materials. However, deepfake research primarily addresses the falsification or impersonation of existing content. It cannot replace authentication of the source and process of generative-model outputs. The ultimate truth of a statement in an output presents a separate question. It depends on the reliability of the generation mechanism and the material's probative relationship with other facts. Courts should not treat that question as an issue of file or source authenticity alone.

Existing studies locate reliability risks at several levels. These include the model or technology, the training data and case-specific inputs, the generation process, and the final output. An output may come from the claimed source and still be unreliable. Data bias, technical defects, poor task suitability, model hallucination, or a lack of explanation may undermine its reliability. Research on AI evidence distinguishes among technological reliability, data reliability, and risks caused by opaque conclusions. Research that directly addresses generative AI evidence also examines the stages of input, machine analysis, and output. Other studies connect model operation with case-specific consequences through an examination of technical prin-



ciples, data chains, and impact assessments.

Research on big data evidence offers a related analytical method. Some studies examine original data, algorithms, and analytical reports as separate layers. Others focus on the data and the analytical process. These studies discuss authenticity, algorithmic suitability, and the reliability of analytical results. Their original object, however, is an analytical result derived from large quantities of case data. A generative model's training data are not the same as the original data of a particular case. A generated output also differs from a statistical report. Big data research can therefore identify relevant levels of examination, but it cannot supply a uniform standard for the qualification of generative AI evidence.

Research on lawfulness mainly considers three matters: the source of the data, the use of the model or algorithm, and the content of the output. Some studies place lawfulness alongside reliability and relevance as a condition for the evidentiary competence of information generated by generative AI. However, legal problems may arise at different stages. They may concern the acquisition of training data, the deployment of the model, the user's input, or the dissemination of generated content. Unlawfulness at one stage does not automatically determine the evidentiary qualification of every material associated with the system. The literature has not yet provided a complete account of how each form of unlawfulness affects a specific item of generated material.

Existing research also follows two approaches to the procedural treatment of technical risks. One approach strengthens review at the admissibility stage. It treats serious defects in the technology, data, or generation process as important factors in deciding whether the material may enter judicial proof. The other approach does not treat an algorithmic black box or an inadequate explanation as proof that an output is incorrect. Under this approach, some technical risks may affect probative value after the material has been admitted. Research on the explainability of algorithmic evidence also shows that black-box systems can obstruct a party's ability to understand, verify, and challenge an output. However, that research addresses algorithmic evidence as a broader category. It does not establish that courts should exclude every unexplained generative output. Chinese scholarship has not developed a consistent boundary between these two approaches.

In summary, existing studies examine the qualification of generative AI materials through legal classification, relevance, authenticity, reliability, lawfulness, and legally recognized forms of evidence. Important conceptual boundaries remain unclear. Independent research value does not necessarily justify an independent statutory category of evidence. Authenticity does not encompass every question of reliability. Evidentiary qualification also differs from the assessment of probative value. Future research must clarify these relationships within the existing system of evidence. Technological novelty alone cannot justify either the creation of a new category of evidence or the automatic exclusion of generated materials.

5 Conclusion and Future Research

Generative AI has changed the role of machines in the process of judicial proof. Chinese scholars have used several concepts to explain this change. These concepts draw on the generational evolution of machine

evidence, the technical operation of generative models, the internal classification of AI evidence, the evidentiary competence of generated information, and the composition of large language model materials. The relevant studies have not produced a uniform definition. However, they share one relatively stable understanding. Generative models use training data and input information to participate in the production of new content. The main disagreements concern the scope of the relevant materials. Some studies focus only on model outputs, while others also examine input records, materials relating to the model itself, and information about its operating environment. The literature also remains divided over whether the materials must serve the function of proving facts in issue.

A comparison with adjacent categories shows that the digital form of a material or the involvement of AI cannot, by itself, determine its evidentiary classification. Digital evidence and electronic data mainly describe the digital form and transmission of information. Big data evidence emphasizes large-scale data processing and the identification of regular patterns. Algorithmic evidence may concern an algorithm, its operation, or its output. Machine evidence focuses on the role of machines in the formation of materials. Scientific evidence focuses on scientific knowledge and specialized methods in the process of proof. These concepts use different classificatory criteria. Generative AI evidence may therefore fall within or overlap with different categories in different circumstances.

Technological novelty does not automatically give generated content evidentiary qualification. Existing studies mainly examine relevance, authenticity, reliability, lawfulness, and legally recognized forms of evidence. However, they have not fully explained how these factors should operate at different procedural stages. The literature has not established when technical opacity should affect admissibility and when it should affect probative value. It has also not resolved whether generative AI evidence requires an independent statutory category. These questions require further research.

Future research should distinguish among three types of material. The first consists of materials directly generated by a model. The second consists of results produced when generative AI assists in discovering or analyzing existing evidence. The third consists of technical materials used to explain the operation of a generative AI system. These materials may have different objects of proof and different procedural functions. Future studies should also examine Chinese judicial decisions, normative documents, and specific technological applications. Such research should assess existing theories against verified judicial practice. It should also examine authentication of the generation process, the allocation of technical risks, and the relationship between generated materials and legally recognized forms of evidence. A more stable connection among legal scholarship, technological facts, and judicial practice can provide a stronger basis for the judicial use of generative AI materials.

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