

Tang ping

Tang ping (Chinese: 躺平; <u>lit.</u> 'lying flat') is a Chinese <u>slang</u> neologism that describes a personal rejection of societal pressures to <u>overwork</u> and <u>over-achieve</u>, such as in the <u>996 working hour system</u>, which is often regarded as a <u>rat race</u> with ever <u>diminishing returns</u>. [1][2][3][4] Tang ping means choosing to "lie down flat and get over the beatings" via a low-desire, more indifferent attitude towards life.

Novelist Liao Zenghu described "lying flat" as a passive-aggressive resistance movement, [5] and *The New York Times* called it part of a nascent Chinese counterculture. [6] It has also been compared to the Great Resignation, a surge of resignations that began in the West at roughly the same time. [7][8][9] The National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center, an institution affiliated with the Education Ministry of China, listed the word as one of the 10 most popular memes for 2021 in the Chinese Internet. Chinese

Tang ping	
Chinese	躺平
Literal meaning	lying flat
Transcriptions	
Standard Mandarin	
Hanyu Pinyin	tǎng píng
Bopomofo	太大 ^ˇ ㄆ一ㄥˊ
Gwoyeu Romatzyh	taang pyng
Wade-Giles	t'ang ³ p'ing ²
<u>IPA</u>	[tʰàŋ.pʰǐŋ]
Yue: Cantonese	
Jyutping	tong ² ping ⁴
Southern Min	
Hokkien POJ	tháng pê ⁿ

search engine Sogou also listed the word at the top of its list of most trending memes for 2021. [10]

Those who choose to "lie flat" may lower their professional commitment and economic ambitions, simplify their goals, while still being fiscally productive for their own essential needs, and prioritize psychological health over economic materialism. [11][12]

The phrase "quiet quitting", meaning doing only what one's job demands and nothing more, which became popular in the United States in 2022, $\frac{[13][14]}{[13]}$ was thought to be inspired by the *tang ping* movement. Another newer related phrase is *bai lan* (Chinese: 摆烂; pinyin: *bǎi làn*; lit. 'let it rot'), which means "to actively embrace a deteriorating situation, rather than trying to turn it around". Basically, it refers to a voluntary retreat from pursuing certain goals because individuals realize they are simply too difficult to achieve. [16]

Origin

The term first appeared around February 2020 (the beginning of the <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u>) on the Chinese Internet. The movement began in April 2021 with a post by Luo Huazhong (username "Kind-Hearted Traveler") on the <u>internet forum Baidu Tieba</u>, in which he discussed his reasons for living a low-key, <u>minimalist</u> lifestyle. In 2016, 26-year-old Luo quit his factory job because it made him feel empty.

He then <u>cycled</u> 2,100 km (1,300 mi) from <u>Sichuan</u> to <u>Tibet</u>, and now back in his home town <u>Jiande</u> in eastern <u>Zhejiang Province</u>, spends his time reading <u>philosophy</u>, and gets by doing a few <u>odd jobs</u> and taking US\$60 a month from his savings. [18][6] He only eats two meals a day. [18]

Luo's post, entitled with "Lying Flat is Justice", illustrates:

I can just sleep in my barrel enjoying a sunbath like <u>Diogenes</u>, or live in a cave-like <u>Heraclitus</u> and think about '<u>Logos</u>'. Since there has never really been a trend of thought that exalts <u>human subjectivity</u> in this land, I can create it for myself. Lying flat is my wise movement, only by lying down can humans become the measure of all things. [1][2]

Luo's post and story quickly gained a following on <u>social media</u>, being discussed and soon becoming a <u>buzzword</u> on <u>Sina Weibo</u> and <u>Douban</u>. The idea was praised by many and inspired numerous <u>memes</u>, and has been described as a sort of spiritual movement. Business magazine *ABC Money* claimed it resonated with a growing <u>silent majority</u> of youth disillusioned by the officially endorsed "<u>Chinese Dream</u>" that encourages a life of hard work and sacrifice with no actual <u>life satisfaction</u> to show for it, spawning the <u>catchphrase</u> "a <u>chive</u> lying flat is difficult to reap" (躺平的韭菜不好割, *Tǎng píng de ji ǔcài bù hǎo gē*). 19]

Background

In April 2021, an incident where a truck driver committed suicide due to fines and vehicle impoundment sparked widespread discussions on the internet about the hardships of life at the grassroots level. This stands in stark contrast to the official emphasis on "poverty alleviation success" and the narrative of achieving a "moderately prosperous society," highlighting the lack of significant improvement, and even decline, in labor conditions amidst the rapid pace of social development. The exacerbation of domestic social issues in mainland China due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 also played a role. Some commentators argue that similar incidents are commonplace and that the working class has not truly benefited from rapid economic growth. [20][21][22]

In May 2021, due to the changing trend in population structure, the government of the People's Republic of China announced the introduction of a <u>three-child policy</u>. However, some analysts believe that many young people today face challenges such as long working hours, stagnant wages, difficulties in homeownership, mental and physical exhaustion, and heavy burdens of elderly care, leading to a widespread decline in willingness to marry and have children. [23][24]

From April to May 2021, a video circulated on the video-sharing website <u>Bilibili</u> featuring a speech by well-known media personality <u>Bai Yansong</u>. When asked about the phenomenon of contemporary young people feeling patriotic and optimistic about the country's future while also feeling powerless in the face of life and employment pressures, Bai Yansong responded with a rhetorical question: "Do we now expect housing prices to be low, jobs to be easy to find everywhere, no pressure at all, and as long as you pursue the girl you like, she will agree?" This statement sparked a barrage of criticism and ridicule from numerous netizens. [25][26][27]

Response

The <u>Chinese Communist Party</u> (CCP) moved quickly to reject the idea. The <u>CAC</u> internet regulator ordered online platforms to "strictly restrict" posts on *tang ping* and had censors remove Luo's original Tieba post^[28] while a discussion group of nearly 10,000 followers on Chinese social media site <u>Douban</u> is no longer accessible. [29] Selling *tang ping*-branded merchandise online is forbidden. [6]

In May 2021, Chinese state media <u>Xinhua</u> published an editorial asserting that "lying flat" is shameful. In May, a video clip of <u>CCTV</u> news commentator <u>Bai Yansong</u> criticizing the low-key mindset circulated on the popular video-sharing website <u>Bilibili</u>, and had attracted thousands of mockeries and slurs on the <u>danmu</u> commentaries in response. The same month, a commentary of <u>Hubei Radio and Television</u> Economic Channel said, "you can accept your fate, but you mustn't lie flat." An October article by <u>CCP general secretary</u> <u>Xi Jinping</u>, published in the Communist Party journal *Qiushi*, called for "avoiding 'involution' [nei juan] and 'lying flat' ". [8][35]

However, there were official voices offering more empathic opinions on the *tang ping* phenomenon. Beijing's party-affiliated *Guangming Daily* newspaper added that *tang ping* should not be discounted without reflection—if China wants to cultivate diligence in the young generation, it should first try to improve their <u>quality of life</u>. Huang Ping, a literature professor who researches <u>youth culture</u> at <u>East China Normal University</u>, told <u>Sixth Tone</u> that official media outlets may be concerned about the *tang ping* lifestyle because of its potential to threaten productivity, but "humans aren't merely tools for making things... when you can't catch up with society's development—say, skyrocketing home prices—*tang ping* is actually the most rational choice."

Comments

Negative comments

In May 2021, <u>Sina Weibo</u>'s "Communist Youth League Central Committee" posted a Weibo message stating that "contemporary young people have never chosen to lie flat." The <u>Nanfang Daily</u> published a commentary article titled "Lying flat is shameful, where does the sense of justice come from?" by Wang Qingfeng, which criticized the "lying flat philosophy," condemning it as harmful and "toxic chicken soup" .[36] This article was reposted by Xinhua News Agency.[37] The <u>Guangming Daily's</u> "Guangming Commentary" column criticized the "lying flat" phenomenon in an article titled "Rejecting 'involution,' are young people starting to believe in 'lying flat-ology'?".[38] A commentary from the TV Economic Channel of Hubei Radio and Television stated: "Accepting fate is okay, lying flat is not".[39] The <u>Global Times</u>' "Global Times Sharp Commentary" column sarcastically said: "Young people who claim to lie flat are always woken up at dawn by the alarm clocks they set themselves".[40]

Li Fengliang, an associate professor at <u>Tsinghua University</u>, believes that "lying flat is an extremely irresponsible attitude that not only disappoints one's parents but also millions of taxpayers. ... People can still achieve upward social mobility through competition." [41]

On December 27, 2021, the Guangming Daily published a commentary on its front page titled "Lying Flat is Not Advisable," rejecting the behavior of lying flat. [42]

Positive comments

Financial scholar He Jiangbing believes that lying flat is a kind of "helpless activism". Although it will have a negative impact on the economy, reducing consumption helps reduce waste and carbon footprint, which is conducive to achieving carbon emission reduction targets. People who "lie flat" are usually very gentle, not rebellious, and mostly do not retaliate against society, which helps maintain stability. He believes that it is unreasonable to accuse young people of lying flat as being decadent, and that a system of rigid hierarchy and lack of fair competition is the real decadence. [43] "Lying flat" can be extended to describe a state of inaction with low desire, low social participation, and not catering to secular expectations or mainstream views, in order to resist or withdraw from formulaic social norms (but not anti-social). [44]

On August 3, 2021, former <u>U.S. Central Intelligence Agency</u> employee and <u>NSA</u> contractor <u>Edward Snowden</u> posted on <u>Twitter</u>, sharing the song "Lying Flat is King", and encouraged young people to "never forget that you are not alone: the exploitation of the emerging generation is a global struggle."

Huang Ping, a professor in the Department of Chinese at <u>East China Normal University</u>, believes that "lying flat" is a way for young people to put down their burdens. When people cannot keep up with the distorted development of society (such as soaring housing prices), [46][47] "lying flat" is not a bad choice as the most rational option, and the official media's attention to this trend is due to concerns that the lying flat philosophy may pose a potential threat to productivity. [48] There is also a view that although "lying flat" is only an emotional social response, it also poses new issues for the healthy development of society, such as how to improve the working environment and career development ecology of young people. [49]

Columnist Chang Ping commented that "lying flat-ism" is "an awakening of rights consciousness and identity consciousness." Sinologist Mieke Matthyssen further describes tangping as a "courageous resistance" that expresses a desire for a mentally healthy lifestyle and balanced personal development. It is a form of "self-preservation" against the harmful inputs of excessive materialism and submissive citizenship. [51]

Analysis of the phenomenon

Guangming Net believes that lying flat is a common phenomenon that happens in a wide range of countries and regions in its post in May 2021. The economy possesses a certain security function and diversified economic opportunity when an economy reaches the climax of a state, so the marginal utility of working overtime decreases, hence resulting in a passive young generation. [52]

According to BBC, the serial popularity of "Geyou Lying Down" to "Lazy eggs" to "mourning culture" signals the increasing pressure on the younger generation, who grew up under the single-child policy, to work longer hours, abide the <u>social credit system</u>, and show their patriotism. [53]

On June 9, 2021, the British newspaper <u>The Independent</u> identified Lying Flat as an online protest by young people in China, an extension of similar movements around the world that call for rest and recovery rather than busyness. <u>[54]</u> Business Insider and The Washington Post reported on the issue and interviewed several young people who practice reclinism. <u>[55][56]</u>

According to <u>New York Times</u>, it indicates that lying flat happens in the US too. It's a movement that individuals are embracing lying flat as a way to resist the expectations of relentless productivity and career success. It highlights economic inequality, limited job opportunities, and a sense of

disillusionment with the traditional path of working long hours as factors contributing to the rise of lying flat. Lying flat represents a rejection of the idea that one's worth is solely determined by their job or economic status. Instead, it reflects a desire for a simpler, more fulfilling life that prioritizes personal well-being over material success. [57]

In <u>NTV NEWS24</u> Morimoto Hayashi believes that the popularity of the "lying flat" movement contrasts sharply with the philosophy of striving advocated repeatedly by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, such as "the new era is the era of struggle." This news has garnered thousands of responses on Japanese websites, resonating with many Japanese netizens. [58]

Some believe that the official concern and criticism of the trend is due to its ideological connotation of non-cooperation, which is considered to pose a potential threat to stability. [40][59][60]

Similar concepts

Quiet Quitting

The phrase "quiet quitting", meaning doing only what one's job demands and nothing more, which became popular in the United States in 2022 primarily due to the evolving landscape of work culture influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic reshaped the way people worked, with remote and hybrid models becoming more common, individuals began to reassess their priorities and work-life balance. [61][62] It was thought to be inspired by the *tang ping* movement. Another newer related phrase is *bai lan* (Chinese: 摆烂; pinyin: $b\check{a}i$ $l\grave{a}n$; lit. 'let it rot'), which means "to actively embrace a deteriorating situation, rather than trying to turn it around". Basically, it refers to a voluntary retreat from pursuing certain goals because individuals realize they are simply too difficult to achieve. [63][64]

It has been considered as a rejection of the hustle-culture mentality that has long been associated with career success and corporate ladder-climbing. It showcases the stance that employers can no longer extract and exploit more employee labor than they are paying for. [65]

Sampo generation

<u>Sampo generation</u> is also referred to as "Three giving-up generation" is a neologism in South Korea referring to a generation that gives up courtship, marriage, and having kids due to the excess stress they face in life including high cost of living, high working hours, low income, and high unemployment rate. [66]

The term evolved into Opo generation (Five giving-up generation), Chilpo generation (Seven giving-up generation), Gupo generation (Nine giving-up generation), and N-po generation, which people giving up on more things including employment, home ownership, interpersonal relationships, hope, health, physical appearance, and eventually life.

Freeter

<u>Freeter</u> is a term specifically describing a state in Japan and Japanese culture, which is a person aged 15 to 34 who is unemployed, underemployed, or otherwise lacks full-time paid employment. The term excludes housewives and students.

Freeter have become a culture in Japan where they accommodate low-waged and marginalized workers to live and enjoy basic activities of life. The culture is presented in Koenji in Tokyo, where there are second-hand shops and recycled objects, and troquets with low and affordable prices in the region, showing an alternative way of living. [67]

NEET

<u>NEET</u> (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is a term describes a state where a person is unemployed and not receiving an education or vocational training. The classification originated in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s, and its use has spread, in varying degrees, to other countries, including Japan, South Korea, China, Serbia, Canada, and the United States.

See also

hikikomori

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