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The “Lying Flat” Phenomenon and Its Features in Contemporary Chinese Society

Master Thesis

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I have written this Master Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

### **Abstract**

This paper is devoted to exploring the definition, characteristics, manifestations, causes, impacts and development trends of the phenomenon of lying flat when the COVID-19 epidemic ends and the economy gradually recovers in China. Combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, this paper analysed the 50 most-liked texts about lying flat from the social media Weibo and the Q&A community Zhihu from January to March 2023, and conducted in-depth interviews with 10 highly educated young people around 24 years old who have lived in mainland China for a long time. The results mainly show that there is a significant difference between the understanding and attitude of the Chinese authorities and the Chinese people towards lying flat. For most people, lying flat is about accepting yourself and your current situation, pursuing balance between work and life, income and consumption, material foundation and physical and mental health. The phenomenon of lying flat has rationality and necessity, and the people who are lying flat passively are more than the people who are lying flat actively.

Keywords: China, Society, Lifestyle, Mentality, Lying flat

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## 1.Introduction

Chinese people today, especially young Chinese, can be roughly divided into two categories, according to the contemporary popular view. One is the people characterized by “involution”. In sociology, involution means that when a certain social resource is limited, but more and more people compete for it, everyone puts in more and more effort but still gets less and less (as cited in Involution, n.d.). They study hard, they work hard, their biggest characteristic is vicious competition, that is, they work harder than those who work hard, not to try their best, but when they see that there are people who work harder and better than them, they will work harder and strive to surpass them. When they surpass this goal, if they observe someone better again, they will aim for it and seek to surpass it again. They are always on the upward comparison. What they seek is to surpass everyone in their field of vision who is better than them and can be surpassed with a certain amount of effort. In a world where there will always be someone richer and more knowledgeable than you, someone smarter and working harder than you, and someone who has a better life than you, people’s efforts for surpassing others are endless and thus the involution is also endless. People in this category, as long as they live, they will seek a better life and more self-actualization, and at the same time, the vicious competition will also continue to escalate.

Yet whether the competition makes sense also depends largely on the size of the cake. Unfortunately, the cake is limited, 10 years ago a master can share a bigger cake, but in the vicious-competition society, 10 years later today, the number of master is far increased, but the cake has not grown much, if one wants to get more cake like 10 years ago, he must become a doctor. This is indeed the case in China, where the number of masters and doctors has been increasing year by year (“Number of Graduate Students”, 2022). This means that the competitive pressure in Chinese society is also growing exponentially, because it is obviously much harder to get a PhD than a master's degree. Moreover, in recent years, with the rise of short video platforms, many people with less education can easily earn much more money than many people with higher education through E-commerce livestreaming or talent shows or something else. This makes more and more people feel that the meaning of hard study is limited, and a degree is no longer as competitive as it used to be. At the same time, such vicious competition like involution exists in all walks of life, including short video industry.

There are constant reports of people dying of sudden death from working too late, and more and more people feel that the risks of hard work far outweigh the benefits. In this context, the "lying flat" sect emerged.

In this context, the second group of people was born and grew. They have the opposite characteristic of the involution, which we call “lying flat”. These people generally have a better mind-set. They are not too anxious, they don't worry too much about the future, they don't often compare themselves with others, or they compare downwards more. They are not necessarily well-off, but they are content with where they are. They go with the flow, or do only modest efforts. They have a casual attitude towards most things. A popular phrase used to describe college students who are lying flat is "score 60 long live, one more wasted". There are a lot of other lying-flat statements like “buying a house, getting married, and having children are three things that a person's life would be much easier if he did less” that are widely circulated in society. And this kind of population is also the object of this thesis.

It is necessary to study the lying-flat attitude and behaviour of these people. Because whether it is active or passive lying flat, it is always bad for social development. If it is allowed to grow into the mainstream of society, then China will become the next Japan.

Although it has been studied by some Chinese scholars, with the rapid changes of Chinese society, the phenomenon of lying flat should have changed correspondingly, and the past research may not be able to reveal the latest characteristics and development trend of this phenomenon. In particular, I have observed that although "lying flat" emerged with the emergence of “involution”, its birth and growth coincided with the time of the COVID-19 epidemic in China. Therefore, there is reason to suspect that the epidemic is one of the important factors for the emergence of lying-flat mentality. However, since the autumn of 2022, the epidemic prevention and control in China has gradually failed, and by the Chinese New Year of 2023, almost all the people in China have been infected. At the same time, China has lifted almost all of its epidemic prevention and control policies except for the only requirement that people are supposed to wear masks on public transport. The epidemic has basically ended in China, the economy has gradually recovered, and people's life has gradually returned to the state before the epidemic. Therefore, whether people who used to be lying flat will continue to be lying flat, whether the involution will become the mainstream

again, and what characteristics and development trend will be presented in the lying flat after the epidemic, these are the questions that this thesis wants to explore.

The mentality and behaviour of lying flat is inevitably caused by complex social, political, cultural, economic and other factors. By exploring these questions, we can not only have a clear and the latest understanding of the social phenomenon of lying flat, but also reveal the more complex and diverse social problems behind it to a certain extent. Exploring the problem of lying flat is not only to improve this social phenomenon, but also to solve various social problems behind it and promote the healthy development of society.

## **2.Literature Review**

The term “lying flat” first appeared online in China in 2011 (“Lying Flat: The Civil Disobedience Movement”, 2021). It got a lot of attention when it reappeared in 2021. Online communities or forums related to lying flat were quickly banned by the Chinese authorities because they ran counter to traditional Chinese values. Since then, although the Chinese government still resists the ideology of lying flat through various channels, the social discussion on lying flat is endless, and more and more people actively or passively accept the influence of lying-flat culture. (as cited in Lying Flat, 2023) In the same year, lying flat was named one of China's top 10 Internet words of the year (Yue, 2021).

Baidu Baike defines lying flat more as a mentality or a life attitude that no longer actively strives for the mainstream definition of success, such as buying a house, making money and getting promoted (as cited in Lying Flat, n.d.). The Chinese version of Wikipedia also defines lying flat more as an attitude of low desire and as a way to combat social inwardness (as cited in Lying Flat, 2023). The English version of Wikipedia defines lying flat more as a lifestyle and social movement that people use to reject overwork and extreme social pressure (as cited in Tang Ping, 2023). This article also tends to define it as an attitude or lifestyle in which people who choose to be lying flat avoid unnecessary efforts by lowering their expectations and needs.

Since the term "lying flat" came into people's view in 2021, it has attracted wide attention at home and abroad, but it is mainly Chinese scholars who are studying it. Zhang Zixuan and Li Ke regarded lying flat as a kind of social movement and analysed emotional

economy, especially the effect of anxiety on the development of lying flat movement by studying the memes of lying flat. They believed that the main groups of people who are lying flat are newly entering the workplace and young people, and that the online culture of lying flat has given them a new collective identity. They recognized the inevitability of lying flat in the social anxiety caused by increasingly fierce competition and believed that the prevalence of lying flat culture reflects the change of cultural values in the process of class solidification in China. They found that lying flat is a manifestation of young people giving up excessive efforts at the expense of health and lowering expectations to relieve mental stress, while on a deeper level, lying flat is a combination of resistance to overall social anxiety and self-repair. (Zhang & Li, 2022)

Zheng Xuegang and Jing Changyu et al. explored the reasons why people choose to be lying flat from the perspective of personal relative deprivation. They believed that lying flat meant low self-improvement intention, and lying-flat people had negative attitudes towards achieving an ideal life or achieving success through personal efforts, so lying flat was more of a helpless compromise to the real life. (Zheng, Jing, Liu & Zhang, 2022) Yin Jie and Ji Yingchao et al. analysed the influence of involution on lying flat and found that involution had a significant negative impact on lying flat through its emotional exhaustion, workplace anxiety and the imbalance between effort and return (Yin, Ji & Ni, 2023).

From the perspective of globalization, some scholars have studied the discussion of the lying Flat movement on the international online community platform and found that the movement has almost received overwhelming support internationally, reflecting the universal plight of young people around the world. (Zhou, 2023) Zhou Changheng also discussed the characteristics, causes and solutions of lying flat from a broader perspective. He compared the young people in China with those in Japan, South Korea, and the western world, and divided them into two categories: those who are lying flat voluntarily for personal purposes such as traveling, and those who are lying flat involuntarily due to employment difficulties or bad working environment. He believed young people choose to be lying flat mainly because of educational and economic problems. In terms of education, these problems include overly tolerant family education, unreasonable structure of higher education, utilitarian education and low recognition of vocational education. On the economic side, these problems include

the high cost of living, class consolidation, and employment difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic's fatal blow to the economy. Still, the author argued that young people's lying-flat lifestyle would be a short-term strategy for self-preservation, and might lead them to rethink the definition of success. (Zhou, 2022)

To sum up, the current research on lying flat mainly focuses on the understanding of the concept of lying flat, the discussion on whether lying flat is positive or negative, the description of lying flat phenomenon, the main population and characteristics of lying flat, the causes and solutions of lying flat phenomenon, and the discussion on the commonalities between lying flat and other movements in the world. In addition, the word "lying flat" often appears together with "involution". The literature related to lying flat is mainly humanities and social sciences, but also involves economics, political science, management, media, philosophy and other fields.

Over the past two years, although many scholars have discussed the issue of lying flat in depth, some scholars have noted the negative impact of COVID-19 on lying flat by damaging the economy. However, in 2023, with the final failure of epidemic prevention and control in China and the complete end of the COVID-19 epidemic, I think it is necessary to conduct a study on the latest development of lying flat phenomenon. Compared with most countries in the world, the impact of COVID-19 on China's economy is not serious, but the economy will surely recover further after the end of the epidemic this year. I believe this will have a huge impact on people's lives, and at the same time, the phenomenon of lying down will also bring new changes. Moreover, I also found that almost no scholars adopted the method of in-depth interview to study the lying flat problem. To this end, this thesis will combine content analysis and in-depth interview to explore the latest development and characteristics of the lying flat phenomenon in China at the end of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2023.

### **3.Methods and Data**

This thesis adopts the method of combining qualitative research and quantitative research to conduct the research in two parts. The first part adopts the method of content analysis, and the second part adopts the method of in-depth interview.

### 3.1 Content Analysis and Data

In order to explore the latest performance of lying flat phenomenon in the period of the epidemic coming to an end and economic recovery, people's latest views on lying flat, the characteristics and development trend of lying flat, and its influence on society, culture and individuals, the first part of this study will be carried out by the content analysis method.

On the one hand, this study plans to collect social comments about lying flat from Weibo and Zhihu for content analysis. Weibo is the most influential social media in China, and its users are also the most diversified. Given the popularity of "lying flat" as an online culture, Weibo would be the most appropriate platform to search for relevant comments, pictures, memes, cases, etc. Zhihu, as the most well-known and widely used question-and-answer community in China, also contains a large number of discussions about lying flat. Moreover, the anonymity and professionalism of the comments on Zhihu are higher than those on Weibo, and the text content is the main content. At the same time, Weibo and Zhihu are selected as the collection sources for the lying-flat content analysis, which can make up for each other's shortcomings and expand the breadth and dimension of the collected content.

On the other hand, this study will also select texts and pictures about lying flat from Chinese official news and newspapers, such as CCTV News, for content analysis, so as to obtain the latest attitude of Chinese authorities towards lying flat. The benefits of analysing the official content are not just that it may contain more and more accurate data, a broad picture of lying flat, and more representative statements and cases. Only by integrating and comparing the official content and social content can we have a more complete, clear, dialectical and objective cognition of the lying flat phenomenon.

Using content analysis for research can save costs. Investigators only need to collect the data themselves, without the direct involvement of others, it's convenient and fast. In addition, a study following systematic content analysis can be easily replicated by other researchers, which means that the results of content analysis can have high reliability. But this method has its limitations. First, content analysis will inevitably mix with researchers' subjective cognition, which will affect the reliability and validity of research results. And researchers must always be careful to avoid focusing too much on certain words or phrases,

as this can lead to the context and nuances being overlooked. In addition, coding text manually can also be time-consuming. (Luo, 2022)

### **3.2 In-depth Interview and Data**

In order to obtain a more specific understanding of lying flat, reflect the overall situation through in-depth research on some representative individuals, trace the emergence, change and development of lying-flat thought, and study the performance, characteristics and causes of lying flat from a more diversified perspective. And at the same time, considering that few scholars have studied lying flat with in-depth interview research method in the past, the second part of this study will adopt the in-depth interview method.

The sampling method of in-depth interview is more accurate. Through in-depth interviews, researchers can not only obtain answers to key questions, but also obtain a lot of additional information from interviewees. Through extended discussion of such information, researchers can not only have a more comprehensive understanding of research questions, but also gain new insights. However, this method also has obvious disadvantages, such as the interviewer's interviewing ability will affect the whole interview, and interview is a costly and time-consuming research method, which requires careful selection of interviewees, design of interview questions, negotiation of interview methods and coordination of time in the early stage, detailed records during the interview, and careful sorting and analysis after the interview. (Bhat, n.d.)

Since the majority of people who are lying flat are young people, this study plans to interview 10 to 20 Chinese young people aged 20 to 30 within two hours each time, mainly through online voice calls. This study will adopt the purposive sampling method for sampling, and select representative interviewees according to the research questions. These interviewees should have significant differences in family economic background, permanent residence, employment status, education level, gender and other aspects. In this study, interview questions will be designed based on relevant literature, the results of the content analysis of lying flat in the first part and the experience accumulated by the researcher in daily life. For details, please see the appendix.

## 4. Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Content analysis results based on Weibo

Through pre-search and analysis of Weibo and official media, I found that although the contents on Weibo integrated various official and personal views, due to the extremely fast update of Weibo on hot events, it was difficult to search the contents on a topic of an event several months ago. Moreover, when I searched the topic of "lying flat" on Weibo, there was no search result, which was consistent with the situation that the topic of "lying flat" was banned by the Chinese government according to the previous literature review (as cited in Tang Ping, 2023).

I entered "lying flat" in the Weibo search box for advanced search, set the search type as "hot", and limited the search time from January 1, 2023 to March 6, 2023. I found that there were 50 pages of web pages in the search result, and the search content could date back to at most one month ago. At the same time, the results are not accurate. Although most of the search content is related to the sociological concept of "lying flat", there is also a considerable amount of content related to the physical sense of "lying flat", such as "lying-flat weight training" and "lying-flat skiing".

However, the search on Weibo is not entirely fruitless. Through browsing the search results, I found that the official media on Weibo, for some reason, have an obvious and highly consistent attitude on the topic of "lying flat", which is manifested in that the official media usually repost articles published by other official media, especially the more influential ones. In addition, there are two obvious ways for Chinese official media to comment on events related to "lying flat". One is to analyse and criticize the events of obvious "lying-flat" nature in a long way; the other is to praise and appeal the events of obvious "non-lying-flat" nature or "inspiring" nature in a short space.

According to the search results, the latest and most influential "lying flat" related topic on Weibo is "be alert to the spread of lying flat mentality", which originated from an article published by Beijing Daily on March 3, 2023, in response to the news that "Shanghai's post-1980s couple retired early after saving 3 million yuan" (Chao, 2023). Under this topic, the Beijing Daily article was forwarded by official media such as Ifeng Finance and National Business Daily, and also triggered a wide discussion among people. Other state media posts

related to "lying flat" include "65-year-old man taught himself English for 45 years," posted by the Paper, and "95-year-old grandmother claims to refuse to be lying flat," reposted by Sina Variety Show and Youku. These are often video interviews with short sentences encouraging young people not to be lying flat.

Therefore, this study will choose this article in Beijing Daily as a sample for content analysis to explore the Chinese official views and attitudes towards the "lying flat" phenomenon. At the same time, from the retrieved 50 pages, the 20 microblogs published by individuals with the highest number of likes were selected as content analysis samples to explore the public's focus of attention or main approval for "lying flat". At the same time, this study will also select the 20 microblogs published by individuals with the highest number of likes from the retrieved 50 pages as content analysis samples to explore the public's focus of attention or main approval of "lying flat". And in this study, Nvivo was used as the coding tool for content analysis. The results of content analysis are as follows.

As shown in Table 1, by coding the article of Beijing Daily, a total of 6 topics are determined for the article. Among them, the definition of lying flat and the description of the current social situation accounted for the most space, followed by the harm of lying flat and the significance of hard work, but on how to solve the phenomenon of lying flat in society, Beijing Daily only gave a sentence.

Table 1

*The results of coding the article of Beijing Daily*

Subject	Reference point
meaning of work	2
solution to the lying flat phenomenon	1
current social situation	3
definition of lying flat	3
lying flat is negative	2
lying-flat stories on the Internet is not true	2

Source: compiled by the author

Specifically, in terms of social status, Beijing Daily believes that different jobs have different conditions, “more-pay, less-work and work-near-home” jobs and highly stable jobs do not exist, and the "lying flat" stories on the Internet are mostly false. At the same time, as the largest developing country, China has many problems to solve. This is a busy time, but it

also has more opportunities. When it comes to the definition of lying flat, Beijing Daily puts it on a par with “being a waste”, “declining spirit of struggle” and “being lazy before getting rich”, saying it is harmful to young people and society as a whole. As for the significance of hard work, Beijing Daily believes that it is the social responsibility of people as social people, and also the realization of their own values and ideals. Beijing Daily's solution to the problem of “lying flat” in society is to improve labour security and ensure access to promotion.

The retrieved microblogs were screened based on the principle of "more likes to less likes", and a total of 20 personal microblogs with the most likes were selected as samples. The posts received a maximum of 15,552 likes and a minimum of 264. The latest one was posted on March 6, 2023, while the oldest one was posted on February 5, 2023. These microblogs were coded, and the coding results are shown in Table 2.

The 20 microblogs cover four topics, namely, the current situation of society, the nature of lying flat, the definition of lying flat and the consequences of lying flat. The corresponding reference points are 23, 15, 13 and 6 respectively. Each post has a different focus on the current social situation, but they are basically explaining the serious problems existing in Chinese society. They believe that it is because these problems are not being solved that China's young people or working population actively or passively choose to be lying flat.

Among these problems, the most frequently cited problem was the lack of labour security. Specifically, it includes companies failing to comply with labour laws and people being forced to work overtime without being paid for it and so on. The second most cited problem was workplace corruption, where people can get promoted through shady means such as personal connections or bribes rather than their true ability to work. In addition, low salary and heavy workload were also mentioned more often. It can be seen that the reasons for lying flat are related to economic issues, but people are more concerned with issues of fairness and justice. And compared with the previous literature, although lying flat can also refer to "lack of effort in study" and "low desire to buy a house, get married and have children", people are more talking about "lying flat at work" which is directly related to economic income.

Table 2

*The results of coding the 20 personal microblogs with the most likes*

Subject	Classification	Reference point
Current social situation	Popularity of entertainment first	1
	Chance of success exists	1
	Unfair distribution of income	1
	High housing prices	1
	Low wage	2
	Heavy workload	2
	Less vacation	1
	Class solidification	1
	Polarization of the rich and the poor	1
	The biggest expenses for ordinary people are buying a house and raising children	1
	Ordinary people cannot survive	1
	Lack of labour security	4
	High unemployment rate	1
	Growing up with intimidation that only success is allowed	1
	Workplace corruption	3
Workplace discrimination	1	
Nature of lying flat	Lying flat is reasonable	9
	Lying flat is negative	6
	Abiding by labour laws	3
Definition of lying flat	Indulging in pleasure	2
	No working	1
	Low desire	3
	Enough rest	2
	No house, no marriage, no children	2
Consequences of lying flat	Happy life based on material base	3
	Obstructed economic cycle	1
	Labour appreciation	1
	People are hard to survive	1
	Become relaxed and happy	1
	Postponed retirement	1
	Pension reduction	1

Source: compiled by the author

In such a problematic society, more people think lying flat is reasonable and fewer people think lying flat is negative, but the difference in the ratio (9:6) is not large. The former believes that lying flat is a personal choice, and one of many lifestyles. Especially when social problems are difficult to solve, it is not the fault of individuals to choose to be lying

flat, and they believe that lying flat can make people's lives easy and happy. However, the latter criticizes lying flat as negative, but does not give a clear explanation why lying flat is negative, and they associate "lying flat" with "idleness", "boredom" and "hopelessness", considering it "sin", "shame" and "self-destruction". The two views are not completely opposed, but through observation and analysis, I find that the difference between the two views stems to some extent from different understandings of the definition of lying flat.

By analysing the 16 reference points of the definition of lying flat, I found that there are wide differences in people's understanding of lying flat. But in general, most people think that "lying flat" in the eyes of the so-called experts is all about consumption, no work, no money, and indulging in pleasure. However, in reality people tend to pursue a balance between work and life, a balance between income and consumption, a balance between material resources and physical and mental health. Specifically, companies are expected to abide by labour laws and not force people to work overtime, and if they do, they will be paid accordingly. On this basis, people can ensure that there is sufficient free time to rest or entertainment, people can also reasonably adjust their consumption desire according to their income. Obviously, if you define lying flat as the former, then there's no argument that it's negative, but if you define it as the latter, then it seems very reasonable that people would choose to be lying flat.

For the consequences of lying flat, a total of six reference points were coded. Some people think that lying flat can lead to an easy and happy life, while others think that lying flat can make it difficult to survive, and these are possible consequences on an individual level. In my opinion, the difference between the two is mainly caused by the inherent differences of individuals, such as family economic background and personal consumption desire. For this question, I will explore further in the content analysis and interview below. On an economic level, either "working less" or "consuming less," as defined by "lying flat," has a negative impact on economic growth. Subsequently, in order to avoid the negative effects of lying flat, the country may take measures such as delaying the retirement age and reducing the pension.

## 4.2 Content analysis results based on Zhihu

By entering "lying flat" in the Zhihu search box to search, setting the sorting method of the search results to "most agreed" first, and setting the search time to "within 3 months", a total of 30 answers were screened out as samples. These answers received a maximum of 11,000 agreements and a minimum of 150 agreements, with the latest posted on March 16, 2023 and the earliest posted on January 12, 2023. These answers are aimed at questions related to lying flat, such as "How to view the phenomenon of young people lying flat", "Will lying flat destroy young people", "Why are more and more people lying flat now", and "Are those who claim to be lying flat really lying flat? People around me are working hard". The results of coding these samples are shown in Table 3.

By coding 30 samples, a total of 9 subjects were determined, namely the current social situation, the relationship between lying flat and the economic base, the definition of lying flat, the reasons for lying flat, the consequences of lying flat, and the performance of lying flat and not lying flat, the state of lying flat, the rationality of lying flat, and the status of the remarks about lying flat. The corresponding reference points are 27, 5, 10, 19, 8, 21, 11, 9 and 4 respectively.

A total of four of the 30 answers said that comments on their answers had been deleted by Zhihu. The four did not know the content of the comments, but said they had not deleted anyone's comments, and warned that the Internet is under the supervision of the law and people should be careful what they say. From this point, it can be seen that the Chinese government still attaches great importance to the lying flat phenomenon and regulates and controls related speech, which is consistent with the previous reference that the Chinese government holds a negative view on "lying flat" and controls the content of related speech.

The fact that comments were deleted from both Weibo and Zhihu not only suggests that the two platforms are controlled and politically correct, but also suggests that the Chinese government is likely monitoring what is being said on more platforms. In this case, content analysis based on network text has certain limitations, and maybe more different information can be obtained through in-depth interviews.

Table 3

*The results of coding the 30 answers related to lying flat on Zhihu*

Subject	Classification	Reference point
Current social situation	Young people are expected to dedicate, marry and have children	1
	Marriage is a luxury	2
	Unfair distribution of income	2
	High housing prices	5
	Low wage	6
	Heavy workload	2
	Severe involution	2
	Long commuting time	1
	Working is a social morality	1
	Freelancing is more cost-effective	1
	Lack of labour security	1
Lying flat and economic base	High unemployment rate	3
	They are related	4
	They are not related	1
	Abiding by labour laws	4
Definition of lying flat	No house, no marriage, no children	2
	No working	1
	Enough rest	3
Lying flat is reasonable		9
	COVID-19	2
	Beyond hope	3
	High housing prices	3
	Corruption	2
	Class solidification	1
	Negative emotions	2
	Low wage	2
	Employment difficulty	1
	Unfair distribution of income	1
Mismatch between effort and reward	2	
Lying flat and not lying flat	Manifestation of lying flat	12
	Manifestation of not lying flat	9
	Positive emotions	4
Consequence of lying flat	Healthy body	2
	Being condemned	1
	More free time	1
Comments are deleted		4
Situation of lying flat	Have been lying flat	5
	Can't be lying flat	4
	Plan to be lying flat	2

Source: compiled by the author

Unsurprisingly, in these answers, the description of the current social situation still dominated, followed by the description of the specific manifestations of lying flat and not lying flat, and the analysis of the reasons for lying flat.

In terms of the social situation, the most mentioned were excessively high and rising housing prices and low and slow-growing wages. The most prominent manifestation of low wages is relative to housing prices. It is almost impossible for the vast majority of young people in China to afford a house solely on their own income. In fact, if there is a phrase to describe the ridiculously high housing prices in China, it is that "to buy a house, you need to empty six wallets——your wallet, your parents' wallets, your spouse's wallet, and your spouse's parents' wallets." However, in the traditional concept of Chinese people, a house is necessary to form and maintain a family. Since people cannot afford such high housing prices, marriage must become a luxury.

In addition, according to the answers, the current situation of the job market in China is that more and more people are highly educated, and the phenomenon of involution is extremely serious; It is difficult for people to find jobs, and the unemployment rate after employment is high; Working people lack labour security, and heavy workloads, long commutes, unpaid overtime, and extremely compressed rest time are quite common. In the wake of this, young people are both unable to ensure their physical health and their mental anxiety is growing.

However, society's demand for young people is that they give without expecting anything in return, consume to promote economic development, and have children to maintain the demographic dividend. Someone points out that in today's society, it is immoral not to work. It can be seen that there is a sharp contradiction between the difficult living situation of young people and social expectations, and this contradiction cannot be easily resolved by some efforts made by one side. And the problem of unfair distribution has not been solved. Under the pressure, young people have to start to find a new way of living, and lying flat is one of them. Besides, it is also suggested that freelancing, where you can arrange your workload and hours, might be a better option.

In the answers, 12 reference points involved lying flat performance and 9 reference points involved non-lying flat performance. According to the codes, low material desire is still the most central characteristic of lying flat, as shown by no house, no marriage and no children. Working or not is not a necessary indicator to distinguish between lying flat and not lying flat. Although lying flat is often associated with relaxing at home or traveling, some of these lying-flat people do not work and some are freelance workers.

And for ordinary workers, lying flat is a flat attitude towards everything in the work, without emotions or with some negative emotions to work. They treat their work as a task and strive to do it to the lowest possible standard, rather than to do it well or to come up with their own ideas, or to find joy in their work or to realize their own value through their work, and they steadfastly refuse to sacrifice any of their personal free time for their work.

Regardless of whether they have a job or not or how much they have saved, people who are lying flat only spend money on essential things like insurance and food. They spend more time on rest and hobbies, and these hobbies are usually less expensive hobbies, such as cooking, reading, watching videos and playing games, etc. There are also lying-flat people who enjoy expensive entertainment such as travel or spend extra money on other things, but they will never spend more than they can afford.

In contrast, those who are not lying flat are constantly striving to buy a house, get married, have children and live a better and more decent life. Their regular jobs, combined with long commutes and endless overtime, cause their bodies to be overwhelmed and suffer from various illnesses, which in turn increase their medical expenses. They don't have enough rest time, not to mention time with their families and free time. Some even died of acute myocarditis after being asked to go to work even after contracting COVID-19. It can be seen that in China, "not lying flat" does not correspond to "hard work", but to "very hard work" and "excessive effort", and sometimes such efforts cost lives.

People who are not lying flat often work in big cities where there are supposed to be more so-called opportunities and better development prospects, but their salaries are not high compared to the rent and other living costs there, and many even need their parents to pay for their rent to maintain their inherently relatively high consumption levels. And in order to achieve their goal of buying a house, getting married and having children, they need to take

out loans from various sources and carry debt for decades, in addition to the financial support their parents will inevitably give them (from savings and pensions). Therefore, not only do people who pursue not lying flat have a lot of pressure, but their parents also have a certain amount of pressure.

By analysing and comparing the lives of people who are lying flat and those who are not, we have been able to figure out why some people choose to be lying flat. By the end of 2022, China's prevention and control of COVID-19 gradually failed, resulting in almost the entire population of China infected with COVID-19. This made many people suddenly realize that life is fragile and short, so they decided to live more in the present and enjoy life, rather than blindly pursue the future after making money and saving money. Others saw the lack of human interest and the prioritization of interests at work during the pandemic, which discouraged them and made them reluctant to work harder.

Despite the pandemic, the reason most people are lying flat is that they can't see hope. For example, houses are extremely expensive compared with their wages, and people who work hard can't compete with people with backgrounds and connections. In a society with rigid classes, people have little hope to cross the class themselves, so they don't want their children to suffer in the same class, and they don't believe that the next generation can cross the class more easily, so they choose not to have children. The barriers to employment are getting higher and higher, and there is no equal reward for effort. People suffer from anxiety about their ability to fulfil their desires and eventually choose to lower their desires, that is, be lying flat, in order to achieve a kind of mental balance and stop self-denial.

In addition, 9 reference points out of 30 samples clearly stated that lying flat was reasonable, understandable, forced or harmless, while no text was coded as negative or harmful, which may be due to errors caused by the small sample size or the characteristics of Zhihu as a platform. Compared with Weibo, it contains less official media opinions and mainly individual opinions. Therefore, it is entirely possible that the content of one tendency is far more than that of other tendencies.

As far as the collected samples are concerned, some people think that lying flat at home is indeed more economical than going to work in a big city, so lying flat is reasonable; some people think that poor people live a good life in a way that suits them without harming

others, so lying flat is reasonable; some people think that lying flat at the cost of sacrificing their health does more harm than good, so lying flat is reasonable; some people are forced to be lying flat because no matter how hard they try, there is no hope; some people think that lying flat means normal work on weekdays and rest on rest days, so they think lying flat is reasonable.

By analysing the 9 reference points coded as the definition of lying flat, it can be seen that the selected samples have relatively consistent definitions of lying flat, in short, do not buy a house, do not get married, do not give birth to children, and find a job that follows the labour laws and gives two days off on weekends to support yourself. But there is also a reference point to the idea that lying flat means staying at home and not working, spending money instead of earning it. In the samples studied, the former view was overwhelmingly dominant, but I don't think the two views of lying flat are completely opposite.

Combined with the performance of the lying flat, if the disadvantages of working outside outweigh the benefits or the income is not enough, the lying-flat people will turn to the home to rest. But whether living on the support of their parents or their past savings, the idleness of working at home is only a transitional stage for most lying-flat people. With the exception of a few who have plenty of savings, most people will end up looking for the next job or freelancing that fits their "lying flat" goal.

The people who pursue lying flat don't buy a house, get married or have children, so they naturally save a huge amount of expenditure. At the same time, their requirements for money are enough to meet the normal life. The lower consumption makes them really don't spend too much energy in order to earn a lot of money.

Therefore, we can believe that the latter negative definition of lying flat is a relatively partial and limited definition derived from a part of the phenomenon of lying flat. In fact, the definition of lying flat should be more inclined to the former, even if it is not positive, but at least not negative.

As for the relationship between lying flat and economic base, one person thinks that lying flat has nothing to do with economic base, and four people think that lying flat has something to do with economic base. That is to say, rich people may not be lying flat, and

poor people may also be lying flat. Lying flat or not, is the result of a variety of factors, economic basis is not decisive.

But if you choose to be lying flat, you have to consider some degree of economic factors. Whether it is lying flat at home without working, or lying flat as a freelance worker, or lying flat as an ordinary worker, the savings or economic income must still meet the basic needs of life. Although the people who are lying flat have a lower material desire, they still always need more or less consumption. Lying flat is related to economic base, that is to say, whether it is to increase economic income or reduce material desire, it is lying flat that the economic base can afford the material desire. If the economic base cannot afford the material desire, people will have anxiety and so on, which is not true lying flat.

Either actively or passively, five reference points were coded as "already lying flat," and these five people were either the respondent himself or someone he observed around him. Four reference points were coded as "unable to be lying flat". These people said that to live a slightly better life, "lying flat" is impossible, meaning that it is not easy to drastically reduce material desires. At the same time, they reported that even if they wanted to be lying flat, there were tangible and intangible pressures from parents, relatives, friends, and people around them that made it difficult for them to do so, that is, regardless of their surroundings, it was difficult for them to maintain the idea of lying flat and not be influenced by others. Others said the inability to be lying flat was due to the difficulty of finding a job that allowed them to be lying flat.

Two other reference points were coded as "plan to be lying flat", the common characteristic of which was that both people already had some savings, and their lying flat was either not working or looking for a relatively easy job. Thus, the proportion of people with a tendency to be lying flat is probably not low in reality.

The consequences of lying flat can be divided into the influence on the lying flat person and the influence on the society. According to the coding results, lying flat has basically positive effects on the people who are lying flat, including physical health, happiness, more free time, can do what they want to do, and even more savings. The only negative effect mentioned is that people who choose to be lying flat may be attacked by public opinion. The mentioned social effects of lying flat are mostly negative. People who are

lying flat don't buy houses, don't get married, don't have children and spend less, which is considered to be very bad for the economy.

We can see that people who are lying flat are basically satisfied with their life after lying flat. At the same time, there is little discussion about the impact of lying flat on society, especially the negative impact of lying flat. This may be because people lack relevant professional knowledge, or it may be because it is difficult for people to find a way to live a better life without being able to live a good life, leaving them little room to think or care about whether that way will have an adverse effect on society.

### **4.3 Results and analysis of in-depth interviews**

As mentioned above, due to the limitations of content analysis based on network text, the research results and analysis in the second part of this paper are based on in-depth interviews with Chinese ordinary people in order to more truly understand their understanding and views on lying flat.

A total of 10 Chinese youth, 4 males and 6 females, were interviewed for this in-depth interview. They are between the ages of 23 and 26, and what they have in common is that until now they have mostly lived in China (including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan) and either never left or have not been away for more than two months. Their qualifications range from undergraduate to postgraduate. They currently live in different parts of China, of which three are currently living in the capital Beijing, four are currently living in Guangdong Province, two are currently living in Shanxi Province, and one is currently living in Shanghai. Their current living conditions are also different. One of them is studying for a bachelor's degree, two are working after graduating from a bachelor's degree, two are planning to go abroad for further higher education after graduating from a bachelor's degree, four are studying for a master's degree, and one is working after graduating from a master's degree. They study or work in a variety of industries, including education, art, media, medicine, politics, law, management. Of the ten people interviewed, six were only children and four were non-only children. In addition, their household economic conditions vary considerably.

All interviews were conducted through Tencent meetings. All interviews were recorded on mobile phones after consent was obtained from the respondents. The interview consent form, interview outline and prepared interview questions can be found in Appendix I,

Appendix II and Appendix III respectively. Interviews generally lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. After the interview, I organized the interview content into written materials according to the recording, but due to space limitations, it will not be presented in this paper.

The following are the main results and analyses of the interviews.

As for the concept or definition of lying flat, all 10 interviewees gave their own understanding. Overall, these understandings share a lot of common ground and similarities, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4

*Definition of lying flat by 10 respondents*

Subject	Reference point
Non-involution	2
Non-positivity	3
Self-mockery	2
Relaxation	2
Receptive attitude	2
Product of social circumstances	5
Freedom and randomness	2
Enjoying life	3
No own thinking	2
No socializing	1
Low desire for consumption or material things	1
Social trend of thought	1
Can be active or passive	3

Source: compiled by the author

Specifically, two people resorted to the concept of involution to explain lying flat, arguing that lying flat is “non-involution”. People either are lying flat without the ability of involution, or they are lying flat without the mentality of involution (Interview with informant JL, 23 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 13, 2023). Lying flat means doing what you need to do, completing the tasks you already have, not doing any extra work or effort, and accepting life as it naturally develops (Interview with informant L, 23 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 12, 2023).

Three people agreed that lying flat is about enjoying life, enjoying the fruits of one's efforts, and doing what one likes. Two people associated lying flat with "relaxation" or "easiness", and believed that lying flat was more relaxed towards life, work and study. Two

people think that lying flat is "freedom" or "randomness", you can do what you want to do, you can do not do what you don't want to do, and you can live in your own way.

Two people defined lying flat as a state of mind, believing that lying flat is a state of mind that accepts oneself or the status quo. Two people think that lying flat is a kind of self-mockery, a self-mockery of how they want their lives to be. One person thinks that lying flat is also a social trend of thought.

Five people think that lying flat is produced in response to the social environment. One of them thinks that lying flat is to get rid of the expectation that the traditional mainstream society requires people to work hard (Interview with informant Y, 24 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 10, 2023). Three of them think that lying flat is because people cannot stand or fail to cope with the great social pressure and competitive pressure, and one of them thinks that lying flat may also be to fight against social injustice and unreasonable rules.

Three people explicitly suggested that lying flat could be classified as active or passive. Three people mentioned that lying flat is a "non-positive" attitude or state, not having a strong motivation, not really wanting to make efforts, and not taking a positive attitude towards work and study. Two people suggested that lying flat is not doing your own thinking, but listening to or agreeing with the thoughts of others. One person suggested that lying flat might also include not socializing. One person mentioned that lying flat requires a reduction in consumer or material desires.

When it comes to the most central characteristic of lying flat, respondents were asked to summarize lying flat in one or a few words, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*The core characteristics of lying flat given by 10 respondents*

Subject	Reference point
Acceptance of the status quo	3
Indifference to the outside world	2
Randomness	2
Reduced pressure	1
Non-involution	1
Comfort	1
Low material desire	1

Source: compiled by the author

Three people believe that the core characteristic of lying flat is accepting the status quo, whether it is good or bad, having no desire to change it, and not pursuing or demanding what one does not have. Two people think that the core characteristic of lying flat is the indifferent attitude to the outside world, that is, there is not much reaction and attention to the people or things outside. Two people believe that the core characteristic of lying flat is to be casual, to follow your heart, to live your life as you like, and not to be kidnapped by the standards of others or society.

In addition, one person thought that the core feature of lying flat was less stress. One person believed that the core characteristic of lying flat is non-involvement, that is, not making excessive efforts. One person believed that the core feature of lying flat is a comfortable state of mind and body (Interview with informant XY, 27 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 11, 2023). One thought that the core characteristic of lying flat was low material desire.

As for the rationality of the existence of lying flat phenomenon, all 10 participants clearly indicated that lying flat is reasonable, among which 6 believed that lying flat is inevitable and 1 believed that lying flat is not inevitable. Please see Table 6.

Table 6

*10 respondents' common views on the rationality of lying flat*

Subject	Reference point
Result of the current social environment	4
Universality and consistency	3
Necessity for the body	2
Inevitability of the mind	2
Life goal	2
Inevitable law of historical development	2

Source: compiled by the author

Specifically, four people believe that lying flat is inseparable from the current social environment and situation as well as economic development. The impact of the epidemic on the economy, employment difficulties, high housing prices and low wages have made people's lives increasingly difficult. Efforts are not rewarded and upward mobility becomes difficult, leading people to see no hope. At the same time, the development of new technology requires people to make rapid progress in a short period of time, so that people

are under great pressure and the pace of life is fast. In such circumstances, it is reasonable for people to want to be lying flat.

Three people believe that lying flat is universal and always present, and that the present lying flat has no different characteristics independent of the past lying flat. Two people think that people's energy is limited, people will be mentally tired and physically tired, and always need to rest, so it is reasonable to be lying flat. Two people think that lying-flat mentality is inevitable, people will always have such a mentality.

Two people believe that lying flat is the ultimate goal of life. People work hard and accumulate wealth in the early stage in order to enjoy life, have mental freedom and physical comfort in the later stage, so it is reasonable to be lying flat. Two people believe that lying flat is an inevitable situation when society and history develop to a certain stage, and it is an inevitable pain in the rising stage of human society. One person thinks that there is no necessity for the appearance of lying flat, because lying flat is a new word, not a historical law, but a social phenomenon.

As for the relationship between lying flat and economic base, 9 out of 10 respondents think that lying flat requires a certain economic base or a relatively higher economic base. They believe that people who cannot even make a living have no conditions and qualifications to be lying flat, and that ordinary people at the bottom of the bottom, who have not yet reached the subsistence line and cannot support themselves, will still work hard to survive. But people with better economic conditions, who can at least meet the basic life, will want to be lying flat and pursue the life they really want.

Only 1 believed that lying flat did not require an economic basis. He believed that people could be lying flat if they wanted to, and that it was mainly the poor who would be lying flat as a helpless countermeasure to society. (Interview with informant N, 24 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 11, 2023)

In addition, four believed that the economic basis for lying flat depended on the needs of the individual. If a person has low needs or is easily satisfied, then the economic basis for lying flat is low. And vice versa. They believe that as long as the economic base can meet the needs of the individual, then a person can be lying flat.

When I asked whether lying flat meant not working, the 10 respondents gave the same answer. They all agree that lying flat is not necessarily related to working. Specifically, they believe that lying flat does not have to be physically lying at home. Whether working or not, people may have the idea or practice of lying flat. Under the premise of ensuring economic foundation, staying at home and not working is a kind of lying flat. Lying flat at work means refusing to work overtime, or having a relatively inactive attitude toward work, or not seeking promotion, or having the time and money to enjoy life. In addition, they also think that freelancing or choosing a relatively easy job is a form of lying flat in itself.

Regarding the question of whether lying flat is easy to achieve, 8 out of 10 respondents said that lying flat is not easy to achieve, and 2 respondents said that lying flat is easy to achieve. The reason why lying flat is easy to achieve is that lying flat itself has a very low threshold, and it is not difficult to achieve a lying-flat mentality.

And there are roughly three reasons to think that lying flat is not easy to achieve. First of all, people must have a certain economic base to meet the necessities of life. Second, it is hard to lower your needs and desires and accept yourself and the reality, and few people can do it without going through a painful process. Finally, it is difficult for people to get rid of the influence of the environment, including the expectations and requirements of society, the opinions of others, the tangible and intangible pressure given by parents and peers, and irresistible factors.

Therefore, almost all of the people interviewed indicated that there are very few people actually lying flat in real life, and only one indicated that he did not know. They believe that everyone may have some degree of lying flat, but that few people are truly fully lying flat, and that passive lying flat is far more common than active lying flat. Many people who claim to be lying flat are still hard at work and study (Interview with informant GL, 23 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 17, 2023). And the majority of lying-flat people exist online.

However, all 10 respondents agreed that there are a lot of people who want to be lying flat in real life. Lying flat, they say, means an easier and more comfortable life, which everyone instinctively craves. One of them also said that unless the society came to communism, everyone wanted to work from the bottom of their heart, and work became a

personal need for survival rather than a means to make a living, then people would not want to be lying flat (Interview with informant SY, 24 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 10, 2023).

When asked if anyone was lying flat around them, 7 out of 10 respondents said that no or very few people were lying flat around them. And the other three could each give only one example of someone lying flat around them.

The person lying flat in Case 1 has a bachelor's degree. After two years of failure in the entrance examination for graduate school, she chose to work in Beijing. However, she did not find a job with an average salary in Beijing, which she thought was caused by the insufficient quality of her undergraduate major and university. Therefore, she was forced to be lying flat. Now she doesn't work and is financially dependent on her father and boyfriend. She hasn't given up looking for good job opportunities, but her parents are a little anxious about her current state.

The person lying flat in Case 2 has a very stable job, which her parents helped her find for 150,000 RMB. Although the salary is below the local average, the work is simple and boring, and it takes her three hours to commute to work while living with her parents, she doesn't want to look for another job. She and her parents are happy with the situation, even though she originally planned to find a job in a big city, but a variety of factors eventually led to her current situation. (Interview with informant JB, 24 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 11, 2023)

The person lying flat in Case 3 is currently studying for a master's degree in a big city, and she does not work very hard compared with those around her. While her classmates may be immersed in the lab from morning to night Monday to Sunday, she may choose to enjoy herself on weeknights and weekends by going to the park or taking short trips. At the same time, she has a good mentality, she likes this way of life and is not affected by the people around her. (Interview with informant JB, 24 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 12, 2023)

When the 10 participants rated themselves, nine did not consider themselves lying flat and one did. Some of these nine people feel anxious, some feel pressure, some are not content with the current situation, and some feel uncomfortable with life, so they think they are not lying flat. Seven of them expressed a desire to be lying flat and two said they did not want to

be lying flat. Reasons for wanting to be lying flat include tiredness, an attachment to the comfort zone and a great fear of endless involution, being lying flat as the ultimate goal in life, feeling confused and disappointed with past efforts.

Although they want to be lying flat, on the one hand, because of the sunk costs, the time and effort that have been invested in the past, they can't be lying flat until they get the results they want. On the other hand, they cannot be lying flat for the sake of their family's expectation, for the sake of winning in the fierce social competition, for the sake of higher income, for the sake of supporting their family in the future, and for the sake of being able to do what they want. And the two people who didn't want to be lying flat gave almost the same reasons for not wanting to be lying flat as the aforementioned reasons for not being able to be lying flat.

The only interviewee who is currently lying flat said that he learned what a good life is like through reading books, and felt that people in his society had a wrong understanding of a good life, so he chose what he thought was the right way of life and did not care about others' opinions. His week, he described, consisted of working two days or 15 hours, auditing three days at a nearby university, and two days for his own recreation, such as reading. He decided that lying flat was his best option for the time being, and he was satisfied and intended to continue in this manner until the social circumstances which he considered unfair and unreasonable were rectified. He feels physically and mentally healthy, but he says his parents just grudgingly accept his condition because it doesn't fit their expectations. He also said that his lying flat tends to be confrontational lying flat, which is essentially to resist the system. (Interview with informant DX, 26 years old, on Tencent Meeting, Apr 10, 2023)

When asked about the state's attitude towards the phenomenon of lying flat, four out of 10 respondents said that the state did not have a clear attitude or was neutral, that is, the state both encouraged people to strive hard and allowed people to be lying flat. They think it is reasonable for the state to take such an attitude, because the state only asks the talented and capable people not to be lying flat and make more contributions to benefit the country and the people, while allowing most ordinary people to be lying flat.

Six people believe that the state is opposed to or critical of the lying flat phenomenon, because they observed that the People's Daily has designated "lying flat" as the annual hot

word and specifically criticized the lying flat phenomenon, and that the CCTV's responses to social hot topics and the articles published by the Communist Youth League of China have revealed an anti-lying flat attitude. At the same time, they also noticed that the state has continuously introduced policies to encourage childbearing and house purchase, and organized programs to encourage childbearing during the Spring Festival gala, which in their opinion also shows that the state does not support people to be lying flat.

Among the 6 people, 3 people think it is unreasonable for the state to oppose the lying flat phenomenon. On the one hand, they think the state is not empathetic, does not really understand people's feelings, and ignores the social reality behind such feelings. On the other hand, they think people should have the right to choose their own lifestyle without being criticized or interfered. Three people believe that it is reasonable for the country not to support lying flat, because the development of the country needs labour force, lying flat is contrary to the Chinese traditional enterprising values, and the country hopes that people have a positive attitude and can develop positively for a good reason.

In addition, three out of 10 respondents believed that the country valued lying flat. Two people said it was unclear whether the state took lying flat seriously. Three people believe that the state does not value the phenomenon of lying flat because few people are actually lying flat and it is not important enough for the state to pay attention to it. Two people think that the country does not pay enough attention to the phenomenon of lying flat, but the country should pay more attention to it or better understand its nature, pay attention to the problems behind it and take measures to solve these problems.

Similarly, 7 out of 10 respondents believe that the state will not react too much to the phenomenon of lying flat because there are very few people who are actually lying flat and the state's current focus is not there. Three people believe that the country is trying to curb the phenomenon of lying flat through a number of measures, such as ending the epidemic, lifting the lockdown, improving the social mentality and making people more confident about the future by improving the economy, using finance to create more jobs, introducing policies to encourage childbirth and entrepreneurship, coupled with negative publicity about lying flat.

However, it is not surprising that all 10 interviewed people believe that the companies attach great importance to the phenomenon of lying flat and firmly resist employees lying

flat. This is determined by the operation mode of enterprises themselves to maximize economic benefits by exploiting people's surplus value. They said that on the one hand, companies will adopt incentives to encourage employees to work hard, such as equity incentives, improved employee benefits, and the temptation of promotion and salary increase. On the other hand, companies will put pressure on employees and force them to work hard by means of layoffs, performance appraisal, and clocking in. In addition, employees are forced to work hard by invisible ways such as creating an atmosphere of overtime, a culture that promotes voluntary overtime, and the mind control of superiors over subordinates.

As for the factors that cause people to be lying flat, 10 respondents suggested a total of 21 possible reasons why people might want to be lying flat, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Reasons for lying flat suggested by 10 interviewees*

Subject	Reference point
Employment difficulty	3
High housing prices	4
High cost of living	5
Low wages	3
Difficulty in promotion	2
Economic downturn caused by the epidemic	4
Mismatch between effort and reward	3
Development of information technology	4
Layoffs	3
Increase in overall social wealth	1
Wide gap between rich and poor	1
Inherent inertia	1
Development of artificial intelligence	1
Involution	2
Ideal job	1
Devaluation of academic qualifications	1
High working intensity	1
Urban population saturation	1
Stress of marriage	1
Uneven educational resources	1
Delayed retirement	1

Source: compiled by the author

Among them, the most mentioned factor is the high cost of living, including high prices, high medical costs, and high education costs. The second is high housing prices, the

economic downturn caused by the pandemic, and the development of information technology, which allows people to re-examine their lives and has brought new and easier forms of entertainment. In addition, employment difficulties caused by few jobs and high recruitment requirements, low wages, unequal effort and return, and layoffs were also mentioned many times. Involution or fierce competition and difficulty in promotion were mentioned twice respectively.

The other 11 factors that were mentioned only once were the large gap between the rich and the poor caused by the large salary gap, the increase in total social wealth that makes it possible to be lying flat, the human nature to tend to stay in the comfort zone, the impact of the development of artificial intelligence on traditional occupations, the employment difficulties caused by the extension of retirement, the depreciation of academic qualifications, the high intensity of work, the saturation of urban population, the inequality of educational resources, stable jobs or jobs that do not require people to improve their abilities, and difficult marriages.

Six interviewees indicated that the above factors had an impact on their physical and mental health and life planning, while four indicated that the above factors had no significant impact on themselves and would continue to live according to the established plan.

Based on the discussion of the above questions, 5 out of 10 respondents believe that the number of people lying flat will increase. They said that with a growing population base, the number of people forced to be lying flat will definitely increase if the country does not solve the various social problems mentioned earlier. Two said it was difficult to determine whether the number of people lying flat would increase. Three people believe that the number of people lying flat will not increase as the economy recovers and develops.

When asked about the pros and cons of lying flat, 8 out of 10 respondents believed that lying flat is more beneficial than harmful to the individual. They say that if people choose to be lying flat, it is because lying flat is their best option. It is good for physical and mental health, makes people live more comfortably, and allows people to spend more time with their families. Its disadvantage is that it makes it difficult for individuals to move upward and is not conducive to individuals to cope with the social environment.

Two people think that the ratio of advantages and disadvantages of lying flat for individuals needs to be analysed concretely. They say that in general, it is better for an individual's own progress not to be lying flat, but if a person is already stressed and mentally broken, then it is better to be lying flat because it is more important to stay alive.

For society, four out of 10 respondents said it was difficult to judge whether lying flat would be better or worse for society. They say that because the actual number of people lying flat is so limited, it does not affect the overall development of society, and that the benefits and disadvantages of lying flat for society depend on what people do after lying flat. At the same time, the lying flat phenomenon gives us the opportunity to re-examine the society.

Two people believe that lying flat is more beneficial to society, because people lying flat are more likely to leave big cities and move to less developed areas, which helps to promote overall development by promoting local development. Four people believe that lying flat does more harm than good to society. Lying flat, they say, hampers innovation and thus social progress, while stagnation in social development leads to more people lying flat, creating a vicious cycle. At the same time, the national attitude against lying flat can also indicate that lying flat is more harmful to society.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Discussion based on content analysis**

Although the content analysis based on Weibo and Zhihu has certain limitations, it can basically reflect the general concerns and specific views of the people on lying flat to a certain extent, and the article in Beijing Daily can also represent the concerns and specific views of the Chinese government on lying flat to a large extent. However, through comparison, it is not difficult to find that their focuses on lying flat are not exactly the same, and their specific views on lying flat are almost opposite.

The primary focus of the samples from Weibo and Zhihu is to describe the current social situation. Both of them believe that there are many serious problems in the current Chinese society. It is precisely because these problems cannot be solved, people see no hope and suffer from physical and mental suffering, so they finally choose to be lying flat. The main problems are lack of labour security, workplace corruption, high housing prices and low

wages, severe involution, and COVID-19. The Beijing Daily’s article does not deny these problems, but argues that these are not the reasons to be lying flat and that life is still full of opportunities and hope. But it also believes these problems need to be addressed if lying flat is to be eradicated.

A certain amount of content in the samples of Weibo and Zhihu clearly indicates that lying flat is reasonable. The logic is roughly that if people are actively lying flat, then lying flat, as a lifestyle and personal choice, is reasonable and should not be interfered with. If people are forced to be lying flat, then it is a hopeless act, which is reasonable and not to blame. However, the Beijing Daily’s article argues that lying flat is necessarily negative and should be firmly resisted.

The samples from Weibo and Zhihu have the same positive definition of lying flat, that is, do not buy a house, do not get married, do not have children, have a relatively low consumption desire compared with the economic base, focus on life and try to pursue a balance with work, and pay much attention to the pursuit of physical and mental health. The Beijing Daily’s article, on the other hand, has a vague and negative definition of lying flat, which can simply be interpreted as "being a waste who doesn't make an effort".

The Weibo and Zhihu samples both believe that the consequences or effects of lying flat can be divided into individual and social levels. On an individual level, both are somewhat inclined to believe that lying flat is more beneficial than harmful and can make people live a better life. At the social level, both agree that lying flat does more harm than good, and that its adverse effects are mainly on the economy. However, according to the Beijing Daily’s article, lying flat is harmful to both individuals and society, while "not lying flat" can realize the value and ideal of life for individuals, and is also a responsibility and obligation for society.

In addition, according to the content analysis of the samples based on Zhihu, the Chinese authorities attach great importance to the lying flat phenomenon and closely monitor and control the comments related to lying flat. And there are probably more people in China who tend to be lying flat than people think. Meanwhile, the Beijing Daily’s article itself is evidence that Chinese authorities are taking the phenomenon seriously. But it believes that the number of people actually lying flat is limited.

## 5.2 Discussion based on in-depth interviews

According to the definition of lying flat of the 10 interviewees, people have different understandings of lying flat, and it is difficult to form a unified and clear definition of lying flat. But some of the respondents' interpretations of lying flat were highly similar. Therefore, based on people's main same or similar cognition of lying flat, it can be basically considered that lying flat means that people are dissatisfied with the current social environment, actively or passively accept themselves and accept the current situation, seek a more relaxed and free life they want, and take a relatively inactive attitude towards work or study. And according to the interview results, more people agree that the core characteristics of lying flat are acceptance of reality and following their heart without being influenced by the outside world.

According to the interviewees' answers, other characteristics of lying flat include that its existence is reasonable and inevitable, it is related to the economic base but not necessarily related to work, and it is not easy to realize because it is affected by three factors—— economic base, needs and desires, and environment.

By observing themselves and the people around them, the 10 respondents came to a relatively consistent view that in real life, few people are really completely lying flat, and many people want to be lying flat, but most of them have difficulty realizing their desire to be lying flat. This view is consistent with the results of previous content analysis.

Among the 10 interviewees, more people think that the state opposes or criticizes the phenomenon of lying flat, while fewer people think that the state has no attitude or holds a neutral attitude towards the phenomenon of lying flat. And whatever the state's attitude, most people agree with it. Most interviewees believe that the state does not pay attention to the phenomenon of lying flat and will not react too much to it. This may be because they do not regard the state's efforts to solve the social problems behind the phenomenon of lying flat as the state's reaction to the phenomenon itself. At the same time, all interviewees agree that the enterprises attach great importance to the phenomenon of lying flat and will resolutely resist employees lying flat through tangible and intangible measures, incentives and punishments.

According to the interview results, the reasons for lying flat can be roughly divided into two types, one is that people are forced to be lying flat due to various problems in the current social environment, and they cannot realize their wishes through their own efforts.

One is that people see more possibilities of life styles through various channels and actively seek the life they want. This is consistent with the results of the previous content analysis. More respondents also thought the number of people lying flat would increase.

On the whole, respondents think that lying flat is more beneficial to individuals, and has no obvious impact on society or is more likely to cause adverse effects on society. This is also consistent with the results of previous content analysis.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on the research results of content analysis and in-depth interviews, this paper draws the following conclusions on the definition, characteristics, causes, development trends and impacts of lying flat.

1. The Chinese authorities do not pay much attention to the lying flat phenomenon, but tend to oppose or criticize it, and do not have much reaction to the lying flat phenomenon itself.
2. Enterprises attach great importance to the phenomenon of lying flat and will resolutely resist employees lying flat through tangible and intangible measures, incentives and punishments.
3. Various problems currently existing in Chinese society are the most important factors for people to be lying flat. These problems include but are not limited to involution, devaluation of academic qualifications, employment difficulties, high housing prices, high cost of living, low wages, high work intensity, layoffs, difficulty in promotion, postponing retirement, large salary gap, large gap between the rich and the poor, corruption, COVID-19, class solidification, saturation of urban population, inequality of educational resources, complexity of marriage, lack of labour security and inequity of effort and return.
4. The development of information technology, which broadens people's horizons, allows them to re-examine their lives and brings new and easier forms of entertainment, the increase in the total wealth of society, stable jobs or jobs that do not require people to improve their abilities, and people's natural tendency to stay in their comfort zone are also factors that lead to people lying flat.

5. Lying flat tends to be positive for the individuals. It is the balance between work and life, income and consumption, material foundation and physical and mental health. Its adverse effects on individuals are mainly unfavourable to upward mobility and coping with the social environment.
6. There is a significant difference between the understanding and attitude of the Chinese authorities and the Chinese people towards lying flat.
7. In general, the impact of lying flat on society is limited, but tends to be negative. It hampers social progress by hindering economic development and technological innovation, and stagnation in social development creates a vicious cycle of more people lying flat. In response, the state chose to end the epidemic and lift the lockdown, improve the social mentality by improving the economy, use finance to increase employment, introduce policies to encourage childbearing, entrepreneurship and house purchase, and carry out negative publicity on lying flat through various media.
8. There is a sharp contradiction between the difficult existence of young people and the expectations placed on them by society, and lying flat is a sign of young people's inability to respond to social expectations.
9. Lying flat has nothing to do with whether you work or what you do, but lying flat requires a certain economic base, which should at least meet the needs and desires of the individuals.
10. Lying flat is not easy to achieve, because first, one needs to have a certain economic basis to meet the necessities of life, second, it is difficult to reduce needs and desires, accept oneself and reality, and finally, it is difficult to get rid of the influence of the environment.
11. Everyone may have some degree of lying flat, but few people are actually completely lying flat, and passive lying flat is far more common than active lying flat. However, because lying flat is an instinctive desire of everyone, there are many people who want to be lying flat in real life.
12. The number of people lying flat is more likely to increase.

13. Lying flat is reasonable for the individual. If people are actively lying flat, then lying flat as a lifestyle and personal choice is reasonable and should not be interfered with. If people are lying flat passively, then it is a hopeless act, which is reasonable and should not be blamed.
14. No matter whether there is universality and continuity of the lying flat phenomenon, the existence of the lying flat phenomenon at the present stage is inevitable.
15. The main characteristics of lying flat are to accept yourself, accept the current situation, pursue a more relaxed and free life, take a relatively inactive attitude towards work or study, follow your heart and not be affected by the external environment.

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## APPENDIX A

## Consent Form

Thank you for considering participating in this research study. The purpose of this study is to have a deep and comprehensive insight into the current lying flat phenomenon in China. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Please read the following information carefully before signing this consent form.

**Purpose of the study:**

This study is devoted to exploring the concept, causes, characteristics, development trend and influence of the current lying flat phenomenon in China through in-depth interview and other methods.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an in-depth interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted via voice call by the researcher. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions related to lying flat. Please note that the interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy and later analysis.

**Confidentiality:**

All information you provide during the interview will be treated as confidential. The data collected will be stored securely and only accessed by the researcher. Any publications or reports resulting from this study will not include any personally identifiable information. If necessary, pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity.

**Risks and benefits:**

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. You may feel some discomfort discussing sensitive topics. However, you have the right to decline answering any question or stop the interview at any time. The potential benefits of participating in this study include contributing to the understanding of lying flat and informing future research or policy.

**Right to withdraw:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. If you decide to withdraw, any data you have provided up to that point will be destroyed.

**Consent:**

By signing this consent form, you acknowledge that:

1. You have read and understood the information provided above.
2. You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.

3. You understand that your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without consequences.

4. You agree to participate in the study and allow your interview to be audio-recorded.

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: Wang Yue

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher at wang.yue@ut.ee.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Outline

This interview outline was used as a guide during the in-depth interviews conducted as part of this study. The purpose of the outline was to ensure consistency across interviews and to help guide the conversation with participants.

#### I. Introduction

- a. Introduce myself and the study
- b. Explain the purpose of the interview
- c. Confirm consent to participate and record the interview

#### II. Interview

- a. Definition and characteristics of lying flat
- b. Examples of lying flat
- c. State and corporate attitudes towards lying flat
- d. The influence of lying flat and its rationality

#### III. Conclusion

- a. Summarize key points
- b. Ask if the participant has any additional comments
- c. Thank the participant for their time

## APPENDIX C

## Preliminary Interview Questions

These preliminary interview questions served as a starting point for the in-depth interviews conducted as part of this study. The questions were adapted and expanded upon based on the participants' responses and the natural flow of the conversation.

1. What do you think is lying flat?
2. What do you think is the core characteristic of lying flat?
3. Do you think the existence of lying flat is reasonable? Why?
4. Do you think people need an economic basis to be lying flat? Why?
5. Do you think freelancing is lying flat? Why?
6. Do you find lying flat easy to achieve? Why?
7. Do you think a lot of people are lying flat in real life? Why?
8. Do you think a lot of people want to be lying flat in real life? Why?
9. Are there any persons lying flat around you? Can you tell me more about them?  
(Age, studying/working, field, specific manifestations of lying flat, reasons for lying flat, are they satisfied with their life after lying flat, are they planning to continue lying flat in the future, attitudes of people around them, their financial condition)
10. How old are you? Are you studying or working? What field? Do you consider yourself lying flat? No——why and do you want to be lying flat? No——why? Yes——why and why cannot you make it come true? Yes——why and what's life like after lying flat? What is the attitude of the people around you? Are you satisfied with your life after lying flat? Do you plan to be lying flat in the future?
11. What do you think the state's attitude is towards lying flat? Why do you think so?
12. Do you think the state's attitude towards lying flat is reasonable? Why?
13. Do you think the state takes lying flat seriously? Why do you think so?
14. Do you think companies take lying flat seriously? Why do you think so?
15. What problems do you think exist in society today that might cause people to be lying flat? How are these issues affecting you and the people around you?
16. Do you think the state will do anything to stop people from lying flat? No——why? Yes——why? What measures are likely to be taken? Do you think that's right? Why?
17. Do you think companies will do anything to stop people from lying flat? No——why? Yes——why? What measures are likely to be taken? Do you think that's right? Why?
18. Do you think more and more people are lying flat? Why?
19. Do you think lying flat is more beneficial or harmful to the individual? Why? If lying flat does more harm than good, why are people lying flat?
20. Do you think lying flat is more beneficial or harmful to society? Why? If lying flat does more harm than good, should the person who is lying flat stop lying flat? Why?

### Resümee

Nähtus nimega "Tang Ping" ja selle omadused tänapäeva Hiina ühiskonnas

Wang Yue

See artikkel on pühendatud "Tang Ping" nimelise nähtuse määratluse, omaduste, ilmingute, põhjuste, mõjude ja suundumuste uurimisele, kui COVID-19 epideemia lõpeb ja Hiina majandus järk-järgult taastub.

Käesolevas artiklis on ühendatud kvalitatiivsed ja kvantitatiivsed uurimismeetodid. Kvantitatiivse analüüsi osas analüüsitakse selles artiklis kokku 50 teksti, millel on kõige rohkem meeldimisi. Need tekstid avaldati 2023. aasta jaanuarist märtsini. Tekstid pärinesid Hiina sotsiaalmeediast nimega Weibo ja Hiina küsimuste ja vastuste kogukonnast nimega Zhihu. Kvalitatiivse analüüsi osas intervjueriti põhjalikult kokku 10 hiinlast. Intervjueritavad olid umbes 24-aastased. Nad kõik on kõrgelt haritud ja elanud pikka aega Hiina mandriosas.

Selle uuringu tulemused näitavad, et Hiina ametivõimude ja Hiina rahva arusaamises ja suhtumises sellesse nähtusse on märkimisväärsed erinevusi. See artikkel väidab, et enamiku hiinlaste jaoks tähendab see nähtus enda ja status quo aktsepteerimist, töö- ja eraelu tasakaalu ning sissetulekute-tarbimise tasakaalu poole pöördlemist ning tervislikuma füüsilise ja vaimse seisundi poole pöördlemist teatud materiaalsel alusel.

Uuringus leitakse ka, et kuigi selle nähtuse olemasolu on mõistlik ja vältimatu, on enamik inimesi selle nähtusega passiivselt seotud. Praegu, kuigi selle nähtuse positiivne mõju üksikisikutele on laialdaselt tunnustatud, on Hiina ühiskonna erinevate probleemide tõttu inimestel harva vabadus seda mentaliteeti või elustiili järgida. Uuringu tulemused viitavad siiski sellele, et selle nähtusega seotud inimeste arv suureneb eeldatavasti nii passiivselt kui ka aktiivselt.

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Wang Yue  
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