

# The Social Root and Mitigation Path of "Lying Flat" and "Rat Race" : From the Perspective of Income Distribution Equity

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**Abstract:** In the past two years, the words of "lying flat" and "rat race" have become popular on the Internet, forming the unique self-ridicule culture of contemporary young people. The two seemingly opposite concepts, "lying flat" and "rat race," reflect the work and psychological state of the contemporary youth. However, we should not simply attribute these phenomena to the psychological characteristics of today's young people, but more deeply study the social roots of these phenomena. In order to practice Chinese-style modernization and achieve the goal of common prosperity, based on the perspective of the fair income distribution, this paper analyzes the "lying flat" and "rat race," excavates the social root of the formation of "lying flat" and "rat race," and discusses the corresponding mitigation path of the phenomenon of "lying flat" and "rat race."

**Keywords:** Income distribution; Lying flat; Rat race

## 1. Introduction

In the past two years, the words "rat race" and "lying flat" have been hanged by young people. In order to survive, they not only need to do their job well but also to learn new knowledge and skills outside of the job to avoid being eliminated by society. As a result, many people fall into endless internal consumption, which in turn creates a society full of anxiety. When the anxiety reached its limit, people began to be tired and expected to lie flat. On the one hand, the feverish young man shouted to lie flat, hoping to find a habitat in this fast-changing society. On the other hand, in order to maintain their livelihood, they are forced to continue to travel and work hard, but it is difficult to get corresponding rewards, even when faced with a survival crisis. As a new social phenomenon, the phenomenon of network "lying flat" not only profoundly shows the true appearance of a social "rat race," but also directly reflects the collective psychological state of young people. It is widely spread in public opinion and deeply affects the direction of social development. Although the young people who are shouting "lying flat" all the time on the network are mostly "lying flat," the people who are really lying flat are only a few, most of them are in the middle state of "lying and lying flat, rolling and not moving." However, the root of this phenomenon is closely related to the equity of income distribution. Many young people feel that struggle and enterprising are meaningless and unable to get a reasonable return, which leads them to choose to give up their struggle. The Twenty National Congress of the Party emphasizes perfecting the distribution system, standardizing the income distribution order, and standardizing the wealth accumulation mechanism. Therefore, in-depth research on the phenomenon of network "lying flat" is of great practical significance for promoting social development, solving practical problems, and regulating income distribution order<sup>[1]</sup>.

At present, the discussion of "lying flat" mainly focuses on self-media and mass media, but systematic research on it is relatively insufficient. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the social roots of the phenomenon of "lying flat" and "rat race" from the perspective of income distribution equity, and try to put forward the corresponding mitigation path.

## 2. Concepts of "lying flat," "rat race" and income distribution

### 2.1. Concept and Connotation of "lying flat"

The phenomenon of "lying flat" refers to the mentality and behavior that people are unable to bear

and gradually abandon the pursuit of success in the face of great practical pressure in modern society. From the perspective of economics, "lying flat" mainly refers to a behavior and concept that causes young people to choose to give up efforts and competition and not pursue personal ascension and development opportunities, thus having a negative impact on the productivity and creativity of the whole society. The phenomenon of "lying flat" is not only a cultural and social phenomenon but also an economic and social phenomenon. To a certain extent, the popularity of this behavior and concept maps some fundamental problems existing in the current society, such as insufficient employment opportunities, excessive work pressure, and high living costs. Although "lying flat" can be regarded as a response and resistance, it also has certain negative and passive. In essence, there is a high correlation between the phenomenon of "lying flat" and the phenomenon of "rat race," which is closely related to the unfair income distribution<sup>[2-3]</sup>.

## **2.2. Concept and Connotation of "rat race"**

The term "rat race" comes from the sociological term "rat race." According to the definition of American anthropologist Gilts, "Involved" refers to a certain social or cultural model after reaching a certain stage of development, because of the interaction between internal power and external pressure, forming a solidified state, it is difficult to achieve a higher level, more adapted to the needs of the times evolution. This concept was initially applied to the study of Java rice agriculture. Later, some Chinese college students simplified the word "involution" to "rat race", which not only contains the meaning of "rat race," but also enriches its connotation and level. From the economic point of view, the "involution" phenomenon is a kind of resource allocation failure, resulting in social and economic inefficiency and instability. This phenomenon is often associated with problems such as a decline in productivity, excessive input into the labor force, and demographic imbalances. "The rat race "may also lead to the simplification of the industrial structure and the rigidity of the labor market, which will affect the sustainable development and overall growth of the economy<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **2.3. Concept and Current Situation of Income Distribution**

The Twenty National Congress of the Party pointed out: "It is necessary to improve the distribution system, insist on distributing according to work as the main body, coexist in various distribution methods, insist on making more work and more work, encourage industrious enrichment, promote fair opportunities, increase the income of low-income people, expand the middle-income groups, standardize the income distribution order and standardize the wealth accumulation mechanism." Income distribution is closely related to equity, so it is not only necessary to realize fair opportunities, but also to improve the income level of middle and low-income people and regulate the wealth accumulation mechanism and income distribution order. The fair distribution of income means that under the reasonable arrangement of an economic and political system, the right and obligation of individuals to obtain income in the market economy are guaranteed equally, thus promoting the development of the economy and society, and guaranteeing the income and survival of the vulnerable groups and the poor<sup>[5]</sup>.

Since the reform and opening up, the people's living standards have been significantly improved. In the process of high development, the income distribution has also appeared serious imbalance. First, the government, enterprises, and residents have three aspects of the distribution of the benefits, the proportion of residents is still significantly low. Second, in some monopoly industries, the income level of employees is much higher than that of employees in competitive industries, and the income gap between industries is too large. Such as electricity, telecommunication, oil, finance, insurance, tobacco, water, electricity, gas, and other public utilities and other state-owned monopoly industries, The income of employees is generally high, resulting in serious unevenness in the industry. Third, the income gap between employees in the enterprise is too large. In some enterprises, the salary of senior executives can reach several times or even higher than that of ordinary employees. This huge income gap will not only cause dissatisfaction and social injustice among employees but also affect the stable development of the enterprise. Fourth, the income gap between urban and rural areas is still too large. The unreasonable distribution of income and the widening gap between rich and poor raise a number of problems. Unfavorable to arouse the enthusiasm of ordinary laborers, will gradually lead to the phenomenon of "rat race" and "lying flat."

## **3. The Social Origin of "lying flat" and "rat race" from the Perspective of Income Distribution**

The emergence of popular concepts such as "lying flat" and "rat race" is not an accident, reflecting the fundamental transformation of the basic logic of development in the process of economic and social

structural transformation and upgrading as China's economy enters a new normal state. The corresponding systematic disturbances and deviations in the actual operation of the economy and society are becoming increasingly obvious. "The rise of "lying flat," "rat race," "Buddhist system" and other phenomena has certain internal logic. It is inappropriate to treat these phenomena in a simple and rude moral qualitative and critical way. On the contrary, ignoring these phenomena and paying little attention to them are not in line with the new development concept of the new era. With the increasing number of "lying flat" people, people gradually lose their confidence and motivation to climb upward, which leads to stratum solidification and the gap between the rich and the poor. Due to the unequal distribution of income and the aggravation of social stratification, the bottom groups may have the mentality of enmity and opposition, which will lead to the aggravation of social instability and unfairness. Therefore, the following will analyze the social roots of "lying flat" and "rat race" from the perspective of income distribution equity to explore relevant mitigation paths<sup>[6-7]</sup>.

### ***3.1. The gap between rich and poor is too large to achieve stratum leapfrogging***

At a time when the economy is still growing in double digits, there is no one willing to take the initiative to "lie down" because of the daily worries about basic fruit. After all, in the age of the "gold everywhere," it is not a night for the poor to turn against the poor.

As the economic growth mode changes from the population dividend to the capital debt to the technological innovation, the excess income and investment return of all walks of life of the society also change with each passing day. From the circulation of foreign trade and industrial commodities to the financialization of real estate to the prosperity of Internet technology, the difficulty for ordinary people to realize "turning over" has been increasing. So far, the world's economic system has entered a highly "inside" era. Not only is it more difficult for ordinary Chinese people to get excessive gains, but it is not better in the land of the United States and Europe, which is why in recent years the political trend and movement of "populism" has been higher than higher. In an age when no asset (stock, house) is equal to no opportunity to increase wealth, "lying flat" becomes the inevitable end result of ordinary people. An era of the making every effort is likely to be the cost of the system's "rat race," and "low desire" has become the inevitable social mark.

### ***3.2. Social stratification makes the employment of young people difficult and the promotion channel narrow***

Now young people "lie flat" is not only the behavior of their own choice, but also a mapping result of structural constraints within the society. With the acceleration of economic development and social change, social stratification is becoming more and more common, which makes young people encounter more and more problems in the process of employment and promotion. Social stratification not only leads to uneven income distribution but also to a rigid social structure, making it difficult for young people born in poor families to strive for social stratification<sup>[8]</sup>.

Employment is an important way for young people to achieve self-realization and social recognition. However, the challenge to young people's employment not only comes from macroeconomic fluctuations but also from the constraints of social structure and institutional factors. First, with the economic transformation and industrial upgrading, the employment opportunities in traditional industries are gradually reduced, and the demand for high-skill and knowledge-based jobs is increasing, which puts higher demands on the educational background and vocational skills of young people. Secondly, the population structure of our country is aging day by day, and there is an obvious asymmetry between the employment demand of young people and the vacant positions of old people.

In this case, young people want to "hard work" to gain access to personal ascension and development opportunities gradually become narrower. They may choose to stop fighting and abandon the fierce competition of the society, just to meet the basic needs of the life, which is "lying down." This behavior can lead to a decline in the competitiveness of young people and an impact on the productivity and creativity of society as a whole. The choice of "lying flat" is usually a passive choice that is unable to achieve job-hunting expectations, and it is a last resort after the ascending path becomes narrower.

### ***3.3. The sensation of powerlessness after "more monks and less meat"***

In the deep discussion of the phenomenon of "lying flat," the mainstream public opinion holds that "rat race" is the fundamental reason for young people to choose "lying flat." In terms of microcosmic

level, the internal "rat race" problems in different fields are different with different causes, but the common causes are "scarce resources" and "more monks and less meat." The basic principle is "inflation" - that is, the decline of the value of resources, the devaluation of work experience and education as "input." The theory of resource scarcity holds that, in the case of resource scarcity, people's decisions and behaviors may be affected, for example, they may adopt more self-interested strategies to compete for resources, or they may be more likely to fall into competition and conflict. Therefore, the fundamental problem of "rat race" lies in the contradiction between scarce resources and human needs<sup>[9]</sup>.

In the process of social development, the contradiction between scarce resources and human needs is a long-standing and inevitable problem. In the case of limited resources, these resources usually need to be obtained through disorderly and irrational competition. For young people who have entered the society for the first time, they lack human capital and social capital, they can hardly realize the leapfrogging of stratum and personal value, and even the harder they appear, the more they accept susceptible to frustrate, the more they may lead to meaningless self-consumption. Therefore, the shouting of "lying flat" in the young population is essentially the weak shouting after efforts, and the helpless resistance to the social anomaly centered on "rat race."

#### **4. Path and Policy Suggestions for Relieving "Lay-down" and "Inside Roll"**

##### ***4.1. Bridging the gap between the rich and the poor and improving the mobility of strata***

There are many reasons for the widening of the income gap in China. From the perspective of the government's role, excessive administrative intervention by the government may lead to unfair resource distribution, which makes a few people obtain more resources, thus leading to stratum solidification and widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. Therefore, in regulating the gap between the rich and the poor of the society as a whole and improving the mobility of strata, it is very important for the government to issue relevant policies. We will reform the system to reduce administrative interference, strengthen market competition, protect market equity, let market resources truly flow to the most competitive and innovative individuals and enterprises, and expand opportunities and equity in the occupational and industrial fields. Let the young people can realize the leapfrogging of the stratum through their own efforts, so as to improve the work enthusiasm of the young people, and avoid the burnout mentality caused by meaningless internal consumption, leading to "lying down."

##### ***4.2. Increase employment opportunities and broaden promotion channels***

We will establish a more just social security system, increase the coverage and level of social welfare security, reduce the living costs and medical care expenses of low-income people, and increase the assistance to poor families and vulnerable groups, so as to reduce social injustice and improve social equity. Formulate employment and entrepreneurship support policies for young people, reduce the division of urban labor market, and increase the labor income of young workers through the minimum wage standard. At the same time, it is necessary to promote the reform of the household registration system and break the restriction of the household registration on the flow of talents, so that young people can enjoy broader employment and development opportunities, lowering the threshold for young people to enter urban employment and reducing the importance of household registration for access to public services and benefits. In addition, we will further standardize and broaden the promotion channels in the enterprise, narrow the distance between young people and executives, and improve their expectations and enthusiasm for the future.

##### ***4.3. Eliminating the social structural dilemma from the institutional level***

The focus of alleviating social "rat race" and "lying flat" is to break the system fence through reform. In recent years, China has speeded up economic structural adjustment and constantly perfected the market-oriented and legal system in order to increase social equity and improve the efficiency of resource allocation. In response to the problems of "retracting" and "lying flat," the government can overcome this structural dilemma at the institutional level of fair income distribution: First, encourage private enterprises to carry out the wage-profit linkage system and improve the redistribution policy. The system of linking salary and enterprise profit can encourage laborers to work harder, improve production efficiency and enterprise profit. This increase will enhance both the income of workers and the income of private entrepreneurs, thus regulating the wealth accumulation mechanism from the initial distribution. In addition, we should make joint efforts from three aspects of initial distribution, redistribution and third

distribution, carry out multiple measures simultaneously, carry out accurate measures, guarantee the employment opportunities of the population with working ability, and enhance the income security of the population without working ability. Second, we will innovate more financial products that meet the needs of family wealth management, strengthen the popularization of financial knowledge, and enhance the investment in personal human capital. Among them, innovative financial products that meet the needs of family wealth management can provide more diversified and personalized financial services. It enables people of different levels and groups to obtain more suitable financial products, thus increasing the proportion of middle-income people and raising the income of low-income people. Strengthening the human capital investment to the residents and improving the education level of the residents can improve the human capital and social capital accumulation level of the people, promote the flow of social wealth among all strata, reduce the degree of inequality, so as to reduce the breeding of young people's "lying flat" mentality and the degree of social "rat race."

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, the Internet hot words "lying flat" and "rat race" are introduced, and the social causes are analyzed based on the perspective of income distribution equity. "The formation of "lying flat" and "rat race" is closely related to many factors. First of all, the whole social economic development, in the age of material shortage, people have no "lying flat" capital. Secondly, the social structural constraints make the employment of young people difficult, narrow promotion channels, and strata gradually solidified. In addition, it is closely related to the increase of uncertain factors in the period of social transformation in China. These factors lead to the more intense competition for the limited high-quality resources in the society, and make people fall into the anxiety state of "involuntary competition" and "rat race." Therefore, in response to the phenomenon of "lying flat" and "rat race," the relevant mitigation path is: First, reduce the gap between rich and poor, improve the mobility of the stratum; Second, increase employment opportunities and broaden promotion channels; Third, the social structural dilemma should be solved from the institutional level.

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