

## **"To be a loser": The frustrated graduates in the highly competitive labour market of China**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines social inequality in the context of higher education expansion and a competitive labor market, focusing on China's ambition to develop a world-class education system through the Double World Class Project. The research highlights the complex interplay of factors affecting Chinese youth, including the household registration system, geographical influences, family expectations, and state propaganda. It specifically looks at graduates from elite universities who face difficulties in the job market, leading to the creation of a resistance discourse on social media through movements like "Lying Flat" and "Involution." Utilizing innovative ethnographic methods, including experience diaries and interviews, the study explores the challenges these graduates face during their job search. It aims to uncover the underlying social inequalities masked by the concept of meritocracy in the global labor market transition.

### **Full paper**

In the context of higher education expansion and the highly competitive labor market, social inequality has become a subject of education and sociology concern as well as a scholarly debate worldwide. Mainstream responses focus on the reproduction of social class and culture in the process of education such as Bourdieu and Paul Willis, while the issue is more complex in China, which is ambitious in building a high-quality world-class higher education system (Double World Class Project). For example, the role of the household registration system and geographical factors cannot be ignored in the uncertain life choices of Chinese youth. Individual education desire is also intertwined with family expectations and official propaganda discourse. This study focuses on a group of graduates from elite universities but frustrated in the labor market. They develop a resistant discourse system in social media, such as "Lying Flat" and "Involution". This subculture, which is contrary to the dominant discourse, influences their job search strategies to a certain extent. Stabilization becomes a big influencing factor. Working within the government (Tizhi) becomes the most popular choice. By using an innovative ethnography, a mix of day experience diaries, and interviews as data collection methods, this article will provide a sociological exploration of the current troubles of graduates in the process of looking for jobs. It will produce a rich account of how and why people adopt a specific job search strategy, such as being keen for a stable job although sacrificing three or more years. Also, it aims to reflect the hidden social inequalities of the term meritocracy in the transition of the labor market in a global context.

## References

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