# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW, GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNICATION (IJLGC)
www.ijlgc.com

# LYING FLAT IN MALAYSIA: UNDERSTANDING TANG PING AMONG CHINESE MALAYSIAN YOUTHS AS COUNTERCULTURE, DEFEATISM, AND SMART INDIVIDUALISM

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**Article Info:**

**Abstract:**

This study investigates the emergence of tăng píng (躺平, "lying flat") among Chinese Malaysian youths as a cultural repertoire of adaptation and resistance in late modernity. While the concept originated in mainland China as a critique of overwork and hyper-competition, its meanings and resonance in Malaysia remain underexplored. Drawing on survey data from 367 Chinese Malaysian respondents aged 16–30, this study examines awareness, interpretive frames, and domain-specific orientations toward tăng píng. Findings reveal that although fewer than 10% of respondents explicitly identify with tăng píng, more than half occupy ambivalent positions, treating it as a potential strategy rather than a fixed identity. Gendered differences are evident: women tend to associate tăng píng with pressures surrounding marriage and family, while men more often connect it to workplace frustrations. Peer networks and social media emerge as the strongest influences, surpassing family or traditional institutions. Theoretically, the study situates tăng píng along three interrelated axes— counterculture, defeatism, and smart individualism—arguing that it operates less as an organized movement than as a diffuse cultural repertoire of selective disengagement. By contextualizing tăng píng within Malaysian diasporic dynamics, this research highlights how global youth idioms are localized, negotiated, and hybridized in response to structural precarity, intergenerational expectations, and digital circulation.

**Keywords:**

*Tăng Píng* (躺平); Lying Flat; Youth Culture; Counterculture; Defeatism; Smart Individualism; Chinese Malaysian; Diaspora; Precarity; Digital Media

## Introduction

In recent years, Tang Ping (躺平, "lying flat") has entered global discourse as a youth-led ethos of disengaging from relentless competition. Originating in China in 2021, it signified rejection of exploitative labor regimes such as "996" and the broader logic of neijuan (involution), often expressed through a "low-desire life" that prioritizes psychological well-being over career, marriage, or material success.

In China, Tang Ping has been condemned by state media as defeatist and "shameful," yet some scholars view it as a rational response to social and economic pressures. Beyond China, related discourses such as "quiet quitting" have resonated among diaspora youth. For Chinese Malaysians—long shaped by values of education, industriousness, filial duty, and upward mobility—the relevance of Tang Ping remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by surveying 367 Chinese Malaysian youths aged 16–30. It investigates awareness of Tang Ping, whether it is seen as counterculture, defeatism, or smart individualism, and how family, peers, and digital media influence its reception. It also examines domain-specific orientations toward work, study, marriage, and family.

The research contributes in three ways. First, it situates Tang Ping beyond mainland China, showing how diaspora contexts reshape cultural phenomena. Second, it engages theories of subculture, resistance, and individualization to interpret youth responses under late modern pressures. Third, it highlights how Chinese Malaysian youth may be shifting from collective success narratives toward individualized well-being. In short, this study offers new insights into how Tang Ping is interpreted in Malaysia, reflecting broader transformations in youth culture, identity, and aspirations within Southeast Asian diaspora communities.

## Literature Review

### *Conceptualizing Tăng Píng ("Lying Flat") And Its Genealogy*

The phrase tăng píng (躺平, "lying flat") emerged in mainland China in 2021 as a viral shorthand for young people's refusal to overwork and overcompete in a system perceived as yielding diminishing returns. Journalistic and policy commentary quickly framed tăng píng as both a lifestyle and a cultural critique—an idiom for opting out of the rat race, resisting "996" schedules (9am–9pm, six days a week), and rejecting the equation of long hours with moral worth. Early analyses in Chinese and English media documented how the meme crystallized frustrations among Gen Z and younger millennials struggling with high housing costs, precarious white-collar work, and intense credentialism (Bandurski, 2021).

A closely related keyword is nèijuăn (内卷, "involution"), which was re-signified by Chinese youths to mean exhausting, zero-sum competition that fails to generate meaningful gains. Commentators have shown how it functions as a vernacular political economy: a felt sense of being trapped in a race with no exit that legitimizes forms of withdrawal like tăng píng (Liu, 2021). Institutional reactions in China were swift. State-affiliated commentaries condemned tăng píng as "shameful" defeatism (Guan, 2021), while more reflective voices urged attention to structural pressures facing youth. Such responses established a normative pole— "struggle" (fèn dòu)—against which tăng píng is cast as deviant.

The legal and labor context is equally salient. In August 2021 China's Supreme People's Court, together with the Ministry of Human Resources, issued "typical cases" clarifying that the "996" schedule violates labor law—a move interpreted as signaling official discomfort with extreme overwork (Reuters, 2021). Although scholarship is now catching up—with recent studies on lying-flat discourse in mainland China and Taiwan—most peer-reviewed work to date treats tăng píng within broader rubrics of youth precarity, overwork culture, or "low-desire" life strategies. This literature underscores that tăng píng is neither simple idleness nor a uniform ideology; it is a family of practices and narratives ranging from moral economy critiques to cautious self-preservation (Sun, 2025).

### *Analytical Frames: Counterculture, Defeatism, And "Smart Individualism"*

Classical studies of youth formations—Roszak's (1995) counterculture and the Birmingham School's subcultural theory—provide a first analytical frame (Roszak, 1995). Roszak conceptualized counterculture as principled refusal of technocratic imperatives, while Hebdige (1979) emphasized symbolic resistance through everyday aesthetics and practices. When Chinese youths publicize "lying flat" as an ethic—limiting consumerist aspirations, rejecting hyper-work—they translate dissent into embodied routines legible as style and discourse (Hebdige, 1979).

Scott's (1985, 1990) accounts of everyday resistance are particularly apt for East and Southeast Asian contexts. His notion of "infrapolitics"—mundane, low-visibility acts that subvert domination without open confrontation—maps onto tăng píng as a repertoire of scaled-down ambition and strategic disengagement (Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, 1985) (Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, 1992). Official and establishment commentaries frequently code tăng píng as "defeatism," "poisonous chicken soup," or a civilizational risk undermining productivity and fertility. (Liu, 2021) framed lying flat as ethically suspect, urging a return to struggle ethos. This perspective treats tăng píng as moral hazard rather than social diagnosis, delegitimizing withdrawal as irresponsible rather than as a call for reform.

A third frame is what can be termed smart individualism: pragmatic, risk-aware self-management under late-modern uncertainty. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that structural changes shift life risks onto individuals, compelling reflexive, calculative life planning (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002). Bauman (2000) highlights the erosion of stable life scripts in "liquid modernity." (Bauman, Liquid Modernity, 2000). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) show how capitalist regimes absorb critique by demanding flexibility and self-enterprise (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). Under this lens, tăng píng becomes neither rebellion nor surrender per se, but a portfolio decision—downscaling aspirations, capping effort, reallocating time to mental health—as a rational response to low marginal returns from hustle.

Smart individualism also renders tăng píng comparable to global idioms such as "quiet quitting," where workers meet job minimums without discretionary extra effort. Gallup's (2022) global workplace report documents large cohorts of disengaged employees, and the popularization of "quiet quitting" since 2022 has normalized boundary-setting as a reaction to burnout rather than sheer apathy (Gallup', 2022).

### Adjacent Phenomena and Cross-Regional Analogues

The "996" work norm in Chinese tech sectors (9am–9pm, six days a week) set the immediate ethical backdrop to tăng píng. Corporate leaders in China, such as Jack Ma, once endorsed "996" as a blessing for ambitious workers, framing it as a mark of dedication. However, social backlash mounted in the late 2010s as cases of sudden death linked to overwork gained public attention (Bandurski, 2021). In 2021, the Supreme People's Court, together with the Ministry of Human Resources, issued "typical cases" clarifying that the 996 schedule is illegal under existing labor laws, signaling official recognition of excessive overwork as a legal violation (Reuters, 2021). This jurisprudential moment underscores tăng píng not merely as a cultural meme but as a vernacular response to structural labor exploitation. The discourse of involution (nèijuǎn 内卷) connects youth exhaustion to systemic competition without productivity gains. Originally anthropological in origin, the concept was repurposed by Chinese youths to describe endless studying, credential chasing, and workplace competition that yield no meaningful improvement in living standards. Ethnographic and interpretive studies have shown how this sense of futility reconfigures aspirations, family negotiations, and self-care strategies (Zhang & Ji, 2023). Within this framework, tăng píng is interpreted as a dignifying tactic—choosing "enough"—rather than nihilism.

Comparatively, tăng píng shares similarities with "quiet quitting" in Western contexts, where employees do the bare minimum rather than exerting discretionary effort. Gallup's (2022) State of the Global Workplace Report showed that only 21% of employees worldwide are actively engaged, while more than half identify as disengaged. This indicates a widespread trend of boundary-setting at work (Gallup', 2022). In Japan, the "satori generation" (satori sedai) of young people born after the 1980s has similarly been characterized by low consumption, reduced ambition, and risk aversion in the wake of economic stagnation (Kelts, 2016). These global analogues situate tăng píng within a broader repertoire of late-modern life strategies where youth opt for moderation and psychological well-being over traditional markers of success.

### Chinese Malaysian Youths: Diaspora Pressures And Reception

Although peer-reviewed literature directly on tăng píng among Chinese Malaysian youths remains scarce, adjacent scholarship illuminates the interpretive context. Chinese Malaysians straddle complex identity politics while being embedded in transnational Sinophone media and migration circuits. Yu (2023) observes that Malaysian Chinese communities navigate between a strong identification with Malaysian nationhood and simultaneous engagement with China's rise, which shapes their reception of discourses like tăng píng (Yu & Alizadeh, 2023).

Local economic conditions also matter. Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) data show youth unemployment remains materially higher than adult unemployment, while surveys highlight housing affordability and rising cost of living as top concerns for Gen Z and millennials. These economic stressors provide fertile ground for tăng píng-like attitudes (Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), 2025). A recent psychological study in Malaysia reported that favorable feelings toward lying-flatism correlate with positive attitudes toward singlehood (Tan & Heng, 2023). Although not ethnicity-specific, such findings underscore how tăng píng-like sensibilities intersect with decisions about relationships, marriage, and autonomy in Malaysia.

Taken together, these contexts indicate that while tăng píng is a Chinese-origin meme, its uptake in Malaysia is mediated by diasporic identity, local economic challenges, and generational cultural change.

### *What Tăng Píng Is Not: Avoiding Reductionism*

The literature warns against reducing tăng píng to simple apathy. Framing it solely as defeatism obscures its structural drivers—overwork, wage stagnation, credential inflation, and housing precarity. Conversely, romanticizing tăng píng as pure resistance underplays how capitalism can metabolize critique, transforming countercultural practices into lifestyle niches (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

The interpretive middle ground—what has been termed "smart individualism"—frames tăng píng as choice under constraint. Young people calculate effort where marginal returns are highest (health, family, side businesses), and trim investment where returns are weakest (unpaid overtime, competitive rat races). This pragmatic calculus resonates with Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002)thesis of individualization, where risks once shared by institutions are increasingly borne by individuals, and with Bauman's (2000) notion of "liquid modernity," where stable trajectories are eroded (Bauman, Liquid Modernity, 2000). Thus, tăng píng should be seen as a complex negotiation, not reducible either to passive surrender or to heroic resistance. It represents a form of adaptive strategy in the context of global late modernity.

### *Towards An Integrative Model for Chinese Malaysian Youths*

Synthesizing across frames, tăng píng among Chinese Malaysian youths can be interpreted along three interlocking axes. First, cultural repertoire (counterculture/subculture). Tăng píng provides a stylistic and discursive toolkit that authorizes opting out of excessive striving without total withdrawal. Everyday practices—such as refusing unpaid overtime or rejecting conspicuous consumption—function as signs of belonging to an emergent moral community of restraint (Hebdige, 1979) (Roszak, 1995).

Second, moral discourse (defeatism vs. responsibility). Public narratives in China that stigmatize tăng píng as irresponsible resonate within diaspora communities. Elders, educators, and managers in Malaysia may echo the same moral framework, framing youth boundary-setting as laziness. This discourse shapes stigma costs and constrains public debate (Liu, 2021). Third, life-strategy (smart individualism). For many Chinese Malaysian youths, tăng píng aligns with calculated lifestyle management. Rather than rejecting work, they emphasize balance, self-care, and flexible adaptation to economic uncertainty. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002)individualization and Bauman's (2000) liquid modernity (Bauman, Liquid Modernity, 2000)provide useful conceptual anchors here, as both emphasize the erosion of standardized life paths and the need for individual reflexivity.

This triadic reading also aligns with Scott's (Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, 1985) (Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, 1992)concept of infrapolitics: much of the "politics" of tăng píng appears as ordinary life management, not organized protest. In this way, tăng píng among Chinese Malaysian youths is not merely imported from the PRC but localized, adapted to Malaysian socio-economic pressures, and hybridized with global generational idioms like "quiet quitting" (Gallup', 2022).

## *Gaps And Implications for The Present Study*

Despite the growing academic and journalistic attention to tăng píng in mainland China, three gaps remain particularly salient for this study.

First, there is limited empirical work on tăng píng outside mainland China. While emerging analyses have begun to explore discourses of lying flat in Taiwan and among overseas Chinese (Sun, 2025), most research still treats tăng píng as a China-bound phenomenon. In Southeast Asia, where Chinese diaspora communities live within different political economies, educational systems, and multicultural settings, uptake of tăng píng has not been systematically documented.

Second, in Malaysia, direct empirical studies on tăng píng are scarce. Existing findings focus more on adjacent constructs such as financial precarity, youth unemployment, or changing marriage and family attitudes. A recent Malaysian psychological study indicated that favorable feelings toward lying-flatism correlated with positive attitudes toward singlehood (Tan & Heng, 2023), suggesting that the ethos of tăng píng may already intersect with relationship and lifestyle decisions. However, robust survey instruments and qualitative interviews targeting Chinese Malaysian youth are still missing.

Third, policy and organizational literatures have not yet integrated the China-specific jurisprudence on overwork, such as the Supreme People's Court ruling against (Reuters, 2021), with Southeast Asian labor regimes. Comparative analysis could clarify how norms around overtime, unpaid labor, and work–life boundaries shape tăng píng-like practices in Malaysia, where statutory protections and workplace cultures differ from the PRC.

For these reasons, this study aims to make three contributions: (1) to document the prevalence of tăng píng orientations among Chinese Malaysian youth, (2) to examine the underlying interpretive frames—counterculture, defeatism, and smart individualism—that shape these orientations, and (3) to situate the Malaysian case within wider regional and global debates about youth disengagement, identity, and the redefinition of success in late modernity.

## Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey, complemented by limited qualitative items, to investigate how Chinese Malaysian youths perceive and engage with tăng píng. The survey design was chosen to capture prevalence and correlations across a broad respondent base (Bryman, 2016), while open-ended items allowed participants to describe experiences in their own words (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

The research targeted Chinese Malaysian youths aged 16–30, in line with Malaysia's Youth Societies and Youth Development Act (2007). This demographic was selected both for policy relevance and because it is heavily embedded in digital media spaces where tăng píng circulates. Chinese Malaysians were chosen given their historical emphasis on industriousness, education, and filial duty (Tan, Neow, & Sarvarubini, 2020), making them a key group for testing whether tăng píng resonates as counterculture, defeatism, or smart individualism. Purposive sampling was used through alumni networks, social media, and UTAR-linked community groups, producing 367 valid responses—above the threshold recommended for exploratory factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019). Females comprised 60.76% of the sample, a gender imbalance commonly observed in survey participation.

A bilingual questionnaire (English/Mandarin) included four sections: demographics; awareness and exposure to tăng píng; attitudinal orientations across counterculture, defeatism, and smart individualism (Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, 1985) (Hebdige, 1979) (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002) (Bauman, Liquid Modernity, 2000); and Likert-scale measures of adoption likelihood. Data were collected online between 19 September and 31 October 2024 via mailing lists, WhatsApp, and WeChat, consistent with Malaysia's high internet penetration (>90%) (Kemp, 2023). Ethical approval was secured, and informed consent obtained (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Analysis involved descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations by gender, education, and employment (Field, 2013), and exploratory factor analysis to test theoretical constructs (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2011). Several limitations apply. Purposive sampling reduces representativeness, and self-report measures risk social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993). Online administration may exclude those with poor connectivity, though this is minimal in Malaysia.

Moreover, influences such as religion or interethnic dynamics may not have been fully captured. Despite these caveats, the design provides a robust foundation for assessing prevalence, interpretive frames, and subgroup differences. It offers both theoretical contributions to understanding countercultural youth practices and practical insights into generational change and social sustainability in Malaysia.

**Findings**

*Overall Patterns and Ambivalence*
The empirical findings reveal a complex and layered pattern in how undergraduate youth in Malaysia perceive and engage with the idea of tang ping (躺平). Rather than indicating a uniform or polarized orientation, the data suggest a spectrum of attitudes shaped by personal experiences, gendered expectations, institutional pressures, and social interactions. The numbers highlight a tension between recognition of the phenomenon, hesitation to fully embrace it, and selective incorporation of tang ping practices into everyday life.

At the broadest level, the general distribution of responses shows that 9.81% of respondents reported a clear willingness to adopt tang ping as a life orientation, while approximately one-third of the cohort expressed an outright rejection. The largest segment, constituting 55.31%, fell into an ambivalent category, indicating uncertainty or hesitation in their stance (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This tripartite structure – with a minority adopting, a substantial fraction rejecting, and a majority holding intermediate positions – provides an important baseline. It suggests that tang ping exists less as a stable or rigid social identity and more as a latent orientation that remains negotiable for many youths. For this majority, tang ping seems to function as a "standby framework" – not their primary stance, but one kept in reserve for possible future use should structural pressures or personal circumstances intensify.

*Gendered and Structural Influences*
Gender differences are also pronounced. The data show that 41.42% of women expressed a greater tendency to adopt tang ping compared with 23.71% of men (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This divergence resonates with the pressures recorded in other domains of the study, particularly around marriage and family. Women appear more likely to perceive marriage and familial responsibilities as sites of heightened stress, thereby framing tang ping not merely as

passivity but as a protective strategy against overwhelming expectations. Men, by contrast, displayed a higher likelihood of adopting tang ping in relation to the workplace, reflecting the kinds of frustrations and compromises associated with employment and career trajectories. This gendered distinction points to the possibility that tang ping is not a uniform cultural script, but rather a differentiated response to distinct domains of life where the burdens of expectation are distributed unevenly.

When examining the relative weight of causes that drive tang ping orientations, three domains stand out as particularly salient. Education (24%), marriage (23%), and family (23%) are the leading drivers, with personal factors (17%) and work (13%) ranking lower (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This ordering is significant. While popular discourse often portrays tang ping primarily as a retreat from the intensification of workplace competition, the findings indicate that for Malaysian undergraduates, educational performance and familial-marital expectations loom at least as large. Tang ping thus emerges as a strategy not limited to career withdrawal but deeply tied to the negotiation of academic standards, family responsibilities, and cultural scripts of adulthood. Together, education, marriage, and family account for roughly 70% of the relative weight, underscoring the structural pressures embedded within institutional and relational obligations.

Responses related to the workplace reveal a subtle balancing act. On the one hand, 50.73% of respondents agreed with the statement that it is better to enjoy life in the present than to pursue long-term stability, signalling a pragmatic stance that limits overinvestment in uncertain futures. On the other hand, 43.05% of respondents still affirmed that high-paying jobs are an important basis for genuine happiness (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). These two findings might appear contradictory at first glance, but in fact they illustrate a dual-track mentality. While there is a growing recognition that relentless effort may not yield proportionate returns, high income remains symbolically and materially valued. Tang ping in this domain thus does not equate to total renunciation of ambition, but rather represents a selective limitation on effort and a recalibration of priorities in the face of economic realities.

### Personal Values and Selective Adoption

In the personal domain, 57.71% of respondents indicated that they had adopted tang ping in certain aspects of their lives, while 47.6% reported that tang ping was consistent with their personal beliefs (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). These percentages highlight a form of partial incorporation. Tang ping does not appear as a wholesale withdrawal from responsibility across the board, but as a selective strategy applied where individuals judge that the investment of effort is disproportionate to the expected return. In this sense, tang ping functions as a boundary-setting mechanism that allows young people to manage pressures while maintaining agency over the distribution of their time and energy.

Findings related to values further reinforce this orientation. A striking 79.52% of respondents agreed that society overemphasizes academic achievement, 73.12% disagreed with the idea that marriage and family should be considered the ultimate goal of life, and 76.35% affirmed that independence in making life choices should take precedence (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). These results align with a cultural shift in which tang ping reflects not merely disengagement but also resistance against dominant social narratives. Tang ping becomes part of a larger assertion that educational scores, marital obligations, and family duties should not singularly define the trajectory of one's life. Importantly, these findings do not imply a

wholesale rejection of those institutions, but rather a repositioning of them from unquestioned necessities to optional choices.

A more detailed examination of mindset categories across domains reveals further nuances. Three main orientations were identified – anti-social, give-up, and pragmatic. In the academic domain, 75.75% of respondents fell into the pragmatic category, reflecting a widespread tendency to adopt a utilitarian orientation toward studies. In the domain of marriage, 68.94% aligned with a give-up orientation, signalling resignation and retreat in response to the burdens associated with romantic and marital expectations. In the family domain, 66.21% identified most strongly with anti-social tendencies, suggesting disengagement or avoidance when faced with domestic responsibilities and obligations. In the workplace, the give-up orientation again scored highest at 45.78%, though pragmatic and anti-social orientations also registered substantial levels (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024).

Gendered breakdowns add another dimension. In the work domain, women's scores for give-up, anti-social, and pragmatic orientations were 42.60%, 31.84%, and 31.84% respectively. Men, in contrast, scored higher across all three orientations, at 50.69%, 38.89%, and 39.58% (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This indicates that men are more prone to negative experiences and frustrations in the workplace, while women, though also affected, appear somewhat less burdened in this respect. In the academic domain, pragmatic orientations dominated among both genders – 78.03% for women and 72.22% for men – but men recorded higher levels of anti-social responses (45.14%) compared to women (32.29%). With respect to marriage, women scored higher than men across all three orientations – give-up (70.40% versus 66.67%), pragmatic (**62.78% versus 47.22%), and anti-social (**58.30% versus 50.69%). This pattern confirms that women, more than men, experience greater structural stress around marital expectations, leading to stronger tendencies toward withdrawal, caution, and avoidance. In the family domain, both genders reported anti-social orientations as the dominant pattern, with 70.85% of women and 59.03% of men registering this response (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). These findings emphasize that while tang ping is a generational phenomenon, it is also mediated by gendered differences in how obligations and pressures are distributed.

### *Social Contexts and Peer-Media Dynamics*

The role of peer influence and media exposure is also reflected in the findings. When asked about sources of influence, 35.97% cited friends, 33.51% cited social media, and around 30% pointed to colleagues or classmates. Family influence stood at 28.07%, followed by print and literature at 22.07%. Film, television, and other sources were lowest at approximately 18% (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This hierarchy demonstrates that tang ping circulates most strongly through peer interaction and platform-based discourse, with formal institutions and traditional media exerting weaker influence. Related to this, 29.43% of respondents agreed that media shaped their positive views of tang ping, 36.51% remained neutral, and 33.06% disagreed (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). Media influence thus exists, but does not dominate; it is one factor among several, with ambivalence again the most common position.

Further data reinforce the gap between recognition and practice within social networks. Approximately 36% agreed that their peers were widely familiar with tang ping, while about 31% agreed that their peers not only knew about it but also practiced it. Only 23.16% expressed agreement with the statement that their peers opposed tang ping, and just 19.35% said their peers' positive perspectives had strongly shaped their own (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024).

This indicates that tang ping is socially visible and acknowledged, but the degree to which individuals internalize or adopt it remains varied and often cautious.

The distribution of responses concerning the presence of tang ping in educational and professional environments highlights the ways in which the phenomenon is observed, normalized, or resisted in collective spaces. Within schools and universities, 34.76% of respondents expressed agreement that tang ping practices could be widely observed among their peers. A slightly smaller fraction, 30.60%, went further to affirm that tang ping was not merely recognized but actively practiced within these settings. At the same time, 26.70% indicated that tang ping was met with opposition, while 28.45% perceived that their peers' positive evaluations of tang ping had reinforced their own understanding (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). The coexistence of these positions underscores the heterogeneity of campus cultures: recognition of tang ping as a visible trend does not necessarily translate into endorsement, and the balance between acceptance, rejection, and ambivalence varies across specific institutional contexts.

When the same question was posed in relation to workplaces, the patterns remained similar but with subtle differences. 34.64% of respondents noted that tang ping was prevalent in their work environment, 29.54% indicated that they had directly observed colleagues practicing tang ping, and 25.97% believed there was a measure of opposition to it. Finally, 28.12% reported that positive peer attitudes had influenced their own orientation (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). The close resemblance between educational and workplace contexts suggests continuity: the cultural codes surrounding tang ping travel with individuals as they move between classrooms and offices, shaping collective norms of effort, disengagement, and pragmatism. Nevertheless, the slightly lower figures for recognition and practice in the workplace compared with the university setting hint that the discourse of tang ping may be more openly articulated in academic settings, while in workplaces it is tempered by professional norms and expectations of productivity.

Social interactions emerged as the most influential factor shaping tang ping orientations. When asked to identify primary sources of influence, 35.97% of respondents identified friends, 33.51% highlighted social media, and 30.09% named colleagues or classmates. By contrast, family members accounted for 28.07%, literature and print media for 22.07%, and film and television for just 18.02% (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). These findings make it clear that tang ping circulates through horizontal and informal channels rather than vertical or institutional ones. Peer networks and digital platforms appear to be the principal carriers of discourse, while older institutions of influence – the family, schools, religious bodies, or broadcast media – appear weaker. Such a distribution confirms that tang ping is less a doctrine handed down from authorities than a shared idiom negotiated among equals.

Perceptions of media influence were ambivalent. 29.43% of respondents agreed that media coverage had shaped their positive understanding of tang ping, 36.51% held a neutral stance, and 33.06% disagreed (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This distribution reflects the cautious stance taken by many undergraduates. While nearly a third admitted to being influenced, the larger majority either refrained from attributing their views to media exposure or actively denied such influence. The implication is that while media – particularly social media – plays a role, respondents preferred to frame their orientations as self-derived or shaped by peer interaction, thereby asserting agency over their own positions.

At the community level, the findings paint a picture of ambivalence and diversity. 33.46% of respondents agreed that tang ping could be widely observed within their communities, while 29.30% believed it was practiced, 27.48% judged it to be opposed, and 28.45% affirmed that positive community perceptions had influenced them (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). These proportions are strikingly close to those recorded for educational and workplace environments, suggesting that the dynamics of tang ping extend consistently across multiple scales of social life. The phenomenon is not confined to youth peer groups or professional spaces but permeates the broader neighborhood and communal settings where individuals reside. Yet again, the proportions reflect a persistent pattern: roughly a third of respondents observe tang ping, another third acknowledge its practice, around a quarter note resistance, and just under a third perceive positive community reinforcement.

At the national level, similar ambivalence persisted. 33.67% of respondents believed that tang ping is widely observed in Malaysia, 28.15% believed it is practiced, 25.76% affirmed that it is opposed, and 26.62% reported that positive national discourse had influenced them (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This near-replication of community-level figures reveals a fractal pattern: whether in schools, workplaces, communities, or at the scale of the nation, the proportions remain remarkably stable. Tang ping is consistently visible, but never dominant; it is practiced, but rarely overwhelming; it is opposed, but not rejected en masse; and positive perceptions exist, but without being hegemonic. This stability suggests that tang ping functions as a cultural undercurrent – a persistent, low-level orientation distributed across social life, not an overwhelming wave that sweeps all before it.

One of the most revealing aspects of the data lies in the pattern of ambivalence. Across domains, large segments of respondents neither fully endorsed nor fully rejected tang ping. For example, while just under 10% explicitly declared themselves tang ping adherents, over half positioned themselves in the uncertain middle (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). Similarly, across school, workplace, community, and national levels, a third observed tang ping, but roughly a quarter simultaneously noted opposition. These balanced distributions demonstrate that tang ping is less a binary phenomenon of "for" or "against," and more a contested discourse that individuals negotiate situationally. The cautious middle, constituting the largest group, highlights the strategic ambivalence of youth: they keep tang ping available as a vocabulary of resistance, but rarely allow it to define their identities wholesale.

Generational identity also plays a role. Though the data set is limited to undergraduates, the findings point to youth as the principal carriers of tang ping discourse, especially given the strong influence of friends and social media. At the same time, the comparatively lower role of family suggests a weak intergenerational transmission. Instead, tang ping appears as a generationally bounded idiom, rooted in peer interaction rather than inherited cultural norms. The near-uniformity of recognition, practice, opposition, and influence across different social contexts reinforces this interpretation: tang ping belongs to the peer generation first and foremost, diffused laterally across their networks.

It is also notable that positive reinforcement rarely exceeded one-third in any domain. Whether in schools, workplaces, communities, or national settings, fewer than 30% of respondents affirmed that supportive attitudes from others had strengthened their own orientation (Lee, Chin, Yong, & Ong, 2024). This indicates that tang ping does not rely on strong collective validation to sustain itself. Instead, it circulates in a fragmented and individualized manner,

with each person negotiating their own stance based on observed practices, peer influences, and selective adoption. The phenomenon thus acquires durability not through explicit institutionalization or collective movements but through the accumulation of many small, private adjustments.

### *Synthesis of Key Findings*

In sum, the data suggest that tang ping among Malaysian undergraduates is marked by four interrelated features. First, it is widespread but not hegemonic: consistently visible in schools, workplaces, communities, and at the national level, but never dominant. Second, it is ambivalent: the majority occupy a middle position rather than firm adoption or rejection. Third, it is peer-driven: friends and social media exert greater influence than families or traditional media. Fourth, it is individualized: positive reinforcement from peers or communities rarely exceeds a third, indicating that most youths maintain tang ping as a private orientation rather than as a strongly validated collective identity.

Taken together, these findings provide a comprehensive portrait of tang ping as a lived orientation among youth. It is not merely an imported slogan or a media fad, but a cultural repertoire negotiated in daily life across multiple domains. The constancy of patterns across contexts points to a stable undercurrent in Malaysian youth culture: tang ping is always present, always noticed, always practiced by some, opposed by others, but rarely definitive. The phenomenon sustains itself not by overwhelming consensus but by continuous, small-scale negotiation across the structures of everyday life. The evidence presented paints a multifaceted portrait of how Chinese Malaysian undergraduates perceive and negotiate the cultural vocabulary of tang ping. Across diverse social contexts—universities, workplaces, communities, and the nation—the distributions of recognition, practice, opposition, and reinforcement remain strikingly consistent. Roughly one third of respondents recognize or observe tang ping, around one quarter indicate its practice, another quarter note opposition, and close to one third perceive positive reinforcement. These repeating proportions reflect the durability of tang ping as a recurring pattern in everyday life, regardless of setting.

At the same time, the data underline that tang ping does not dominate youth culture. It is consistently visible but remains a minority orientation, accompanied by broad ambivalence and cautious neutrality. The majority of respondents position themselves in between—acknowledging tang ping as a presence in their environment but not fully aligning with or rejecting it. This reveals tang ping less as an organized movement and more as a cultural undercurrent, available as a repertoire of meaning and action but not imposed as a collective imperative. Social influence emerges as central. Friends and peers, followed closely by social media, rank as the most significant factors shaping orientation. Families, traditional print sources, and entertainment media play lesser roles, suggesting that tang ping is generated and circulated horizontally within generational cohorts rather than vertically across generations. This finding also signals that tang ping is rooted in generational identity, with youth positioning themselves through peer-based discourses rather than inherited norms.

Another defining feature is the modest role of positive reinforcement. Fewer than one third of respondents reported that supportive attitudes from others had influenced them. This suggests that tang ping is sustained not through overt affirmation or collective validation but through a more diffuse process of individual adaptation and negotiation. It circulates as a loosely held disposition rather than a mobilized ideology, which accounts for its persistence despite lacking

institutional structures or organized advocacy. In closing, the findings establish tang ping among Chinese Malaysian undergraduates as a widespread but non-hegemonic cultural practice, sustained by peer networks and digital circulation, mediated through ambivalence, and maintained as individualized orientations. These patterns underscore the distinctiveness of tang ping in Malaysia: less a radical break or mass withdrawal than a subtle, persistent recalibration of expectations and effort within education, work, and community life. The implications of these results provide fertile ground for deeper theoretical discussion, particularly regarding the ways in which youth negotiate structural pressures through ambivalent cultural repertoires.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study offer a rich opportunity to reflect on the cultural, social, and political implications of *tang ping* among Chinese Malaysian youths. While the empirical results demonstrated the visibility of *tang ping* across multiple social contexts—universities, workplaces, communities, and the national level—the proportions consistently hovered around one third recognition, one quarter practice, one quarter opposition, and one third reinforcement. Such stability in distribution patterns raises important theoretical questions about the meaning of *tang ping* in the Malaysian context, its functions for youth identity, and its broader resonance as a cultural form of resistance or adaptation. In this discussion, the results are interpreted in light of theoretical debates on counterculture, defeatism, and smart individualism, and placed in comparative dialogue with broader literature on youth cultures in East and Southeast Asia.

*Ambivalence and the Structure of Feeling*

A first point of reflection is the duality of presence and marginality. *Tang ping* is widespread enough to be recognized by most respondents, yet it does not dominate youth culture. The majority of students neither fully embrace nor categorically reject it, instead maintaining ambivalent or moderate positions. This ambivalence suggests that *tang ping* cannot be reduced to a simple binary of resistance versus conformity. Rather, it aligns with what Williams (1977) conceptualised as a "structure of feeling"—a shared but inchoate sensibility that captures lived responses to structural pressures without necessarily solidifying into a coherent ideology (Williams, 1977). For Chinese Malaysian undergraduates, *tang ping* functions as such a structure of feeling, signalling disaffection with meritocratic competition and socio-economic precarity while remaining diffuse and individually mediated.

The evidence also underscores the centrality of peers and digital platforms as the primary vectors of influence. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that friends, followed by social media, shaped their orientation toward *tang ping* more than family, traditional print media, or entertainment industries. This finding resonates with existing literature on youth agency in the digital age, where peer-based networks mediate cultural flows and empower young people to negotiate collective identities outside hierarchical (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2015). In this sense, *tang ping* in Malaysia reflects not only a cultural critique but also the modality through which contemporary youth cultures circulate: horizontally, digitally, and relationally.

At the same time, the relatively low proportion of respondents who reported positive reinforcement suggests that *tang ping* is not sustained by explicit validation but by diffuse circulation. This observation is consistent with Scott's (1992) theory of "infrapolitics," which highlights how resistance in everyday life often operates through implicit gestures, minor refusals, and symbolic practices rather than overt mobilization (Scott, Domination and the Arts

of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, 1992). Chinese Malaysian undergraduates appear to engage *tang ping* not as a codified doctrine but as a repertoire of micro-resistances: lowering effort, moderating ambition, or quietly rejecting excessive demands. These practices allow for adaptation and survival within an environment of structural constraint while avoiding open confrontation.

The Malaysian context introduces unique layers to the interpretation of *tang ping*. Unlike in China, where the term originated as a critique of hyper-competitive work cultures under "996" labour regimes (Sun, 2025), Chinese Malaysian youths operate in a different socio-political environment. Here, ethnicized affirmative action policies, limited upward mobility for minorities, and high out-migration rates form part of the structural backdrop (Gomez & Saravanamuttu, 2012). Against this context, *tang ping* may reflect a rational recalibration of expectations: a pragmatic refusal to over-invest in a system perceived as inequitable. The finding that nearly one third of respondents explicitly recognized *tang ping* as a visible practice in national life indicates its salience as a cultural critique of unequal structures, even if expressed through individualized withdrawal.

Moreover, the ambivalent stance of the majority highlights what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) call the "individualization thesis," wherein late modernity forces individuals to make reflexive choices about biography and identity under conditions of uncertainty (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002). In Malaysia, where structural barriers intersect with globalized cultural flows, *tang ping* offers a vocabulary through which youths can navigate contradictions: desiring mobility and success while confronting systemic ceilings. The willingness to adopt or sympathize with *tang ping* without overt endorsement thus illustrates what might be termed a pragmatic individualization: choosing to step back, slow down, or disengage without abandoning mainstream aspirations altogether.

Importantly, the distributional stability across domains—university, work, community, and nation—suggests that *tang ping* transcends specific arenas and functions as a broader cultural orientation. This supports the interpretation of *tang ping* not as a transient fad but as part of a deeper repertoire of youth adaptation to structural strain. The comparative absence of institutional structures or collective movements behind *tang ping* in Malaysia further emphasizes its character as a cultural repertoire rather than an organized campaign. It circulates through memes, conversations, and tacit dispositions, aligning with what Hebdige (1979) described as subcultural "signs" that signal difference and resistance without requiring explicit ideological programs (Hebdige, 1979).

The findings also complicate interpretations of *tang ping* as mere defeatism. While around one quarter of respondents indicated engagement in practice, this does not imply total withdrawal or nihilism. Rather, as Standing (2011) observed in relation to the global "precariat," youth responses to insecurity often oscillate between disengagement and tactical adaptation (Standing, 2011). In Malaysia, *tang ping* may embody a mode of "selective defeatism": rejecting certain avenues of over-exertion while still engaging others. This is consistent with the notion of "smart individualism," wherein individuals recalibrate their investment to maximize well-being under constrained conditions. Thus, *tang ping* reflects neither absolute surrender nor radical defiance but a nuanced negotiation of life chances.

This interpretation situates Malaysian Chinese youth within a broader East Asian pattern of generational recalibration. Similar phenomena—such as "sang culture" in China, "herbivore men" in Japan, or "lying flatism" discourses in Taiwan—indicate a regional repertoire of youth responses to neoliberal precarity. The Malaysian case adds a distinctive layer by demonstrating how such repertoires are rearticulated in minority contexts, where structural inequalities intersect with global flows. That respondents identified tang ping not only in university life but also in workplaces and national politics signals its broader relevance as a lens for understanding youth-state relations in Malaysia.

### Peer Networks, Digital Circulation, and Infrapolitics

The findings also underline the decisive influence of peers and digital platforms in shaping the ways Chinese Malaysian undergraduates understand and negotiate tang ping. Friends and fellow students were consistently reported as the strongest influences, surpassing family members, teachers, or religious authorities. This indicates that tang ping, while often interpreted as individual withdrawal or refusal, is in practice embedded in a highly social ecology. Youth do not arrive at tang ping in isolation; they arrive at it in dialogue with friends who share memes, debate aspirations, or normalize certain forms of strategic disengagement. This peer circulation reflects Henry Jenkins's concept of "participatory culture," in which media and meaning-making are generated collaboratively, not passively consumed (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2015). Within this ecology, tang ping functions less as a manifesto and more as a conversational repertoire that allows youth to articulate ambivalence, joke about exhaustion, or justify deliberate restraint.

The centrality of digital media deepens this peer-based dynamic. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter amplify transnational flows of youth discourse, exposing Malaysian Chinese undergraduates to mainland Chinese memes, Hong Kong student activism, or Japanese NEET culture. Delwiche and colleagues (2012) describe this as the "networked publics" effect, where youth develop cultural practices that are simultaneously local and transnational (Delwiche & Henderson, 2012). Tang ping becomes legible not only as a Malaysian adaptation but as a node in a broader global circulation of youth idioms of resistance and recalibration. This also explains why the percentages of recognition and observation remained consistently higher than those of direct practice: digital media create visibility for tang ping even among students who do not themselves identify with it.

Such peer and media dynamics are crucial when situating tang ping within the sociology of youth resistance. James C. Scott's concept of "infrapolitics" highlights that everyday forms of subtle resistance—foot-dragging, feigned ignorance, calculated withdrawal—can be politically significant without constituting overt movements (Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, 1992). In this sense, tang ping as practiced by Malaysian undergraduates is less a refusal to participate in society and more an everyday negotiation of structural constraints. When students joke about reducing effort, or quietly opt out of overwork, they may not be rejecting neoliberal or Confucian values in total. Rather, they are practicing a form of infrapolitics: quietly recalibrating their commitments while avoiding direct confrontation with parental or institutional authority.

This brings into focus the intergenerational dimension. Family members, though not the strongest influence in shaping tang ping practices, remain the backdrop against which youth negotiate their choices. In Malaysia, as in much of East Asia, filial piety and parental

expectations of academic achievement retain strong normative force (Ho, 2015). Parents often expect their children to pursue upward mobility through education and professional achievement. Youth who articulate tang ping therefore risk being read as ungrateful or irresponsible. The finding that only a minority reported positive reinforcement suggests precisely this generational disjuncture: while peers may normalize disengagement, family contexts remain oriented toward ambition, sacrifice, and mobility. Ulrich Beck's theory of individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) illuminates this tension. Youth are increasingly required to construct "biographies of choice" rather than follow predetermined scripts, yet they must do so in the shadow of parental expectations shaped by earlier periods of industrial growth and class mobility (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002). Tang ping becomes a delicate negotiation between asserting autonomy and preserving filial bonds.

### *Diasporic Context and Regional Comparisons*

The Malaysian case also invites comparison with related phenomena across East Asia. In mainland China, tang ping emerged in 2021 as a viral meme that rapidly became a generational slogan, provoking both youth resonance and state backlash (Sun, 2025). There, tang ping was widely condemned by officials as threatening national rejuvenation, with state media warning against its "destructive" passivity. In Hong Kong, by contrast, youth disengagement is often framed through the lens of political fatigue following the 2019 protests (Lee, Yuen, Tang, & Cheng, 2019). The idioms of "lying flat" or "being salted fish" articulate exhaustion with political mobilization as much as with work or study. Taiwan provides yet another variant in the discourse of the "strawberry generation," a term often used pejoratively to describe youth perceived as fragile, unwilling to endure hardship, or too individualistic (Vocab, 2008). Japanese youth have long been described through related idioms, such as the NEET phenomenon (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) or the "satori generation," who are said to have renounced consumerist ambition in favor of modest, minimalist lives (Furlong, The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people, 2008). The Malaysian variant aligns with these but is distinguished by its diasporic position: it is filtered through Chinese cultural idioms, yet articulated in a multiethnic national context shaped by Malaysia's education system, labor market, and ethnic politics.

This comparative lens highlights both convergence and divergence. Convergence lies in the way tang ping and its analogues respond to structural precarity: rising costs of living, uncertain employment, and shrinking returns on higher education. Guy Standing's analysis of the "precariat" captures this condition across societies, identifying youth as disproportionately vulnerable to unstable labor, debt, and downward mobility (Standing, 2011). Malaysian undergraduates' awareness of tang ping mirrors this global pattern of insecurity. Yet divergence lies in the normative and political reception. In China, tang ping threatens state developmentalist narratives; in Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is linked to local political cultures; in Japan, it indexes cultural minimalism; in Malaysia, it resonates with Chinese diasporic youth who straddle Confucian familial expectations, neoliberal education markets, and a multiethnic national context. This distinct layering means tang ping in Malaysia cannot be reduced to imitation of Chinese memes, but must be understood as a local adaptation that speaks to the dilemmas of Chinese Malaysian youth in particular.

While tang ping originates in China as a reaction to intensive labour regimes and strong ideological messaging, its Malaysian expression emerges within a diasporic context characterized by ethnicized mobility constraints and more diffuse institutional pressures. As a

result, tang ping among Chinese Malaysian youth tends to be less oppositional and more oriented toward pragmatic risk management and selective disengagement. Finally, these dynamics reveal that tang ping is neither pure counterculture nor sheer defeatism, nor even fully individualized pragmatism. It operates across registers: as countercultural discourse shared among peers, as pragmatic adjustment in the face of limited opportunities, and as individualized negotiation of identity and family obligations. This hybridity makes tang ping an especially revealing case for youth studies. It demonstrates how young people creatively appropriate transnational discourses while embedding them in their own life contexts. It also shows how subtle repertoires of disengagement can carry significance even when they fall short of organized resistance or radical critique.

### *Hybridity of Counterculture, Defeatism, and Smart Individualism*
An additional layer of complexity lies in the moral discourse surrounding tang ping. While youth may articulate lying flat as a rational response to systemic constraints, critics—often from older generations, employers, or state-linked commentators—frame it as laziness, irresponsibility, or even moral decline. This discursive polarization is not unique to Malaysia. In mainland China, the government actively condemned tang ping as corrosive to collective ambition, with state media warning that "lying flat is shameful" (Sun, 2025) . Similar moralizing tendencies are evident in Taiwan, where the label of the "strawberry generation" serves less as description than as rebuke, suggesting weakness and lack of resilience (Vocab, 2008). In Malaysia, the survey findings that peers were the strongest influencers and that family support was minimal suggest a similar divide. Youth participants interpret tang ping as selective self-preservation, while external observers often interpret it as abandonment of duty. Such divergences underscore how moral evaluation of youth practices is deeply tied to generational interests and socio-economic conditions.

Yet the persistence of tang ping discourse among Chinese Malaysian undergraduates suggests that it cannot be reduced to passivity or defeat. On the contrary, it demonstrates a subtle form of agency. Judith Butler's theory of performativity, originally developed in relation to gender, reminds us that repeated acts—even those of withdrawal—can constitute identity and meaning (Butler, 2021). Choosing to refrain from excessive ambition, declining to overcommit to exhausting goals, or openly joking about reduced effort are all performative acts that signal resistance to dominant norms. While they may not transform structural inequities, they nevertheless open space for alternative subjectivities. As James Scott (1992) emphasizes in his study of "hidden transcripts," such everyday gestures of resistance gain cumulative power precisely because they evade direct confrontation while undermining the presumption of consent (Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, 1992). Tang ping, in this sense, is not merely a void but a patterned practice with social significance.

This perspective also challenges binary categorizations of youth practice. The temptation is to label tang ping as either countercultural rebellion, defeatist surrender, or pragmatic self-interest. Yet the Malaysian data show how these categories intersect. As counterculture, tang ping allows youth to resist both neoliberal work cultures and Confucian filial expectations, using irony and memes to subvert dominant narratives. As defeatism, it reflects the recognition of limited structural mobility, echoing Guy Standing's account of the "precariat" trapped in insecurity (Standing, 2011). And as smart individualism, it embodies strategic recalibration, where students economize their energy to preserve mental health, pursue side interests, or delay risky commitments. These are not mutually exclusive; they co-exist within the same practices

and discourses. Thus, tang ping should be conceptualized not as a singular orientation but as a repertoire of youth strategies.

From a broader sociological perspective, tang ping underscores the evolving contours of youth subjectivity in late modernity. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) framework of individualization highlights how youth are compelled to author their own life projects in conditions of uncertainty (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002). Tang ping exemplifies this: far from signaling absence of direction, it reveals the difficulty of constructing coherent trajectories when labor markets are precarious, social mobility is narrowing, and family expectations remain stringent. Similarly, Bauman's (2005) notion of "liquid life" captures how the instability of contemporary existence encourages flexible, tactical responses rather than linear careers (Bauman, Liquid Life, 2005). In this light, tang ping is less an abandonment of the future than an improvisational adjustment to liquid modernity. Importantly, this analysis calls for avoiding overly pathologizing or romanticizing tang ping. It is neither a moral failure nor a heroic resistance. Rather, it is an everyday cultural practice that reflects the conditions and dilemmas of contemporary youth. Understanding it as such allows scholars and policymakers to engage youth perspectives without reducing them to stereotypes. It also suggests directions for future research: longitudinal studies to trace whether tang ping orientations persist into adulthood; cross-ethnic comparisons within Malaysia to examine whether Malay and Indian youth articulate similar repertoires; and deeper ethnographic work to explore how tang ping interacts with religious, gendered, and class dynamics.

In conclusion, tang ping among Chinese Malaysian undergraduates should be read as a prism through which broader youth struggles are refracted. It expresses weariness with overwork, skepticism toward shrinking opportunities, and ambivalence toward family and societal expectations. Yet it also reveals creativity, adaptation, and subtle forms of resistance. Its significance lies not in whether it succeeds or fails as a coherent ideology, but in how it illuminates the ways youth negotiate modernity. By situating tang ping within intersecting frameworks of counterculture, defeatism, and smart individualism, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary youth subjectivities in Malaysia and beyond.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of tang ping among Chinese Malaysian undergraduates highlights its role as an adaptive response to precarity rather than simple apathy. By rejecting relentless competition, youths critique neoliberal demands for constant productivity while recalibrating priorities to protect mental health. This aligns with Furlong and Cartmel's (2007) idea of "epistemologies of survival" and Standing's (2011) account of the precariat. In Malaysia (Furlong & Cartmel, Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives, 2007) (Standing, 2011), tang ping also reflects systemic inequalities shaped by affirmative action policies, stratified education, and intergenerational expectations, echoing Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) thesis of individualization (Beck-GernSheim & Beck, 2002).

Digital media and peer networks amplify tang ping as a recognizable discourse, normalizing selective disengagement through participatory culture (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2015). Such practices constitute forms of "infrapolitics" (Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts, 1992), allowing youths to resist structural pressures without overt protest. Comparatively, Malaysia's manifestation of tang ping is less pathological than often portrayed in China or Taiwan, functioning instead as pragmatic negotiation with socio-economic realities.

For policymakers and educators, this underscores the need to address youth well-being and employment precarity rather than dismiss disengagement as laziness. These findings suggest that youth disengagement in Malaysia should be interpreted in relation to structural pressures rather than individual shortcomings. Policies in education and employment may benefit from recognizing these pressures and supporting more sustainable forms of youth participation and well-being. Ultimately, tang ping embodies countercultural critique, structural frustration, and pragmatic individualism, offering insights into how young people creatively navigate uncertain futures.

## Acknowledgement

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