

# A Classical Perspective on the Modern Internet Buzzword "Laying Flat"

Shuangyu Xie<sup>1, a, \*</sup>, and Hongli Deng<sup>2, b</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Arts, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China;

<sup>2</sup> Education Information Technology Center, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

<sup>a,\*</sup> 3174761918@qq.com, <sup>b</sup> dhl2016@cwnu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** The Internet is an important forum for the expression of opinions and views, and also an important place for the generation of subcultures. The emergence of the network buzzword "lying flat" is the result of the long-term accumulation of social problems and the convergence of various social trends. This paper will change the context, find a new reference point to reflect on the phenomenon of lying flat and draw on the ideas of the ancients to alleviate the anxiety of lying flat to provide a useful reference point of view.

**Keywords:** "Lying flat" phenomenon; Classical Chinese Thought.

## 1. Introduction

In 2021, an online article titled "Lying Flat is Justice" appeared in the public eye, triggering the resonance of many netizens. "Lying flat" originally meant lying horizontally on a flat surface, like the still surface of water. However, this word has been given a new connotation in the context of the times, representing a social mentality of "no desire, self-emptying, and refusal to struggle." Now, this word is used to describe the social reality where many young people are indifferent to competition and actively seek a life without desires. "Lying flat" is not a sudden social phenomenon, but a result of the long-term accumulation of social issues and the convergence of various social trends, as well as a product of the highly developed material civilization. As a cultural phenomenon shaped by the social environment, perhaps there are many people who lie flat in the past and present, and the article will explore the phenomenon of "lying flat" from an external and internal perspective in a different context.

## 2. Organization of the Text

### 2.1 Section Headings

#### 2.1.1 Sub heading

The external aspect of "lying flat" refers to the original meaning of the word. The "Kangxi Dictionary" did not include the word "lying flat," so we can only refer to the word "躺 (tǎng)." The earliest appearance of the word "lie" can be found in the Yuan Dynasty work "The Poetic Records of the Tang Dynasty Tripitaka" where it expresses the meaning of lying flat. The term "lying flat" originated from the word "lying," which is a pictophonetic character, with "身 (shēn)" as the radical, indicating the body, and "尚 (shàng)" as the phonetic part. In modern Chinese, "lying flat" is used as a verb complement, supplementing the state of "lying" with "flat." Therefore, "lying flat" can be understood literally as "lying in a flat state," which is quite different from the current popular meaning of "lying flat" in internet slang.

Understanding cultural phenomena and events within the current context can convey personal emotions, but it can also obscure certain aspects of the truth due to subjective feelings and the influence of external developments. Judging cultural phenomena not only requires consideration of the current ideological state but also reflects on the historical flow of thought from the current state of thought. Returning to the current state of mind of "lying flat" has its historical origin, and each

era has its own special words and phrases to express the state of mind of lying flat. Contemporary people can take a longer view and look at how ancient Chinese poetry expressed "lying flat" and how people faced this mentality in ancient times.

### 2.1.2 Sub heading

As a cultural phenomenon, the idea of "lying flat" is not unique to modern people, and the main connotation it implies is that the ancients had an insight into it a thousand years ago. Laozi, the teacher of Confucius, and founder of Confucianism in Chinese civilization, was the first person in the "lying flat" world of China. The phrase "wuwei" (meaning non-action) embodies the idea of conforming to nature and not doing unnecessary things. However, modern people seem to only remember "wuwei," while neglecting the more critical "wubuwei" (meaning not leaving undone what needs to be done). This indicates that Laozi's concept of "lying flat" was also conditional. We can consider "lying flat" as a tendency of "wuwei," so do we have "wubuwei" after "lying flat"? This is the key to "lying flat". Confucius's discussion of "lying flat" is recorded in the "Analects Commentary": "Master said: With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bent arm for a pillow - I have still joy amid these things. Riches and honors acquired by unrighteousness are to me as a floating cloud, this passage consoled those literati who did not succeed in their career. After all, most literati in the world have experienced years of hard study, but not every literati can gain recognition and attention. Therefore, during the days of being unappreciated and frustrated, literati can only alleviate inner depression by "lying flat".

Being in different times and influenced by different cultures will lead literati to make different choices regarding "lying flat". Tao Yuanming was born into the Tao family in Xunyang, Jiangzhou, and was influenced by Confucianism's concept of "learning and excellence" from a young age. "To be self-reliant in poverty, and to benefit the world when successful" was his initial aspiration, under this influence, Tao Yuanming often quoted Confucius' sayings in his poetry, reflecting the influence of Confucian thought on his early career aspirations. Li Changzhi mentioned in his Biography of Tao Yuanming that Tao Yuanming "respected Confucianism, did not reject Taoism, and later combined them into one, which formed his unique ideological face". Additionally, he was greatly influenced by Daoist thought, quoting from the "Zhuangzi" over fifty times in his poetry, even more than from the "Analects". It was this indirect influence of Confucian and Daoist thought that led Tao Yuanming to vacillate between pursuing a career and seeking reclusion. However, the Eastern Jin Dynasty obviously did not provide Tao Yuanming with a normal political environment, and the product of the regime, which was jointly supported by all the major clans, led to the chaos and darkness of this era, which made Tao Yuanming's career path very difficult, and the corruption of the officialdom made him feel disappointed and lack of political security, which often gave rise to the feeling of impatience: "Poetry and books are good for staying, but there is no worldly feeling in the gardens. How to give up this go, far away to the West Jing", Tao Yuanming is a person who attaches great importance to his own spiritual pleasure, he wants to pursue freedom and opposes all kinds of constraints, saying that he is "not good enough to be a mandarin" and does not "bend over backwards for the sake of five buckets of rice"., and as his temperament made him do so, he finally chose to "lie down flat" and go back to his hometown to enjoy the closeness and beauty of nature. Tao Yuanming's "lie flat" is not only driven by the times and society, but also by his choice to follow his own heart.

Wang Wei's life was full of vicissitudes, and his career experienced many ups and downs. When the opportunity arose, he would express his aspiration through poetry, "stating that he would not sell his integrity and would act for the sake of the people". During chaotic times, Wang Wei realized he was powerless to resist and was unwilling to follow those whose political ideals differed from his own. Therefore, he chose to "lie flat" to protect himself wisely. However, Wang Wei did not completely "lie flat" like Tao Yuanming; instead, he chose a semi-official and semi-reclusive lifestyle, Wang Wei both disgusted with the officialdom but not out of the officialdom, yearning for the mountains and forests but not completely into the mountains and forests, which contains the

wisdom of Wang Wei's survival, can be seen from the letter written in his later years, "and Wei Jushi Book This can be seen in the letter he wrote in his later years, "Letter with Wei Jushi": "Recently, there was Tao Qian, who refused to put the board and bend his waist to see the governor and abandoned his official position by removing the seal and ribbons. After the poor, 'begging for food' poem Cloud 'knocking on the door of poor speech', is repeatedly begging and more ashamed. Tried to see the governor and post, an eating public land several hectares. A shame of intolerance, and life-long shame? This is also a person I attacked, forget the big guard small, do not care about their tiredness." he challenged the Tao Yuanming-style "lying flat." He believed that "lying flat" requires material and economic foundations, and that Tao Yuanming's sacrifice of basic living standards for the sake of noble character is not worthwhile. "Drunkenly singing the wine of a field house, laughing at the books of the ancients. It is a good thing to have a lifetime of work, and there is no need to dedicate the Zi Xu". In "Sending Meng Liu back to Xiangyang", Wang Wei advised Meng Haoran, who had failed to pass the examination, to return to his hometown and live in seclusion as soon as possible, and it can be seen that Wang Wei aspired to and affirmed this kind of idle and free life. Paradoxically, Wang Wei advised Meng Haoran to return to his hometown and live in seclusion on the one hand, but on the other hand, he stayed idle in Chang'an and even offered poems soon after to draw attention to himself. It can be seen that Wang Wei believed that "lying down" was not necessarily in opposition to joining the civil service, that the two could be balanced and unified, and that the poem "Walking to the end of the water, sitting down to watch the clouds rise" is a good interpretation of Wang Wei's psychological activities when he was "lying down". This poem is a good illustration of Wang Wei's psychological activities when he was "lying flat". He always had expectations for the future, and he tried his best in good times, but he never gave up on life when he was "lying flat".

Su Shi had a very different approach to "lying flat" from the two aforementioned individuals. In the Song Dynasty, there was a strong emphasis on literature and scholars held significant power and social status. This environment motivated Su Shi, a scholar-official, to persist in his ideals, leading him to maintain a strong sense of social responsibility. After the Wutai Poetry Case, even if his career has experienced a greater turn, he has never easily given up his principles and abandoned the world to protect themselves, but Su Shi had more and more faith in Buddhism and Taoism, the bitterness of the heart in the fields and landscapes, more to the self-subjective consciousness as the center. His inner struggle led him to believe that the pursuit of fame and wealth was meaningless compared to the tranquility of nature and liberation from distress. However, this was merely an ideal for Su Shi, and he could only construct a "Peach Blossom Spring" world in the depths of his heart. His poems, such as "On Reducing the Characters in 'Magnolia Blossoms' – Seeing Off Zhao Huizhi to Dongwu," reflect his longing for seclusion, embodying his "lying flat" mentality, which provided him comfort during his challenging career, serving as a pathway for facing the difficulties of life. This mindset enabled him to maintain an optimistic spirit, full of hope for the future, despite major political setbacks and life's hardships, stemming from his pursuit of inner freedom and resilient spiritual strength. Although Su Shi did not withdraw to the countryside like Tao Yuanming, he achieved a kind of spiritual freedom while existing in the real world. To quote Lin Yutang, He was always engulfed in the political whirlpool, yet always transcended politics[1]. Su Shi's mature mindset shielded him from worldly disturbances, maintaining his optimism. After numerous demotions, he realized that only a strong inner self could overcome external challenges, leading to the idealization of his hometown. Even when far away from home in the wilderness or thousands of miles from family, Su Shi managed to maintain inner peace and resilience. Whether it was Sichuan or Hainan, it didn't matter, because as long as the heart is content, any place can be home.

### 3. Summary

We examined the artistic lives of the three poets Tao Yuanming, Wang Wei, and Su Shi, and found that they all share a common feature: with the sudden turn in their real lives, their inner spiritual

world and artistic creation also undergo significant changes. They have different choices for their "lying flat" state - either as a seasoning for their unsuccessful career, or as the wisdom of preserving oneself in the officialdom, or as a transcendent state of mind, all of which reflect their life philosophy.

The ancient concept of "lying flat" often represents the subjective poetic transcendence, while the current "lying flat" phenomenon in the context of today's society highlights the dissolution of the subjective value and self-existence of young people, manifesting a crisis of sliding towards nothingness [2]. We can draw on the thinking of the ancients to adjust the biased mentality of the current "lying flat" phenomenon and break out of the dilemma of passive "lying flat".

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