

**EXHAUSTED YOUTHS: *TANG PING*
AND OTHER SIMILAR SOCIAL
PHENOMENA IN NORTHEAST ASIA**

LIM Tai Wei

EAI Background Brief No. 1682

Executive Summary

1. The genesis of *tang ping* is derived from a post from Chinese social media platform Tieba (hosted by Chinese search engine Baidu) which read: “Lying flat is my wise movement...Only by lying down can humans become the measure of all things”. The term enjoys popularity with middle class youths in China and the *wenyi qingnian* (young arty hipsters).
2. Unrealistic social expectations provoked youngsters to turn to *sang*-ness (doomsday culture) as a form of self-preservation and coping mechanism, stunting their personal growth, reducing expectations/stress and making unambitious life goals to avoid failure. In essence, it is an organic form of resistance against society in the absence of alternative options.
3. The cause for the *tang ping* social phenomenon is based on the idea that Chinese youngsters are worn out by hard work with little returns (including long hours, stress of sending out resumes and difficulties in locating the ideal job) and therefore opting for a less pressurising or stressful lifestyle by ‘lying flat’.
4. Young entrants into the job market appear to be under strong competitive pressure to get into high-tech sector jobs and white-collar occupations while being anxious about high-pressure corporate culture.
5. At major tech firms, the corporate culture popularly labelled as “996” (12 hours at work from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days weekly) was a source of social unhappiness.
6. *Tang ping* is also connected with demographic changes. Young entrants to the workforce are products of the one child policy. They have to pick up work that used to be performed by their retiring seniors who enjoy twice the number of workers, thereby increasing work pressure on fewer younger workers.
7. In fact, China is not the only Northeast society experiencing a *tang ping*-like situation. Across Northeast Asia, youngsters are having the same experience. In

South Korea, youngsters are skipping marriage and buying apartments while, in Japan, youths are not as fixated on material possessions as before.

8. South Korean youngsters called their country as the pejorative 'Hell Joseon', nicknamed after the decline of the Joseon dynasty, an era that Koreans considered as weak.
9. In 2011, a South Korean media outlet came up with the term *sampo* (or "give up three") to symbolise an entire generation of Koreans who have given up dating, marriage and having children as many South Korean youths consider them excessively costly.
10. In Japan, the *satori sedai* generation has a pessimistic outlook of life and lost all desires for materialism, giving rise to a minimalism movement.