

# *Supporting Aspirations, Empowering Oneself: An Empirical Study Based on the Current Situation of Some Youth University Student Groups in 27 Regions Falling into the 'Low Desire' Trap*

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**Abstract:** This research report first presents an in-depth exploration of the formation, research objectives, and significance of the "low desire" youth university student group. Then, by reviewing a large number of relevant academic literature, the author conducted an analysis from three dimensions — the conceptual research of the "low desire" youth university student group, the current status of this groups' development and its existing problems, and construction of the index system of the phenomenon influencing factors. The corresponding solutions are proposed with the aim of providing important theoretical references for improving the subjective initiative of the youth university students, alleviating social employment pressure, and promoting social harmony and economic development. We wish to change the "low desire" youth university student group's perception of self-worth to allow them to complete higher education smoothly and with high quality, taking the responsibility and mission of the youth in the new era proactively.

## 1. Background

Japanese management scholar Kenichi Ohmae proposed the concept of a "low desire society" in his book "How to Ignite the Low Desire Society". In recent years, similar phenomena have appeared in Chinese society with a representing format of popular online buzzwords such as "demotivational culture," "Buddhist-style youth," and "lying horizontal". Part of university students has chosen a passive and unproductive lifestyle in reality. The spread of this mindset greatly troubles the values of these early adults, and may even have an impact on the mainstream values of other age groups, which is not conducive to the student's growth.

We should not suppress the youth subcultures that emerge during social transitions. Instead, we should acknowledge that societal mentality is a reflection of social reality. <sup>[1]</sup>Undeniably, the

enormous pressure faced by university graduates in seeking employment has exacerbated the phenomenon of "low desire" among university students. While China's economic development stably grows, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in national policies have resulted in large-scale layoffs in companies. Furthermore, competition has become increasingly fierce with a large number of graduates entering the job market. Therefore, the pressure faced by most college students, who are about to end their academic careers and begin their work-life right after graduation from college, is obvious.

Currently, some experts and scholars have conducted certain research on this phenomenon, but the research is not entirely sufficient as the lack of empirical data and the pure reliance on theoretical generalizations. Viewed from China's social background, contemporary college students generally have a "Buddha-like," "lying horizontal," and other "low desire" mentalities, which are not conducive to contemporary society growth. Therefore, it is imperative to inspire college students' fighting spirit and help them break free from the "low desire" status quo.

## 2. Research Status

In the process of reaching socialization, college students are surrounded and shaped by the social environment, culture, family, school, peers, and other factors that promote them to further achieve socialization and transform them from blank individuals into qualified social members. With the rapid development of China, these factors have undergone significant changes with respect to the shift in the social environment. As a result, many obstacles have arisen in the socialization process of college students, with some experiencing "low desire" psychology and being unable to complete socialization normally.<sup>[2]</sup>In recent years, the mental health issues of college students have gradually become a hot topic among scholars and have achieved many research results.

Li Haiyan analyzed the reasons for the formation of "low desire" among college students based on changes in macro social factors.<sup>[3]</sup>Feng Lianjun, Pan Guangwei, and others analyzed the role of social and economic factors, social structure, and value systems during China's transitional period in the formation of "low desire" among college students from a historical materialism perspective (Feng Lianjun, Pan Guangwei, 2020). Song Dexiao and Bie Yangyang also believed that the formation of the "low desire" group is an inevitable product created when the youth are facing group anxiety, intergenerational characteristics, and self-depreciation caused by social objective problems. Although there are some differences in the specific mechanism, they all believe that the formation of the "low desire" group is a phased product of social development.

Lei Shu characterized and interpreted "Buddhist-style youth" from four dimensions — attitude towards life, emotional expression, behavior, and value orientation — and believed that the formation of the "low desire" group is a subculture branch that is co-led by the high-pressure caused reverse "low desire society", group infection of Western postmodernism, the crisis of self-identity construction during the "emerging adulthood" period, and the network subculture of the internet era (Lei Zhu, 2019). Xiang Yafang explored the reasons for this phenomenon from the perspective of subculture and analyzed the social and cultural factors, such as network media which shapes the identity of the "lying horizontal" group and the negative effects of consumerism culture that promoted the formation of the "low desire" group.

From the research of these scholars, it can be seen that the reasons for the formation of the "low desire" group among college students mainly focus on specific stages of social development and multiple cultural shocks and subcultures fields. College student groups are at a loss when facing various objective contradictions that arise during a specific stage of social development, and the factors that were helpful to them, such as school, classmates, and family, have also undergone tremendous changes. Under the double pressure of social competition and the impact of multiple

cultures, college students are more likely to be influenced by these subcultures and unable to complete socialization normally. They are forced to give up their high expectations and choose to become a "lying horizontal" group with "low desire" as a way of soft resistance to express their dissatisfaction with society. Therefore, we can regard it as a "low desire" phenomenon behind the "high desire."

### **3. "Low desire" Status of University Students**

#### **3.1. College Students with "Low Desires" under the Status of "Enjoying Peace and Comfort"**

Some college students who are in a "low desire" state do not have a clear understanding of the outside world. They stay in their own comfort zone and are unwilling to face failures in their studies or lives. They believe that "nothing is difficult in the world if you are willing to give up." They actively adopt a negative attitude of "as long as I lie horizontal enough, the spiral of competition won't affect me" to deal with their lives and studies. Some college students have a good household income, and their parents have paved the way for their future, making them free from a "nowhere to turn to" worry. These "low desire" college students who live comfortably gather together in dormitories and classrooms, filling their inner emptiness through games, novels, short videos, and other means. They find satisfaction in entertainment but do not bother to pay attention to other things around them.

#### **3.2. "Low desire" University Students under Negative Avoidance Behavior**

The abundance of material possessions and excessive indulgence from parents can directly or indirectly impede the development of strong stress resistance in some college students. When students encounter repeated failures despite their efforts or fail to achieve their goals, they may experience self-denial emotions and thoughts of avoidance. They may even become hesitant and afraid to attempt things that they could have otherwise accomplished. Eventually, these students may adopt a psychological defence mechanism, avoiding challenging work or goals, and instead, seeking refuge in their comfort zone. They may passively accept a negative self-image and carry the shackles that imprison them, causing them to suffer.

#### **3.3. "Low Desire" University Students under Cognitive Bias**

Some college students who lack self-control are highly susceptible to becoming addicted to the online world, and are dominated by it. They often spend a considerable amount of time on electronic screens every day, neglecting their studies. With the development of network information technology and the popularity of computers and mobile phones, college students have more ways to access various types of online information. In the era of big data, accurate information pushes make it easier for people to obtain information that interests them. College students become more concerned about the lives of others on electronic screens, and begin to dislike their current selves and environments. They gradually lose their goals and ideals and start living a life of aimlessness. When they see the lives of others on electronic screens that they envy, the impact of the conflict between their ideals and reality gradually corrodes the positive and upward-looking desire to strive for success that they once had. Interviewee Xiao Wang stated, "Passing the course and graduating successfully is enough." They do not have the consciousness of pursuing high scores in their coursework and exams; instead, they hover around the passing line, and sometimes even spend money to purchase assignments to meet their teacher's requirements. They lack ambition, live day by day, and have no pursuit in life or plan for their studies.

### **3.4. "Low Desire" University Students with a State of Confusion**

Due to the fact that some university students have not yet adjusted to university life and the transition of roles, they present a state of confusion when faced with relatively free university life. They have no clear plans for the future and simply live day by day and lack a clear understanding of their career choices and selectively ignore future career options. They have vague expectations for the future but are still lacking in terms of implementing their actions. For example, the interviewee, Xiao Liu, expressed that she is currently in a "low desire" stage. She said, "I don't have any clear ideals or goals right now, but in my imagination, my ideal life is to have a small home in the future and some money to enjoy life. When I get older, I want to watch the sunset, dance, and sing with my loved ones...But if you ask me what my goal is, I'm afraid I can't answer you right now because I'm also looking for my own goals."

### **3.5. "Low Desire" College Students Under refined selfishness**

With the development of the market economy under the rapid development of reform and opening up, the market economy has brought many benefits to people. However, it has also led to a variety of phenomena, such as the spread of refined selfishness. Some college students become accustomed to prioritizing their own interests, and are willing to do whatever it takes to benefit themselves. They are more likely to pursue instant gratification and lose their motivation to work hard in the face of adversity. They lack a sense of social responsibility and a sense of belonging to society. They often think of others as tools to achieve their goals, and they are more likely to adopt unethical and immoral behaviors.

## **4. Influencing Factors Analysis**

### **4.1. The Contagion of Postmodern Cultural Trends**

During the 1960s and 1970s, a social and cultural trend emerged in Western countries that was characterized by anti-centrism, anti-rationalism, anti-mainstream, the advocacy of individual freedom, the abandonment of ideals and beliefs, and the rejection of moral obligations and social responsibilities. This trend is known as postmodernism. Under the influence of this cultural movement, the "NEETs" (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) phenomenon appeared in the early 1990s in the UK. This phenomenon later spread to Europe and South Africa. When the "NEETs" phenomenon entered the East Asian cultural sphere, it blended with the local culture and society, giving rise to the larger-scale and more influential Japanese "Low Desire Society" and the South Korean "Solitary Society" phenomena. In recent years, these trends have developed from "NEETs" and "Low Desire Society" to domestic buzzwords such as "demotivational culture," "Buddhist Style," "Lying Horizontal," and "Slacking Off." Many college students have yet to form a stable worldview, resulting in confusion about their self-perception and exposure to these trends.

### **4.2. The Accelerated Spread of Internet Subcultures in the Era of New Media**

The spread of internet subcultures has accelerated through the era of new media. While the rapid development of internet technology has brought great convenience to people, it has also caused many problems. The author found through a questionnaire that 90% of the surveyed college students considered the internet to be important or very important to their lives, indicating the significance of the internet to college students' lives. Currently, due to the lack of personal information protection and the continuous iteration of algorithms supported by internet companies,

the internet can easily capture students' pain points and provide personalized push notifications based on their preferences. Some college students who lack self-control are unable to extricate themselves from the complex network world and become immersed in the sea of fragmented information, addicted to milk tea and spiritual drugs manufactured by capitalism. Under the long-term influence of internet subcultures, some college students cannot distinguish the harm in concepts like "lying horizontal", "Buddhist style", and "being lazy", and even enjoy them. They gradually lose their ability to judge and identify with negative internet subcultures, agreeing with the viewpoint of "the futility of effort" and losing their motivation to strive.

#### **4.3. The Need for University Students to Relieve Stress and Defend Themselves**

Under the contradiction of limited resources and a large population, the phenomenon of societal "involution" continues to intensify, and college students face tremendous social pressure. This pressure comes not only from the expectations of society, family, and intense competition among peers but also from the sense of powerlessness caused by unfulfilled high expectations. <sup>[4]</sup>Under this great pressure, college students cannot express their suffering and can only silently endure it. However, the inability to effectively relieve and vent long-term pressure causes students' emotions to be on the verge of collapse, gradually becoming a "low-desire" group who believe that "as long as I lie horizontal enough, you can't drag me down." Some college students may choose to disguise themselves as "low-desire" to reduce competition pressure, using it as self-mockery. This "low-desire" group is essentially a manifestation of self-doubt and distrust, forced to use "low-desire" as an excuse for their own failure to construct a psychological defence barrier.

Through observing and analyzing questionnaires, I found that introverted college students are more likely to own a "low-desire" state than extroverted students. Jung once said in "The Wisdom of Jung: Jungian Personality Philosophy Interpretation" that "personality determines destiny," which provides a perspective for analyzing why some college students are in a "low-desire" state. <sup>[5]</sup>Some introverted college students prefer to be alone, prefer introspection, and have sensitive emotions. However, excessive self-reflection sometimes makes them doubt their abilities, lower their expectations for themselves, and fall into a "low-desire" state.

#### **4.4. Abundant material conditions breed selfishness**

As the social economy develops, material wealth becomes more abundant, and a large number of families ride the "bandwagon" of rapid economic development, greatly improving their quality of life and providing more economic support to college students. Living in favorable material conditions for a long time, college students find it difficult to experience the hardships of life, let alone any pressure within the ivory tower of university. Influenced by this lenient material environment, some college students develop a selfish mindset, indulging in luxury and comfort, unwilling to work hard and preferring to enjoy life's pleasures. They believe that under the current model of strict admission but lenient graduation in universities, as long as they lie horizontal for four years and make a symbolic effort before graduation, they will be able to obtain their degree. Even if they are not competent after graduation, their parents will bail them out of their decline, leaving them with no real pressure to survive. It is not surprising that the group of young college students who hold this belief fall into the trap of "low desire."

## **5. Analysis of Relevant Measures**

### **5.1. Strengthening Career Planning Education to Improve Core Competence**

It is highly important to value the significance of career planning education, enhance and perfect top-level design, issue relevant regulatory systems timely, and explore incorporating the curriculum into the scope of high school education and examination to continuously guide and improve students' social cognitive ability. Professional forces should be selected and organized to compose targeted and instructive counselling materials that enable students to acquire knowledge, apply it, and gain insights. The advantages of new media and self-media should be fully utilized to deepen multi-party linkage, promote school-enterprise linkage and home-school linkage, and make career planning education more effective. Activities such as inviting enterprises into campuses and organizing school-enterprise summer camps should be held during extracurricular activities and summer holidays to help students narrow information gaps, broaden horizons, enhance students' cognitive ability, and lay a foundation for their interests and hobbies, thus making their career planning more targeted and confident.

### **5.2. Restructuring Labor Education to Create a Positive Life**

To cultivate a proper attitude toward work, the proportion of labor education should be increased. The role and significance of labor education in higher education should be elevated and linked to students' personal development by developing a plan for its growth. Through labor education, students can be helped to develop a correct view of labor, which can help to counteract the detrimental influence of market-oriented utilitarianism. Encouraging students to actively participate in labor can help them seek their personal and social value. When conducting labor education in universities, theory and practice should be combined to avoid the phenomenon of teaching without labor or laboring without teaching.

To better integrate various resources for labor practice and build a complete evaluation system for labor education, universities should consolidate various labor practice resources and establish an open selection platform. By classifying labor practice resources such as "Sports to the Rural Areas", volunteer teaching, and community practice, students are allowed to freely choose some projects, thus providing more opportunities for labor practice and igniting students' enthusiasm for practical work. Based on the actual development of the university, a comprehensive labor education evaluation system should be established to regularly check the implementation effects of labor education, thus providing accumulation for future reform and development.

### **5.3. Opening Up the Mind and Building Dormitory Mailboxes**

University dormitory culture that has an implicit effect on college students' psychological activity and behavior is composed of four levels of material, system, spiritual, and behavioral culture. Material culture refers to the hardware facilities and environmental sanitation of the dormitory. Through network searches and field observations, it was discovered that some college dormitories lack facilities for students to express emotions. Additionally, compared to extroverted students, introverted students who prefer to stay alone are more likely to be in a "low-desire" state. Therefore, building mailboxes as a platform for expressing emotions and sharing thoughts can provide an opportunity for college students to express themselves and communicate with others anonymously. This is not only beneficial for college students to express negative emotions, create a harmonious dormitory atmosphere, but also helpful for the development of a good dormitory culture. It has a positive impact on helping college students get out of the "low-desire" state.

## 6. Conclusions

This survey report combines previous research results to determine different indicators from four dimensions: social environment, family environment, cognitive assessment, and educational experience, and to quantify and calculate the weight of the questionnaire. <sup>[6]</sup>The data revealed that most of the young college students with "low desire" are under the pressure of competition in the social employment environment and have deviations in self-assessment.

Combining the results of the questionnaire and data analysis, we propose some feasible suggestions and countermeasures for improving the phenomenon of low desire of young college students, based on the variables with high correlation coefficients, in order to provide important theoretical references for improving the subjective motivation of young college students, alleviating the social employment pressure, promoting social harmony and economic development, so that In order to improve the self-worth of young college students with "low desire", they can successfully complete their higher education with high quality and take the initiative to shoulder the responsibility and mission of young people in the new era.

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