

## **The Hopeful Disposition and the Performative Media Practice of Age: A case study of the lying flat movement on Xiaohongshu**

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### **Abstract**

Since 2022, quiet quitting has been a global workplace trend which means completing the bare minimum with emotional disengagement. Expanding on the referential meaning of lying on your back and doing nothing, the China's lying-flat cyberspace movement came into shape. A multitude of posts on Chinese social media platforms embody a rejection of overworking, and embrace a new economy of slow-paced labor which counteracts the authoritative behavioral scripts based on the incremental chronological age. Between 2021 and 2023, the literature on lying flat has burgeoned, but lacks a thorough study either on the element of age (younger generations as primary initiators), or investigating the relevant posts on Xiaohongshu (Chinese Instagram). This study uses data collected from Xiaohongshu through the walkthrough method, in particular the mood and tone of the comments under a range of image posts in which the nonhuman (e.g., cats, ducks, roosters) lie down as vividly as human beings. In addition, the disposition hopefulness is utilized, a crucial methodological shift within the domain of postcritique, to analyze and visualize the data. The analysis suggests that lying flat is a unique expression of age performativity which recuperates mental health, apart from subverting age norms. Whereas lying flat is pathologized by the official media discourse as unproductive, it bears the potential of being redeployed into a hopeful disposition. The emotional attachment focusing on hope to the target audiences, who are frustrated with the working culture of modern society, is able to address the age-associated decline with care and repair.

**Keywords:** Hopeful disposition; lying flat; performativity of age; Xiaohongshu

### **Bio**

Yikun Wu is currently a guest researcher at the Center for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS), Linnaeus University. He holds a PhD in English Literature from Nanjing University, China. His research examines diverse cultural discourses of age on social media platforms. His previous work can be found in the leading journals of mainland China: *Contemporary Foreign Literature* (当代外国文学) and *The Journal of Nanjing Normal University* (Social Sciences) (南京师大学报 (社会科学版)).

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