CHINA DIGITAL TIMES

LEXICON

China's Lexicon of Digital Resistance

Netizens on the Chinese internet have been using buzzwords and memes for decades, to express obliquely what they cannot directly. From the "grass-mud horse" to "driving in reverse," they show how public sentiment and protest has evolved since the early 2000s.

XIAO QIANG — MARCH 7, 2024

INTERNET

China's online population at the start of 2003 was less than 60 million. 10 years later, it was fast approaching 600 million. Now, after 20 years, it is well over a billion.

In the closely monitored Chinese digital sphere, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) views all Internet users as subjects to be controlled and guarded against, as well as potential economic assets. On social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin and Zhihu, netizens actively oppose censorship and propaganda through strategic, well-timed actions focused on specific issues and tactical opportunities. Their resistance is marked by diversity, creativity and adaptability, often emerging spontaneously and organically, without the need for formal organization. In the dynamic landscape of Chinese social media, these individual acts of defiance merge, creating a significant collective impact on public opinion.

Every major debate on the internet represents a battle of narratives. While state censors and government-supported online commentators strive to filter, suppress, distort or erase varying viewpoints, the tenacity of netizens — voicing opinions, documenting events, sharing narratives and engaging in discussions — counters the CCP's authoritarian grip. Despite the extensive censorship apparatus, the combined voices and inventive resistance of millions of Chinese social media users present a formidable opposition that no censorship system can completely silence.

In response to netizen activities, censors often resort to deleting posts and ramping up the monitoring of "sensitive words," which in turn gives rise to various subtle forms of "resistance discourse." Netizens have developed a repertoire of techniques such as satire, mockery, roasts, provocations and intentionally contrarian interpretations. A key component of this is the use of parody, in which netizens ingeniously manipulate and reinterpret symbols and slogans

from official propaganda. These collective efforts repurpose elements from both official and popular culture, turning them into instruments of subversive expression. This creative defiance generates internet buzzwords that, while subtle, represent a powerful form of digital resistance.

On a more profound level, the aggregation of these seemingly minor terms constitutes a rich, emotive lexicon, akin to an ever-expanding "coral reef" within the history of resistance on the Chinese internet. My aspiration is that this coral reef of dissent will eventually grow substantial enough to become an integral part of the broader narrative, effectively grounding the colossal vessel of the CCP's legitimacy.

Since 2003, *China Digital Times* has been at the forefront of tracking and preserving information that faces censorship on the Chinese internet. Using automated technology and the crowd wisdom of Chinese netizens, our editors capture content suppressed by the Party-state, as well as the varied ways in which netizens combat censorship and propaganda. Our archive contains narratives and expressions stifled by official media, personal accounts from marginalized voices, and insights revealing the inner workings of China's censorship and propaganda systems.

The dozen phrases below, presented chronologically, are excerpted from 104 terms in the 20th-anniversary edition of the *China Digital Times Lexicon* (originally titled the "Grass-Mud Horse Lexicon," after one of its entries) — selected by our Chinese team, who have spent a collective century or more deeply immersed in Chinese online discourse — from official slogans and their irreverent appropriations to protest cries and nationalist accusations. They aim to capture something of the enormous explosion of online speech that accompanied this growth of the Chinese internet, with a particular focus on efforts by authorities to tame it, and by others to push back.

– **Xiao Qiang**, Founder and Editor-in-Chief, *China Digital Times*

2004 — Five Times Better (好五倍)

A phrase from an argument that Sha Zukang, former Chinese ambassador to the United Nations, made to the press in April 2004 in defense of China's human rights record.

In his statement to the press, Sha employed some dubious mathematical logic to support his claims about China's human rights record:

Sha: "China's human rights are the best" *(CDT)*

> I have openly remarked that the human rights situation in China today is better than that in the United States. The population of China is five times larger than the population of the U.S. If you look at it just in terms of comparing the populations, one would expect China's problems to be at least five times greater than those of the U.S. in order for our human rights situations to be the same. But the reality is that our human rights situation is better than that of the U.S. — this shows that China's human rights situation is five times better than that of the U.S.

Sha is known for other less-than-diplomatic statements. He caused a stir in September 2010 when he declared his distaste for Americans and U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. "I

know you never liked me Mr. Secretary-General — well, I never liked you, either." In 2007, The Onion published a satirical commentary, purporting to be penned by Sha, under the headline: "I'm the U.N. Undersecretary Your Mother Warned You About."

The phrase "five times better" has also been used on Chinese social media to mock exorbitant claims or grandiose plans by the government. In response to an August 2014 news item about the Chinese Communist Party investing 20 billion yuan to build a Party school in South Africa, Weibo user @人生药师 wrote: "Now that the people of South Africa finally have a Party school, and finally have human rights that are five times better than America's, Mandela can rest in peace at last."

2006 — River Crab (河蟹 héxiè)

A troublesome creature whose name echoes the CCP's treasured "harmony" (和谐) and serves as a euphemism for censorship.

The river crab, wearing luxury watches *(CDT)*

Originally a Confucian concept, the idea of "social harmony" was resurrected as a key tenet of Hu Jintao's "scientific development concept" and used as a motto to embody his governing philosophy. The Hu administration introduced its doctrine of "harmonious society" (和谐社会) in 2006, broadening the Party's focus from raw economic growth to ameliorating income inequality and other threats to social stability. Critics of this philosophy argued that the government created a surface appearance of harmony by suppressing or "harmonizing" elements of society that were not to the Party's liking.

As online communication and mobile phone use spread, Hu's reigning doctrine of "harmony" became a euphemism for censorship. In some online forums, the word "harmony" itself became a banned keyword. In order to circumvent such censorship, netizens replaced it with the homophone "river crab" or other similar-sounding terms. Ultimately, netizens used the word "river crab" to refer broadly to the government's behavior of blocking terms and foreign websites, covering up negative news, and otherwise curtailing freedom of speech and information.

The word can also be used as a verb: censored content can be said to have been "harmonized" (被和谐了), or to have been "river-crabbed" (被河蟹了). At one point, the "river crab" was even retrofitted into the text of a short, satirical Ming dynasty verse originally written by an anonymous poet to mock Yan Song, a notoriously corrupt Ming regent. Chinese internet users changed the word "crab" to "river crab" to give the line an update: "I shall keep an eye upon that river crab, and see how much longer he manages to scuttle about."

The river crab is sometimes depicted wearing three watches (带三个表), a play on words referring to the "Three Represents" (三个代表), the defining governance theory of Jiang Zemin, as well as the once hot phenomenon of spotting officials wearing luxury timepieces costing many times their official salaries.

2007 — Take a Walk (散步)

Walking as an innovative, moderate form of civil disobedience to avoid more provocative forms of protest — such as marches, demonstrations, or sit-ins — that would be easily suppressed by authorities.

Citizens "go for a walk" in Xiamen *(United Daily News)*

In China, it is difficult to strike, applications for protests are routinely denied, and petitioning the government often brings dire consequences. As such, workers and citizens have constantly adopted new methods that tread the fine line of legality. One of these innovative forms of resistance that began as early as 2007 is "taking walks," which mobilizes large numbers of people to walk together in the name of a common cause, without necessarily labeling it explicitly as a protest. The more innocent terminology also facilitated online organizing without the use of easily filtered keywords. This allows citizens to legally express their opinions while (hopefully) avoiding scrutiny by authorities. In recent years, as such peaceful "walks" have become riskier and less common, the term has fallen out of use somewhat.

In the spring and summer of 2007, a text-message campaign rallied citizens in Xiamen to begin "taking walks" to protest the construction of a paraxylene (PX) processing plant, which was ultimately moved to another location. In February 2011, an online source attempted to stage a pro-democracy "Jasmine Revolution," echoing language used to describe the various Middle East protest movements, by encouraging groups to "walk" the central Beijing shopping district of Wangfujing. An open letter by the anonymous organizers called on people to gather every Sunday in 13 cities for a low-confrontation approach, without banners: "We invite every participant to stroll, watch, or even just pretend to pass by. As long as you are present, the authoritarian government will be shaking with fear."

In 2014, a series of state-led campaigns against "illegal religious buildings," in which churches were demolished and crosses removed, generated fierce resistance amongst Chinese Christians. Taking a walk was one of the tactics that Christian groups employed to defend their religious freedom. A 2014 post on Weibo from user @廖木林传道 announced one such potential walk:

> If Zhejiang authorities do not immediately put a halt to the illegal removal of crosses, tens of thousands of Christians will don protest t-shirts and take a spontaneous walk through the streets to protect our rights. We will hold protest signs to express our feelings to the entire world.

2008 — Fart People (屁民)

Originally an insult, "fart people" was reclaimed as a self-deprecating label of pride for the common people. The term comes from a 2008 incident involving Lin Jiaxiang, former Party Secretary of the Shenzhen Maritime Administration, who was caught on surveillance camera harassing an 11-year-old girl. He asked her where the bathroom was, then cornered her after she showed him the way. After the girl escaped, her parents confronted Lin. Angrily

A CCTV clip of the Lin Jiaxiang incident *(Southern Metropolis Daily)*

pointing at the girl's father, Lin shouted:

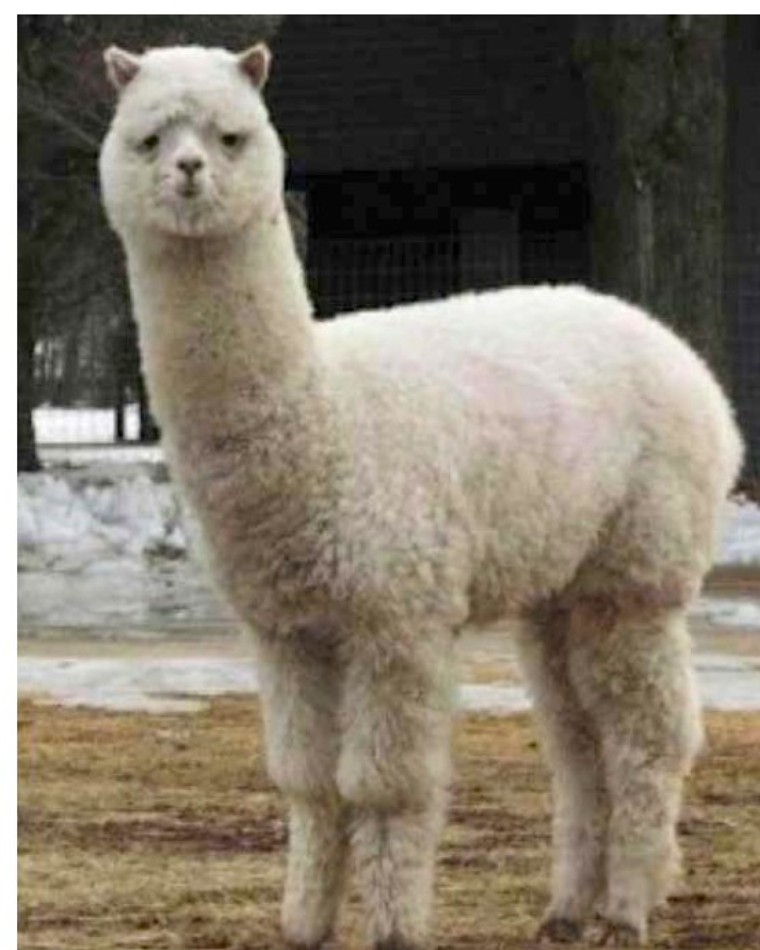
> Do you people know who I am? I was sent here by the Ministry of Transportation. I'm on par with your mayor. So what if I pinched a little child's neck? You people are worth less than a fart to me! How dare you mess with me? Just see how I deal with you.

"You people are worth less than a fart to me" was picked up online, giving rise to the designation "fart people" as a sardonic reflection of the people's perceived standing in the eyes of officials. "Fart people" originally stood in inherent opposition to officialdom as, for example, in the derivative phrase "the system errs, the fart people suffer" (体亏屁思). Amid severe air pollution in 2013, when the China National Committee for Terms in Sciences and Technologies was seeking a Chinese term for "PM 2.5," one suggestion floated online substituted "fart people" (*pimin*) for the acronym's original "particulate matter."

The dichotomy of officials vs. fart people has faded somewhat over time. In their 2013 essay "China at the Tipping Point? From 'Fart People' to Citizens," Perry Link and Xiao Qiang observed that while the term "began as a bitter suggestion that powerholders see rank-and-file citizens as having no more value than digestive gas [… now] it is just another way to say *laobaixing* (ordinary folks). But the seemingly innocuous process by which sarcastic terms are normalized can have profound consequences. It converts the terms from the relatively narrow role of expressing resistance to the much broader one of conceiving how the world normally is."

2009 — Grass-Mud Horse (草泥马)

De facto mascot of Chinese citizens fighting for free expression, symbolizing defiance of online censorship.


An alpaca or llama, used as a stand-in for the grass mud horse *(CDT)*

The grass-mud horse, whose name sounds nearly the same as the phrase "fuck your mother" (肏你妈), was originally created to skirt government censorship of vulgar content. Film scholar Cui Weiping draws a direct connection between the launch of the "Special Campaign to Rectify Vulgar Content on the Internet" in early 2009 and the appearance of the viral music video "Song of the Grass-Mud Horse" in February of that year. The idea caught fire after the creation of a video depicting the imaginary grass-mud horse defeating the likewise mythical river crab (see above). Users continually expanded the lore of the grass-mud horse by composing catchy songs and creating photo albums and fake nature documentaries purporting to show the creature in its natural habitat.

An annual "Grass-Mud Horse Festival" is held on July 1, the anniversary of the CCP's founding. The grass-mud horse is one of many mythical creatures invented in response to increasingly strict censorship measures. Naturally, the grass-mud horse itself has long been targeted by government censors. More recent examples of (partially) censored fictional creatures include Winnie the Pooh and Peppa Pig.

Over a decade later, its image still serves as a powerful rebuke to government censorship, such as in November 2022 when a woman brought three alpacas to Shanghai's Wulumuqi Road following an online crackdown on the White Paper protests that began at that

intersection. A May 2015 comment from Weibo user @弹力晗超人 expresses the frustration of having to constantly play a game of cat-and-mouse with online censors:

> Uh … # ¥% & * + "$ & …posting, getting deleted, and then reposting. I can no lon- ger find the words to describe the number of grass-mud horses that are currently on my mind.

2011 — Dinner and Drinks (饭醉)

To discuss or engage with politically sensitive issues, usually as a group over food and drink; homophonous with "to commit a crime" (犯罪).

The term comes from a practice of the New Citizens' Movement to gather for dinners and discuss political and social issues. These gatherings were sometimes referred to as "getting dinner and drinks in the same city" (同城饭醉 tóngchéng fàn zuì), which sounds identical to "committing a crime in the same city" (同城犯罪 tóngchéng fàn zuì).

Xu Zhiyong on the cover of the Chinese edition of *Esquire*, August 2009

The practice began around 2011, starting with small gatherings of legal professionals who discussed cases and current events, either on a regular basis or on the spur of the moment. As more people were encouraged to participate, the gatherings spread to over 30 cities with as many as 200 people at a given dinner. The topics expanded to cover environmental pollution, CCP history, government corruption, censorship, land expropriation, models of democratic governance and other sensitive topics. All participants were given time to voice their opinion on the subject, before the group agreed on a proposal for action.

The New Citizens' Movement called for democratic and rule-of-law reforms, constitutionalism, human rights, and social justice. After authorities detained rights lawyer Xu Zhiyong, a central figure in the movement who gave it its name, and a dozen other members of the group in 2013, the dinners continued, but fewer people attended. The 2015 "Black Friday" arrests of hundreds of civil rights lawyers, and the continuing repression of civil society groups under Xi Jinping's tenure, made such dinner gatherings even riskier. In 2019, Xu and Ding Jiaxi organized another dinner gathering of the New Citizens' Movement in Xiamen, but authorities tracked down and arrested the participants. In 2023, Xu and Ding were pronounced guilty of "subversion of state power" in closed-door trials and sentenced to 14 and 12 years in prison, respectively.

The idealism and excitement of these once-common gatherings is palpable in this 2013 comment from Weibo user @马玉清 风, who responded to an announcement about monthly "civic-participation" dinner parties in Xiamen by posting:

> "Dinner-and-drinkers, empower yourselves by building consensus with fellow citizens of your city!"

2013 — Catch the Frisbee (叼飞盘)

Eagerly latching on to (and putting a positive spin on) whatever rhetoric the government throws out, much like a dog catching a frisbee. Most commonly associated with Hu Xijin, former editor-in-chief of the nationalist Party-owned tabloid *Global Times* (环球时报).

A Weibo post about frisbee-catching dogs, as a veiled criticism of Hu Xijin *(CDT)*

Hu Xijin earned the nickname "Frisbee Hu" (飞盘胡) for his track record of diligently latching on to and reinforcing government propaganda. From 2005 to 2021, Hu led *Global Times*, a tabloid subsidiary of People's Daily known for its nationalism and pro-government stance. Hu personally is known for being an outspoken "wolf warrior" on Chinese and Western social media. While he boasts a sizable following, he is often criticized for his incessantly positive spin on questionable government talking points.

The nickname spread during a controversy around the 2013 New Year message from progressive and out-spoken newspaper *Southern Weekly*. After the government sparked public outrage by censoring the message, other outlets were forced to republish a *Global Times* editorial backing the decision. When Hu tried to defend the editorial, a *Southern Weekly* editor expressed an oblique criticism of Hu by posting on Weibo a photo of a dog catching a red frisbee, with the caption: "A ferocious moment as a dog catches the frisbee." An editor at Nandu.com, a news website affiliated with the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, went a step further by creating a photo collection of frisbee-catching dogs with the title: "The Greatest Moments of the Frisbee-Catching Dogs of the Global Times."

Later that year, amid fallout from the Bo Xilai scandal, Hu published an editorial titled "Bo's Case Shows Resilience of Rule of Law." Some Chinese internet users scorned Hu's attempt to find a silver lining in the scandal and wondered why, if the rule of law was so resilient, Bo was not questioned earlier for a pattern of alleged misconduct that stretched over decades. One Weibo user posted:

> "No matter how far his masters throw the frisbee, Master Hu will always fetch it back for them."

In February 2014, when Hu wrote a Weibo post complaining that his political commentary had made him a target of critics, the online community piled on even more criticism, with Weibo user @平壤热线 writing: "Frisbee Hu, what happened to you? Smell something in the wind again?"

2016 — Driving in Reverse (开倒车)

Derisive metaphor used to satirize Xi Jinping's governance of China, which users of the phrase view as being regressive, or going in the wrong direction, particularly in terms of its escalating emphasis on the singular, extended rule of "core leader" Xi himself.

The *People's Daily* Weibo post of a driver reversing off a ledge

Several viral online incidents helped propel the phrase "driving in reverse" to popularity. In June 2016, *People's Daily* posted a video to Weibo of a Volkswagen Tiguan reversing down a ramp and falling off a ledge, along with this warning: "Driving in reverse is a task that requires real technical skill!" Weibo users flocked to the comment section to draw parallels with Xi Jinping's governance, highlighting the danger of going backwards, lest it result in a "hard landing" and the need to "step down." One user offered this assessment:

> "Correct answer: Backwards drivers need to step down!"

In November 2018, Bilibili was revealed to be prohibiting comments on all videos in search results for "driving in reverse." This applied to comments on videos that had nothing to do with politics or that simply had the phrase "driving in reverse" in their title or description, as well as comments from usernames containing the phrase. When one netizen asked a customer service representative to explain the reasons for this ban, he was told that the phrase "touches on sensitive topics."

The phrase "driving in reverse" or "going backwards" is also used in reference to Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening" policies. Under the "new era" of Xi Jinping, analysts have argued that Xi is leading China in a direction that deviates from Deng's, given Xi's different development goals and China's decoupling from Western countries. The slowing economy, compared to the record growth rates in the decades preceding Xi's rule, has motivated many critics to view Xi as steering the country on a regressive course.

2018 — Awesome Country (厉害国)

Ironic phrase, used to mock China, derived from the 2018 state-media propaganda documentary "Amazing China."

The user-generated IMDB page for the film, with satirical blurb

The film was co-produced by CCTV and China Film Co, both state-owned enterprises. Its Chinese title 厉害了，我的国 (literally "Amazing, My Country") comes from the similar-sounding expression "厉害了，我的哥" which means something akin to "awesome, bro."

The film lauds Chinese achievements in science, technology, development, and poverty reduction since Xi Jinping became the country's leader in 2012. After the film was released. its popularity was greatly exaggerated by the Chinese authorities. State media reported that it broke box office records within hours, but many people noted that some companies and schools forced their employees and students to watch the film. The State Administration of

Radio, Film, and Television circulated a notice requiring all movie theaters to give the film two screenings per day on the opening weekend, in their largest theater spaces. Moreover, online ratings appeared to be controlled by censors. On Douban, the film's "user rating" was concealed and replaced with a "media rating" of 8.5/10, accompanied by glowing reviews from *Xinhua* and *People's Daily*.

Determined to express their opinions, internet users created a page for the film on the U.S.-based movie site IMDb, where it received a rating of 1.5/10., with the following description:

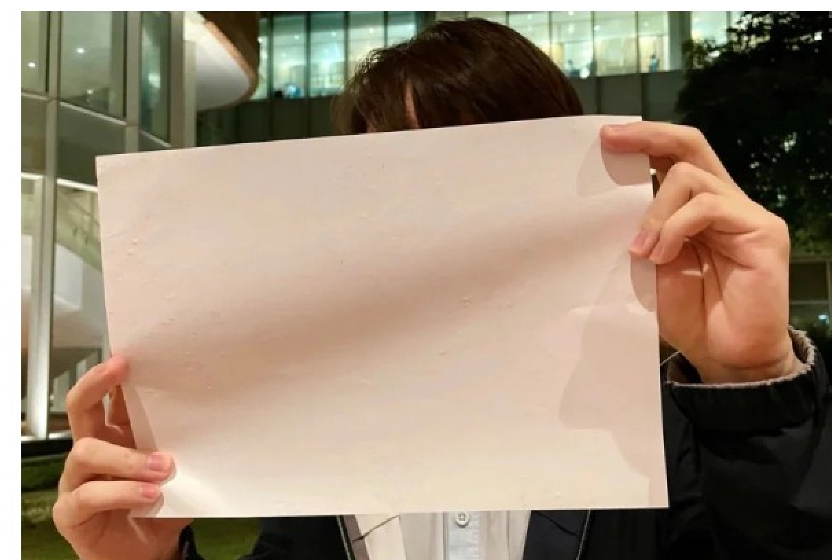
> "'Amazing China' shows the great projects China accomplished under the reign of Xi Jinping, a man with only [a] middle school diploma, but [who] struggled to become the emperor of China."

The Cyberspace Administration of China later asked Amazon, which owns IMDb, to remove the page for the film, and some negative reviews were subsequently deleted.

Critics of the film began referring to it as "Amazing, Your Country" ("厉害了你的国) instead of "Amazing, My Country" ("厉害了我的国"), in order to distance themselves from the CCP's propaganda. The phrase "awesome country" was adopted as an ironic way to ridicule Chinese government boastfulness.

2020 — Correct Collective Memory (正确集体记忆)

Term for the Party-state's approved account of history, made infamous in the aftermath of the initial Wuhan Covid outbreak.



A protestor holding up a blank sheet of A4 paper in November 2023 *(CDT/VOA)*

In June of 2020, the State Council Information Office issued a white paper that cast China's initial pandemic response as an unmitigated success. The white paper elided all mention of the late Dr. Li Wenliang and other "rumormongers" who tried to warn of the emerging virus, and who were subsequently disciplined. On June 8, 2020, then-Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying dismissed all criticism of alleged opacity and misinformation about the virus, asserting:

> China issued the white paper not to defend itself, but to keep a record. The history of the combat against the pandemic should not be tainted by lies and misleading information; it should be recorded with the correct collective memory of all mankind.

The phrase immediately went viral on Weibo, with a number of posters writing of their ongoing resistance to the Party-state's control of memory, such as @Tin_Oxide who wrote: "Whatever the case, I've set up a folder to store a whole bunch of incorrect memories."

Efforts to control China's memory did not start, nor finish, with the pandemic. "Correct collective memory" was immediately applied to other instances where the Party-state has attempted to suppress alternative histories, such as the Wenchuan earthquake, the Karamay fire, the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen crackdown. The citizen journalist Lu Yuyu adopted the phrase for the episodic memoirs he published upon his release from prison in

June 2020, titling the collection "Incorrect Memory."

The push to enforce "correct collective memory" of the pandemic continued after the end of the Zero-Covid policy. When mass protests against the policy shocked the world in November 2022, Xi recast them as simply the product of "frustrated … teenagers in university." Commemorations of the protests are aggressively censored. In 2023, the Party launched a major propaganda campaign to laud its pandemic response while eliding the once much-vaunted Zero-Covid policy. Sinologist Geremie Barmé has noted that "in Communist societies a utopian future is immutable, but it's the past that constantly changes."

2021 — Lying Flat (躺平)

Giving up, or slacking off, as an antidote and method of resistance for despairing youth in the face of a hyper-competitive society.

A screenshot of the banned Douban group "lying flat" *(Web archive)*

"Lying flat" or "lying down" is a form of slacking that emerged as a response to the unrealistic expectations of success for many young people: getting into the best schools and universities; competing for high-paying jobs that demand a grueling 996 work culture (working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days a week); saving enough money to purchase a home in an expensive housing market; and finding a partner for marriage and having kids, all while being in one's mid-twenties. It is also an expression of distress at the widening wealth gap between the rich and the poor, and at the lack of upward mobility for those in the middle class. The term emerged around the same time as "involution," which refers to a sense of burnout and unhappiness brought on by pursuing all of the benchmarks above, and questioning the purpose of that pursuit. In order to push back against "involution," many young Chinese are simply choosing to "lie flat."

"Lying flat" dates back to at least July 2020, when a Douban group formed around the concept. The term really took off in May 2021, when the Communist Young League's (CYL) official Weibo account posted a tribute to young patriots with the hashtag #TodaysYouthNeverLieDown (#当代年轻人从未选择躺平). The CYL disabled the post's comment section after it was flooded with thousands of angry replies criticizing this perceived insensitivity to young people's struggles. Days later, a Douban "lie-downism" group with almost 10,000 members was banned. Around the same time, searches for the term on Zhihu were blocked. Later, the Cyberspace Administration of China mandated that products branded with "lie down, lie-downism, involution" and the like be removed from e-commerce sites.

A May 2021 comment in response to the closure of Douban's "lie-downism" group expresses frustration with the increasingly long list of activities — including slacking off — that the government will not allow:

> Feminism isn't allowed, lying flat isn't allowed, only endless burnout is allowed. They insist that only suffering and selfless dedication will bring about just rewards. I wonder where this will all end, with no guarantee of basic human rights and no happiness in sight.

2022 — The Last Generation (最后一代)

A rallying cry for China's disenchanted, inspired by a Shanghai man's lockdown defiance. In a video published in May 2022, three "Big White" pandemic control workers commanded a household to move to centralized quarantine. A man explained that the Big Whites did not have the authority to compel them to do so. One of the Big Whites then threatened him: "After we punish you, it will influence your next three generations." The man calmly replied, "We're the last genera- tion, thank you," then closed his apartment door. The video went viral, with "the last generation" becoming shorthand for the profound dissatisfaction of Chinese youth.

A clip from the encounter with pandemic control workers *(YouTube)*

Chinese human rights lawyer Zhang Xuezhong wrote on Twitter:

> This phrase, redolent of tragedy, is an expression of the deepest form of despair. The speaker declared a decision of a biological nature: we will not reproduce. This decision is underpinned by a psychological and existential judgment: a future worth striving for has been taken from us. It is, perhaps, the strongest indictment a young person can make of the era to which they belong.

Censors took down the video and deleted commentary on it from social media. Posts mentioning it or using it as a hashtag were removed from Weibo and WeChat, and Weibo searches for "last generation" returned no results. Some users wrote the phrase into their usernames and bios in an apparent effort to avoid censorship. A number of people reshared a still from a biopic about the executed late-Qing reformer Tan Sitong, in which he asks, "In today's China, is it one more child or but one more slave?"

The phrase became a dual protest against both the tyranny of harsh lockdowns and the state's natalist push — and a defiant counterpoint to "correct collective memory" of the pandemic. *When People's Daily* published a blithely upbeat retrospective of the year 2022 with the hashtag #12SentencesRecollecting2022#, one user suggested the real phrase of the year was, "We're the last generation." ∎

Adapted from the 20th-anniversary edition of the China Digital Times Lexicon (originally titled the "Grass-Mud Horse Lexicon"), published online December 28, 2023. Download the e-book for full versions of entries, and further terms.

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