

From low desire to lying flat, do you really understand the youth of today?



By He Jinyu

Low desire does not mean no desire

In his book *How to Ignite the Low Desire Society*, well-known Japanese scholar Kenichi Ohmae coined the concept of a 'low desire society' characterised by population decline, a super-aged society, and an increased number of youngsters abandoning enterprise and desire.

Many people are now worried that low desire may have a negative impact on social progress and economic development. However, in my opinion:

Firstly, the phenomenon reflects diversity in values. Youngsters are no longer only chasing 'cakes and ale' but are instead now able to adopt the most suitable path and lifestyles for themselves. People are consuming more rationally, and society is becoming more mature.

Secondly, major sources of happiness vary between time periods. In a society where the economy is soaring, striving

for a goal gives people a sense of fulfilment; but during low-growth periods, people tend to slow their pace and enjoy life's simpler pleasures.

Last but not least, low desire does not mean no desire, but refers to a shift in desire from a material dimension to a spiritual level, which also brings about the re-adjustment of industries such as the thriving of the culture industry.

'Uprooting' replaces 'planting'

The emergence of the low desire phenomenon can be attributed to two causes; namely 'passive austerity' and 'active awakening.' Under passive austerity, due to life pressures and worry about the future, people seek to meet only their basic needs; by contrast, those experiencing active awakening have accumulated more wealth and enjoy more creature comforts, but choose to abandon consumption culture and turn to lead a life of simplicity with spiritual enrichment. 'Planting' (the desire to consume products and services) can no longer fulfil today's young con-

sumers' needs and 'uprooting' (curbing the desire to consume) is indeed emerging.

On the Chinese social networking website Douban, a 'minimalist life' group has attracted more than 300,000 members, nearly 250,000 people have joined a group of 'consumption culture betrayers,' nearly 100,000 people are following a 'low consumption research institute' group,' and more than 150,000 belong to a 'If we could be happy without consumption' group.

Finding life balance via danshari

Japanese management consultant Shin Katazukejutsu advocates the concept of 'danshari' or abandoning things unnecessary, unsuitable or outdated and cutting off one's attachment to them.

In terms of the macroeconomy, danshari can help reduce overproduction and wasted resources, and help advance the carbon neutral agenda and enhance sustainability of the environment.

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From a micro perspective, danshari encourages people to reflect on what is more valuable in their lives, cut down on blind consumption and rid themselves of obsessiveness so as to achieve balance in life.

At the same time, the core of danshari involves reviewing our inner desires and examining the boundary line between needs and wants. In this respect, danshari is needed in any society at any time.

Lying back is a kind of reflection

Many people associate ‘low desire’ of youngsters with the recent buzz word ‘tangping’ (or ‘lying flat’). Lying flat does tell of youngsters’ sense of powerlessness which needs to be taken seriously; but it also represents a kind of reflection. If danshari involves finding a balancing point in consumption, then lying flat is a reminder to people to not overwork themselves and to try to strike a work-life balance.

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