

## Why Chinese Students study so hard

how far can you push someone before they break the Asian work ethic is notorious for being synonymous to hard work with things like tiger parenting academic excellence and tutoring all being closely tied to Asian culture in fact in 2018 Korean drama sky castle explored these values to the extreme as it portrayed four families obsessively pushing their kids to study better and harder in order to make it into one of Korea's most prestigious universities though this is a satirical drama the ruthless study culture and fierce competition portrait resonated with a lot of its audience competition is everywhere but in Asian countries it is truly inescapable the situation in China is no different and perhaps the extreme levels of competition in China is becoming too much take this Tutoring company that went viral for trying to exploit the anxieties of parents and students with the ad that reads if you come with tutor and help your child if you don't come we'll tutor and help your competitor it's honestly horrifying and that's just the tip of the iceberg once you make it out of the schooling environment and through possibly one of the hardest and most grueling University admission exams in the world you find yourself looking for a job in a culture that has normalized the 996. what is the 996 it's where you're expected to work 12 hours from 9am to 9 pm 6 days a week which is insane the grueling studying routines and the 996 work system is just a taste of what happens as a result of intense competition but how did this hyper competition come to be and how is it impacting the people to really understand this I'm going to introduce a word that went viral in China in 2020 and it expresses a very specific type of Despair arising from this very situation and that is involution foreign is said to be popularized by American Anthropologist Clifford Gertz he used this word to describe when Society had developed to a certain point that it just plateaus and it isn't able to reach a higher level in modern day China this word is being used to describe the experience of being locked into a competition that one ultimately knows is meaningless now hearing this definition might not mean much at the moment but there's a brilliant analogy that really puts this into perspective yeah foreign in the real world this extra effort that people make is the equivalent of the front row just deciding to stand up in school or in the workplace this is a student or a colleague deciding to work extra hard on a project then the second row saying that first row stand up and work hard has no choice but to stand up and work hard themselves too if they want to get the best marks and effectively we've mentioned the whole theater standing because no one wants to be outdone so they all end up putting in extra effort for this project or an

assignment and because they all put in the same amount of extra effort we're kind of back to square one involution therefore is the result of fierce competition between individuals but more specifically it's a level of competition that results in an outcome that is unfavorable for all participants so far it feels like the only people involved in this situation are students or trying to outdo each other on an essay by writing more words or workers who hold each other hostage by voluntarily doing overtime but if we take a closer look the situation is actually unfavorable for all participants except for an invisible third party who acts actually profits and is the source of all of this involution to figure out who this third party is I would need to bring in some economics into this video but I'll be super quick about it and I'll keep it under 60 seconds so hang in there sociologist Michael Bureau was studying Factory workers when he noticed something peculiar you see something that is emphasized in traditional Marxist theory is how labor and capital during the production process is mutually antagonistic in other words the interests of the workers conflict with the owners of capital according to Marx this is because capitalists want to make as much profit as possible which often means that they would have to exploit the labor force by paying them as little as possible and working them as hard as they can the workers meanwhile kind of want to be paid fairly for what they do and work good hours in good conditions so their interests are very different and because one side is always trying to exploit the other this is essentially why labor and capital don't get along okay that's the basic economic theory over and now I like to thank surfshark for sponsoring this video honestly it's kind of crazy because I'm currently two foot rotary for sponsors and instances in my life where I wish I had the product or service if you haven't heard about surfshark before it's an awesome VPN service which helps keep you safe and private as you browse online but the best perk in my opinion is how you can change your location to any part in the world to one of my worst mistakes which is going to China for three months and forgetting to install a VPN beforehand which meant I couldn't access anything because of China's massive firewall if I had surfshark back then with one click I would have been able to change my location and instantly access all of my favorite sites again but I didn't so the next best thing is to make sure none of you repeat my tragic mistake I was also in Japan recently and I started watching Nano on Netflix while I was there but now that I'm back not as not actually on my Netflix anymore which had me kind of stressed before I realized I could just change my location and everything was fine I would pick up right where I left off which is amazing surfshark also offers a 30-day money-back guarantee and if you use my code only or go to the description and click the link

there you can get 83 off and three months for free now I just need to figure out how how to gift my 17 year olds off this subscription thank you surfshark for sponsoring this video and now back to our man pureway we mentioned just then how in traditional Marxist theory labor and capital are opposed so Bureau was just observing all these workers except he realizes not only were they not complaining about the system they won't complain about the working hours the wages their conditions or anything they weren't resisting it at all instead they were actually working really hard for the capitalists so this is a real head scratcher for bureauway and the question that he's left asking is why are they working so hard he came across the answer during his field work and turned the mechanism responsible for this than making out game the company that Bureau away was at employed a wage system based off assert datum if you produced below that data you only got the basic wage but if you produce above datum you got a bonus for every extra piece you produced what's so important about this mechanism is the fact that this system is all based on individual labor and not Collective labor it creates competition between individual workers because they're all trying to create the most pieces they can to surpass the data sound familiar the system did two very crucial things first it added a bit of spice to the workers shifts which provided them with a sense of satisfaction to what was otherwise a very tedious and repetitive job secondly and more importantly this Mutual competition from the making out game transformed the vertical class antagonism or beef with the capitalists to horizontal class antagonism AKA rivalries with your co-workers and as Bureau puts it once workers participate in this making out game the third party being the employer who led all of these workers to compete with each other becomes completely obscured because instead of questioning the rules of the game being capitalism workers would instead enthusiastically compete in this game to get as far ahead as they could and this making out game could not be more evident in modern day China the food delivery industry exemplifies this because of how individualistic the job is that whole industry is all about being fast the faster the driver delivers the food the happier the customer the more they like and use their app so as you would imagine the algorithm is scarily good at pushing the limits of their drivers by giving them a very tight time frame for them to fulfill the order in since Riders get higher ratings and rewards if they beat the time and punishments if they're delayed Riders end up having to go faster and faster and honestly I think this Obsession or Need for Speed is going overboard like do you guys remember all those Amazon Prime memes because the same day delivery was getting so out of hand with stories about delivery drivers who don't have time to take

bathroom breaks because that's how tight their delivery time frame was but all that rushing cutting corners cutting bathroom breaks tells the algorithm that we can shrink this time frame even more therefore accelerating the whole industry faster and faster and the same thing applies not just to speed related delivery industries but also to workers and students where competition is often even more individualistic this relentlessly accelerating and hyper-competitive environment is the reason why China's youth is feeling an unprecedented level of burnout and despair in fact the Chinese word for involution is *nature and Hua* and *nadron* is made up of the characters inside and rolling which suggests a process that crows inward and snaring its participants title and title I wanted to start off by looking at the making out game because even though involution is characterized by meaningless competition between individuals it's really more of a reflection of how China's society and economy has developed let's keep that perspective in the back of our minds as we take a look at how growing up in this hyper-competitive environment impacts people and why China's youth are giving up thank you the usage of the word involution and how it took China's internet by storm actually all starts with this one photo here this is a photo of students from Qinghua University one of China's top units if you made it here or Beijing University which is just as top tier there is no greater honor therefore those who do make it in are without a doubt China's best and brightest the cream of the crop so the problem with this picture is that we're seeing a bunch of Ching Hua students making their way around campus fairly normal stuff but wait why is there this one guy on his bike traveling to and from campus while doing statistical modeling on his laptop this action blew up on the Internet because people were realizing that even the top 0.001 of students didn't feel like they could take a break from studying I mean this guy literally didn't think that he could just ride a bike on campus to and from somewhere without cramming in study time too and if even the best students didn't think they deserved a break what does that spell for the rest of us this bike guy was then nicknamed The involution King but he was not the last China really likes bargaining things into fours like the four Great ancient Beauties or the four classic novels in Chinese literature so of course three more involution Kings had to pop out these are all still Ching Hua students by the way so may I introduce you to guy who sleeps and eats at the same time because there is clearly no rest for the wicked guy who sleeps and reads at the same time and now I need those Chinese captions to really elaborate because this is the life hack I need all those clickbait articles to actually cover and finally guy who rides a bike and eats instant noodles at the same time he's just out here to flex that he can ride a bike without using any

hands oh and I guess the secondary fact is that he's from Ching Hua but guess what we're both out here eating instant noodles during uni so we're kind of the same anyways but in all seriousness despite being cream of the crop it seemed like even China's best and brightest students were still uncertain about their future and whether they could land a good grad job so like everyone else they felt the need to constantly hustle and this may seem like a few individuals just showing off but it really sets the tone for how intense competition is for students one student gives the following example to depict the despair that involution holds say the teacher gives out an assignment and it's an essay of 5000 words however because students want the best marks many of them would choose to write 8 000 or 10 000 words or even more than that and if you know the guy next to you is putting in that much effort you're not going to get that Top Mark if you stick to the original 5000 word guideline so you start putting in more effort too in the end everyone submits double the advice length everyone goes above and beyond and it's precisely because everyone did more that we've kind of evened out the playing field again and the worst part is the teacher technically didn't even ask for it this is the type of Despair that sums up involution forced to compete and burn out in a process that they ultimately know is meaningless but that is not all the damage that is done a state of competition like this affects not just academics but also how students interact with other students instead of students being close with those in the same class or in the same cohort as them there's been a shift in these social dynamics as Junior Senior Friendship are becoming more common now and there's a few reasons one of them is the fact that you're not in direct competition with each other you're not doing the same exam competing for the same ranks and for the same marks so there's less threat from them and the other reason is that those in the grade below can ask those in the grade above for all of their resources and notes because they've been through all of this before this is just one of the many observations that Liu Shan the vice president of the education department at Beijing University had summarized he spent four years talking to 200 students as well as teachers from various other departments and schools and the main takeaway was that this level of competition was changing things and often not for the better one teacher who had been on the interviewing panel for prospective students told dorinshan that early in the career they could still see the unique characteristics of each applicant however since 2015 they've become more reluctant to attend these interviews because it seemed like the answers to each question had become standardized with students or becoming a copy of each other why had this happened well the cost of failure is simply too big if you're being

original you're taking a risk in trying something that has no guarantee to work so all students end up approaching interview questions in the same way the teacher then comments that in these interviews instead of students answering questions with how they would respond it felt like they were trying to figure out what he was thinking instead how can they adapt their answer to agree with him and that he says is terrifying this evolution of how students think or how they're taught to think is probably best exemplified by an interaction between Chang and Qian Xuesen in the hospital the former known as the father of China space and missile programs and the latter being the former premiere of China interestingly Qian essentially says China still hasn't fully developed a large part of this being that no University in China has really taught in a way that has allowed for the next inventor in stem to emerge this is a recurring thing when no new Talent has appeared and it is a big problem after he passed away in 2009 this became known as Qian's question why can't the Chinese education system produce Innovative talent and some important context here is that Chang actually grew up and did his schooling in the states so that would have played a big role in how he saw the Chinese education system as well as his criticism of it Chang questioned whether Innovation was perhaps being stifled by the Chinese education system to be Innovative you have to be able to take risks but does the Chinese education system which is so focused on your marks really allow you to do so a department head once told Qian about how once they had a student with a GPA of 3.89 apply for one of their scholarship programs the whole panel was really impressed with this High Mark until they realized that this applicant had very craftily dodged some of the hardest subjects when they asked this applicant why they didn't do some of the more difficult subjects they replied that they weren't interested but it was clear that their interests really lay in their GPA the department head then goes on to say that they had to turn this applicant away even though they had really high marks because this wasn't the type of behavior that they wanted to encourage ideally students will be challenging themselves and taking courses that they're genuinely interested in even if it's hard but it's difficult to do so when Max matters so much probably making things even harder is knowing how much of your family's hopes ride on your shoulders in hopes that you do well a teacher has commented on how studying no longer feels like a solo Endeavor in China because whole families are becoming very involved with this process now partially this is because a lot of parents have come out of their education system themselves so they know where they can step in but also because a lot of families if they are able to will have one parent actually quit their jobs so they can devote their time to fully helping

that child study and so students will naturally feel burdened by all these expectations and the level of sacrifice that's being made for them which would make them reduce the amount of risk that they take and therefore lead to them taking courses that are easier and they will guarantee higher marks an example of such high expectations from parents on their children can be seen through this one Forum post this poster asks my child is four years old and they only have around 1 500 Words of English vocabulary does that seem a bit low and the response was that's definitely enough in America but that's not enough for high ten district and hydrone is a district in Beijing where China's best two institutions Beijing and chihua these very involved parents not only have expectations for what their kids academics should be like but they also made a tier list for what kind of hobbies children should have based on how good it would look on your application because God forbid Hobbies be something you genuinely like and let me tell you if you play a musical instrument and it's piano bottom tier that's dead last on the list it's okay though we can keep each other company as we come to understand how worthless playing piano was and you know how we should remodel this living room so I can fit in this new organ that I want to play sorry to say but that's not the only list either there's also one for sports don't ask me where basketball volleyball tennis or your favorite sport is if it's not on this list it's not worth your attention it might as well not exist but the fact that these lists itself exist leads us back to how everything kind of boils down to your marks and how everything comes back to doing whatever you can to guarantee your best chance at success so this obsession with marks filled by intense competition really leads to more than just academic burnout it also comes with the consequence of these kids not really being able to develop on their own and finding out what their interests may be at least with these tier lists though it's still considering Hobbies as something that's worth doing but there are schools in China where their whole Focus will be on studying and studying only foreign schools in China so much that many parents have come out to criticize their teaching routine due to the semi-military style under which the school is Run students follow a tight schedule where each period of the day is meticulously mapped out and if you notice on the screen that only breaks other than lunch and dinner are short 10 minute ones that are squeezed in between classes oh and the days are also like 17 hours long this extreme study routine is also accompanied by various social restrictions like not being able to interact too closely with the opposite gender and if you get into our relationship with a classmate you could get expelled some of you may be thinking hang on what happened to that example where students are all going above and beyond writing

extra words on their essay to do better and it ends up forcing everyone to do more. Hong Shui high school was that first kid who decides to send it and they not only write 8 000 words they write a whole book so now that Hong Street has raised the stakes does that mean other schools in China have to also follow suit adapt and implement more brutal study routine well interestingly no the teaching methods of Hong Shui high school is actually quite controversial in China in lower socio-economic areas there's more authoritarian approach is accepted by these families as the gold color is so important that doing this maximizes the chances of students being able to lift themselves out of poverty however in more wealthier areas this approach is looked down at and is regarded as backwards cruel and unnecessary that's not to say that families from wealthier areas don't play the game they still do it just in a different way in the TV show nothing but 30 the protagonist is constantly seen creating this image where she inserts herself into different social circles she sponsors this whole firework event and she also takes out a loan to buy a luxury apartment all this to solidify her social status so that later when she attends an interview at a prestigious kindergarten it's easier for her kid to make it in obviously this is an example from a TV show which is often dramatized but it is still relatable for example in many countries where you go for primary school is often just the school that's closest to where you live so many parents will actually move houses or rent a property that's closer to a school they know has better teachers education is such a big part of Chinese culture and values that the game is often being played really before the child even starts their enrollment and because education is so valued and important the government often keeps a close eye on what is being taught and how things are going in late 2021 because of all this pressure placed on students there was actually a reform implemented to reduce studying hours for students but this also came with other changes for one new study material was introduced as a political Doctrine outlining xi's Vision to strengthen the Communist party's control was made compulsory from primary school to University there was a huge Crackdown on the private tutoring industry to reduce the cost of education and some of the stress that came with it but this also came with other ideological motives for one foreign tutors are banned from teaching kids on online platforms as this had become a way for Chinese youth to interact with foreigners and secondly foreign textbooks are now barred from primary schools and middle schools so whilst the reform did cut study hours in order to make student life better it also made the student experience a lot more insular with its increased censorship being a student in China is not easy and there's so much pressure not just from competition in



general but from your parents and from yourself what you learn and access is also very subject to government policy but it all comes back to this no matter how old you are which type of City you live in or how hard you work you can't escape the game and worse once all that studying is done and you enter the work for both the competition only gets more intense let's talk about the 996 work week and what happens when you push your people to their limits what does it look like to quit the game foreign six work week was named after the expectation of working 12 hours a day from 9am to 9 pm 6 days a week this should sound horrifying and it is but the reason why this system works is because these companies know if you can't handle the workload and you quit there will instantly be someone to replace you even worse you know this too so you don't really have any say or leverage in trying to reduce your hours or workload one in five young Chinese are unemployed and these people are all usually educated and capable they just can't find a job because of how competitive the market has become economists shares our phone commented on the situation as he said it is not the boss who makes you work overtime but it is other people who are willing to do overtime the 996 was able to work because of competition and how everyone was willing to work hard in fact we can see this overly competitive Spirit through this Banner here which went viral for exposing how bad involution had gotten the words here translate to I'd overwork myself to death if that meant my competitors would be left starving that's a pretty literal translation but they're just are still there I'd sacrifice everything I have if that meant I edged out the competition no one wants to work 12 hours a day and six days a week but they don't have a choice Vice Asia actually did a video covering their 996 where they interviewed people currently going through the system and being able to hear from the people themselves is way more powerful than any description I can give you um foreign YouTube foreign under the system as the notion of involution called popularity China's youth also saw a growing opposition towards capitalism on this has said the previous editor-in-chief of Harper's Bazaar China sumang commented that she understood involution to be the result of young people having too many Ambitions but being too lazy to achieve them she then said that all your confusion and being at a loss isn't really that hard to solve which disappointingly just feels like an older generation response that we might have heard all too much the younger generation is talking about something that deeply affects them and the response that comes back is totally disconnected and dismissive the comment section was unsurprisingly filled with criticism with comments like capitalists should just shut up and if bosses understood how the working people felt the 996 would have never happened and

this whole involution situation might have been avoided even Jack ma the founder of Alibaba who was previously adored and respected by the public is feeling the heat all these voting comments in the screenshot here are either calling him a capitalist derogatory or they're telling him to shut up and you know what I think him going on the record saying the 996 is a blessing probably didn't help either as a result of this situation the resignation and burnout that many Chinese youth face are being conveyed through movements like Tom ping which translates to lying flat compared to everyone else constantly being caught up in a never-ending grind lying flat is about being anti-hustle and this term comes from a forum post where the poster talks about how he hasn't worked for almost two years and he's just been messing around and he doesn't really feel like anything is wrong in fact the only pressure he faces comes from people around him who compare their lifestyle to his and Elders who hold a more traditional view the poster then talked about how he can do whatever he wants with his free time and this idea really blew up with the disillusioned Chinese youth who are facing a shrinking labor market as well as greater demands to put in more effort lying flat was a movement so extreme in its non-action that is starkly contrasted involution and was able to convey that sense of powerlessness and hopelessness that were felt by the people Chinese youth were now realizing that things weren't the way it was for their parents you simply couldn't be smarter work harder and reap the rewards you would simply be working harder and getting caught up in a vicious cycle in a game where everyone continues to raise that bar a game where you are an unwilling but active participant at the same time there were numerous deaths being reported of employees allegedly passing due to overwork a delivery driver was reported to have died while delivering meals for the platform eleme which sparked concerns sometime later on news broke out again this time regarding the deaths of two employees at e-commerce giant pinduoduo one of these employees collapsed on their way back from work later passing away at the hospital and the other by Suicide all of these tragic deaths stirred heated discussions over both China's 996 work culture and the Dark Side of working at some of China's most acclaimed firms given the bubbling outrage for the 996 work culture and growing attention on the lying flat movement the government stepped in to reduce such brutal working hours and they made it illegal although that practice still very much exists today the state's official media then expressed concerns over the lying flat movement and has even denounced it saying that people who participate and believe in it are impeding society's growth and not just that but because of the Aging population problem that China is facing young people really need to pull their

weight other media Outlets have also criticized the lying flat Movement by saying it's the grind and the hustle that brings happiness and if you don't hustle in life then that's not worth of being called a happy life then another media Outlet called out lying flat for being an attitude that is very irresponsible because not only are you letting down your parents but you're also letting down tens of millions of other people who are working hard oh and the lying flat hashtag is also obviously banned on weibor keeping workers working is obviously a big deal for the Chinese government because they need workers to keep the economy going and not only that China needs young people to work so they remain competitive but young people are realizing that whilst they might never be enough and do enough they've had enough it seems almost unfair to be in a situation where the harder you work the more hopeless Things become but that is the reality with involution we started this video by examining the making out game where workers are pitted against each other but really it is the capitalist that profit we then saw what involution was like for students how everyone was forced to put in more effort for the same amount of reward and end up exhausted in the workplace this constant acceleration also ramps up filled by how Expendable labor is in the end after running in place for so long people are thinking of lying flat that brings us to the end of this video and as usual I would love to hear your thoughts about the 996 system competition involution or really any part that shocked you because there were so many things in this video that shocked me thank you all so much for watching make sure to subscribe if you enjoyed and I will see you in the next one bye