

LET IT ROT

"Humanity knows nothing at all. There is no intrinsic value in anything, and every action is a futile, meaningless effort." - Masanobu Fukuoka, The One Straw Revolution

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New Chinese Buzzword ‘Let It Rot’ Takes ‘Lying Flat’ to New Heights

The ‘lying flat’ generation has decided to stop caring altogether and to simply ‘let it rot’

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Beatrice Tamagno

Even with countless errands on your to-do list, do you find yourself taking excessive breaks, scrolling through social media, or binging one Netflix series after another? If yes, congratulations: You’ve joined the ranks of Chinese youth who are ‘lying flat,’ (tang ping) or at least claim to do so.

In this involuted era triggered by China’s intense ‘996’ work culture, new slang terms are being coined to capture young people’s sense of doom and despondency.

The latest to join the Chinese lexicon is ‘let it rot’ (*bailan* 摆烂).

‘Let it rot’ means to let things that are already beyond repair deteriorate. Some suspect that the word originated from NBA fan circles and was used to describe teams that intentionally tank games or lose on purpose to secure a competitive advantage in the next round.

The phrase was picked up by Chinese gaming communities after reportedly being popularized by ‘Big Eggplant’ (大茄子), a livestreamer known for using colorful language.

Suggested Further Reading

Prison Break by Flower Bomb

Tangpingist Manifesto

Manual for a worldwide manuke revolt by Matsumoto Hajime

How the Stirner Eats Gods by Alejandro de Acosta

The Abolition of Work by Bob Black

An Invitation to Desertion by Bellamy Fitzpatrick

Desert by anonymous (readdesert.org)

Demotivational Training by Guillaume Paoli

Active Vs Passive Nihilism by anonymous

Possum Living by Dolly Freed

Evasion by Mack Evasion (google 'evasion the anarchist library')

The Unique and its Property by Max Stirner

A Forest Garden Primer by Sylvia Wilde



A WeChat sticker of two avatars performing bailan together

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2021 was the year of tangping 躺平.

One by one, Chinese youths began to opt out of a system where additional effort no longer tracked additional rewards. In fact, the system was so overheated, rewards often decreased with added effort.

They called it "involution" 内卷. 2/7

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2022 is the year when Chinese chose to bailan.

Bailan means to actively embrace a bad situation (i.e. let it deteriorate further) rather than to try and flip it into a good one.

A similar Chinese idiom is 破罐破摔 referring to dropping a pot that's already cracked. 3/7

6:56 AM · May 12, 2022 



'Let it be,' reads the sticker

Not long after, memes related to 'Let it rot' began circulating the internet and became embraced by the masses.

Bubbly 27-year-old Shanghai resident Erica Liu works in education and described herself as someone who isn't easily self-defeated. In recent times, however, she has identified more and more with the 'let it rot' mentality and frequently uses the expression when chatting with her friends.

"When my company set impossible goals for me to meet, I just felt like the only thing I could do was to bailan," Liu tells RADII.

Liu explained that the term 'let it rot' is similar to 'lying flat' but conveys a new degree of cynicism.

"'Lying flat' equates to spending little effort and adopting a laid-back attitude, whereas 'let it rot' means not caring whatsoever, seeing as there is nothing to be done."

Other netizens on Weibo have shared similar sentiments with comments such as, "Lately, I really want to bailan. There's just too much going on in my life."

Unsurprisingly, many of said commenters are caught in Shanghai's drawn-out lockdown or other cities in China that are experiencing movement restrictions. The buzzword describes how they have gone into 'goblin mode' and are enjoying it.

Whether the 'let it rot' mentality represents the final stages of cynicism among Chinese youth remains to be seen.

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