

Analysis of the Phenomenon of “Involution” among Young People

Yijun Zhou^{1,a,*}

¹The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW 2050, Australia

a. yzho2206@uni.sydney.edu.au

*corresponding author

Abstract: "Involution" among young people refers to the continuous efforts of the young generation in pursuit of better grades, career development, and quality of life in today's competitive social environment. This phenomenon reflects the problems of the current education system because the school evaluation system focuses too much on scores and rankings. It is also associated with a highly competitive job market. As the economy slows down, young people are facing increasing pressure to find a job. There is also the phenomenon of "involution" in pursuing a better quality of life. With the popularity of social media and the advent of the information age, many young people measure their happiness by comparing themselves with others in terms of material conditions and travel experiences. This comparison mentality encourages them to constantly exert pressure on the outside world and chase the so-called "success" standard. In this context, this paper studies the characteristics, causes, and problems of the phenomenon of “involution” among young people in China. According to analysis, it is concluded that the phenomenon of "involution" exhibits evident utilitarian characteristics and can weaken team collaboration. It is mainly caused by parental expectations, societal norms and values, and the education system. The "involution" phenomenon leads to excessive competition and an unbalanced distribution of resources. In addition, it also hurts the education system and brings negative impacts on the workplace.

Keywords: Involution, Excessive pressure, Fierce competition, Young people

1. Introduction

The term "involution" has been trendy in recent years. It means that in a highly competitive environment, individuals constantly increase their workload and pressure to pursue higher interests, resulting in an endless state of competition for the whole society. The so-called "involution" emphasizes an increase in internal competition. The benefits created previously through a certain amount of time and effort are now obtained by consuming several times the cost, increasing people's workload, stress, and anxiety, thereby leading to physical and mental health problems. The overtime culture in the Internet industry and the ranking of students in schools are both the best embodiment of “involution”. It means the cutthroat competition as well as the endless and pointless rush, especially the mad competition for wealth or power in big cities. Yilin [1] points to an Ivy League-like alliance of elite Chinese universities and shares the reality that many students at these universities

feel anxious, stressed, and overworked, and they find themselves being caught up in status competition. For most students, success is to get high grades, land a high-paying job, buy an apartment, and find an equally accomplished spouse. Biao [2], a professor at Oxford University, once said, "Young people still feel that if they don't work hard or compete, they will be cast out of society, but despite their repeated efforts, they can't see their breakthrough." This generation of young people must work harder to achieve the results the previous generation could easily achieve. Against this background, the author summarizes the characteristics of the phenomenon of "involution" and explores its causes and challenges. By analyzing the phenomenon of "involution", this paper advocates the rational allocation of resources and the balance of life and work, attaching importance to individual happiness and social justice.

2. Definition and Characteristics of the Phenomenon of "Involution"

The "involution" phenomenon is characterized by individuals within a particular social group engaging in excessive efforts, overloaded workloads, or participation in meaningless competition driven by competitive pressure, values, and other factors to pursue so-called success or meet certain standards. Yu and Chen [3] point out that this phenomenon is observed across various domains such as education, workplace environments, and social media. Firstly, the phenomenon of "involution" exhibits evident utilitarian characteristics. In a highly competitive social environment, it is widely believed that constant hard work and surpassing others are the only means to achieve success and gain respect; consequently, many individuals push themselves excessively to attain their self-set goals while holding extremely high expectations for themselves. Secondly, the phenomenon of "involution" also exhibits characteristics of weakening team collaboration. Individuals striving for personal interest maximization can lead to cooperation breakdown and even foster vicious competition in certain cases. Consequently, the entire team or organization fails to establish a conducive atmosphere and positive motivation. Moreover, internal fragmentation is associated with issues such as anxiety and stress. When a social group becomes trapped in a state of internal fragmentation, individuals experience pressure from external expectations and comparative psychology, leading to concerns about failing to meet anticipated goals and generating anxiety. Furthermore, news reports on internal fragmentation often involve moral decay and loss of fairness and justice among other problems. In some instances, the pursuit of so-called success may be accompanied by unethical practices like fraud or cheating. In summary, the phenomenon of "involution" has emerged as a prominent social issue, eliciting widespread concern. It signifies the multitude of challenges and predicaments prevailing in contemporary society. At the same time, it also serves as a poignant reminder to critically examine and contemplate strategies for mitigating its adverse repercussions while seeking novel and more sustainable developmental paradigms.

3. Causes of the phenomenon of "involution"

In recent years, "involution" has become increasingly prominent in Chinese society, particularly among young individuals who face immense pressure to excel in various domains, including education. The influence of parental expectations is one significant factor contributing to the participation of young people in involution. Wang and Ge [4] argue that parents often hold high expectations for their children's academic performance and future success, thereby intensifying the pressure on their children to achieve outstanding results. Another influential factor is rooted in societal norms and values prevalent within Chinese culture that strongly emphasize academic accomplishments as a means to attain success and social status. This cultural value system significantly contributes to the intense competition observed among students. Furthermore, the education system plays a pivotal role in promoting involution by prioritizing standardized testing and

ranking systems that create an environment where students feel compelled to strive for higher scores or rankings at any cost constantly.

Overall, multiple factors contribute to the prevalence of involution among young individuals today; however, altering these underlying societal pressures overnight may prove challenging. Both individuals and institutions alike must acknowledge the detrimental effects of excessive competition and work towards establishing more balanced environments where personal growth and well-being are prioritized alongside academic achievements. The phenomenon of "involution" has become increasingly prominent in Chinese society, and this can be attributed to the pressure brought on by societal values and expectations. It is important to understand that social values play an important role in shaping individual behavior. The emphasis of the Chinese education system on academic performance and success has led to fierce competition among students, and academic performance and ranking have become the ultimate goal of Chinese students. Many Chinese students and their parents no longer prioritize physical health and happiness, and academic performance has brought great pressure, leading to many family arguments and resulting in psychological depression and anxiety among students.

According to a survey in 2023, about a total of 2,000 students in Haidian District, Beijing, one of the most important areas in China, suspended school due to psychological reasons [5]. Under such great pressure, proper relaxation might be more suitable for students' development. Many primary school students living in Haidian District of Beijing have even more resumes than college students. They are proficient in foreign languages, and they participate in various competitions and win awards. Students with such capacities and experiences are common in Haidian District. This can lead to the popularity of "involution" because parents want their children to be good and excellent. Moreover, social expectations have also contributed to the prevalence of "introspection". Parents may force their children into a certain profession or lifestyle based on cultural norms or personal beliefs. These expectations can create a sense of obligation for individuals, who feel they must meet these standards at all costs. However, it is important to note that not everyone succumbs to "involution" despite facing similar pressures from society. Personal resilience and self-awareness are key factors in determining how an individual responds to external stress. Therefore, while social values and expectations shape individual behavior, they are not the only cause of the phenomenon of "involution" in Chinese society. If individuals wish to avoid being consumed by internal competition, they must develop their sense of identity and purpose outside of external influences.

4. Challenges brought by the phenomenon of “involution”

The phenomenon of "involution" is a common problem in the present society, which brings a series of problems and challenges. First of all, the "involution" phenomenon leads to excessive competition and comparison, the pursuit of so-called success and superiority. This competitive pressure makes individuals constantly work hard, study hard, or pursue higher standards. This can help improve their work or study results, but at the same time, it also causes an increase in mental health problems. In pursuit of a better life, "involution" is less important than physical health.

Secondly, the phenomenon of "involution" also leads to an unbalanced distribution of resources. In a competition-oriented society, resources are often concentrated in the hands of a few, and it is difficult to distribute them fairly to everyone. This further exacerbates the problems of social stratification and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. "Involution" is more inclined to active and passive choice. Some people are born with a big and clear goal. They work hard on this basis, approach the goal, and finally achieve the goal. However, some people passively choose "involution". Even if they work hard for a lifetime, they achieve little because they do not have a firm heart.

In addition, the phenomenon of "involution" has hurt the education system. Due to excessive attention to test scores and rankings, there have been drawbacks in education such as "education to the test" and utilitarian tendencies. Students are forced to recite a large number of knowledge points without practical application ability; Teachers are faced with too many evaluation indicators and limited space for innovation. For example, in an education system that only cares about grades and rankings, students will blindly learn to become a learning machine, resulting in fixed thinking, which cannot be easily changed.

Finally, the "involution" phenomenon also has a negative impact on the workplace. Employees work hard and even sacrifice their rest time and family-life balance to get promoted or keep their jobs. This situation not only poses a threat to the physical and mental health of individuals but may also affect the overall organizational atmosphere and efficiency and affect the harmony between families. Solving the problem of "involution" requires the joint efforts of the whole society. The government can guide the direction of social development by formulating relevant laws and policies and providing a fair and reasonable resource allocation mechanism; schools can promote quality education and attach importance to the all-round development of students; enterprises can establish a good employee welfare system and cultural atmosphere; at the same time, everyone should start from their own and abandon blind comparison and excessive competition thinking. In conclusion, there is a need to recognize various problems and challenges and take corresponding measures to promote a more just, equitable, dynamic, and sustainable social environment.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, "Involution" is a complex phenomenon, which has both positive and negative sides. In some cases, "involution" can motivate people to work and study harder, improving personal competitiveness and creativity. This positive "involution" can also promote social progress and development. However, in the excessive pursuit of "involution", it is easy to neglect physical health and mental health. Overworking or studying for a long time may lead to physical fatigue, weakened immunity, and other problems; at the same time, "involution" can also bring negative effects such as stress, anxiety, and even depression. While supporting proper "involution", there is a need to take care to protect physical and mental health, arrange work and rest time reasonably, and pay attention to exercise. In addition, in the pursuit of success, people should follow the code of ethics and laws and regulations, while they should not seek personal gain by any means. In short, the proper "involution" can stimulate individual potential and promote social progress; however, if pursued blindly, it may hurt individuals and society. Therefore, in practice, it is necessary to balance the interests of all aspects and make choices and adjustments according to the actual conditions. Future studies can focus on the solutions to eliminating the negative effects of the "involution" phenomenon.

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