



The Culture of “SANG” Depressive Life Attitude of Chinese Teenager Derives from Society

Investigation of Common Depression Among Chinese Teenagers in Major Cities

Inspired by News Published by China Youth News Organization

Art & Culture

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#Team 1

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One year ago, a Netflix cartoon named BoJack Horseman went famous in China. This cartoon is famous for its dispirited plot, which shows that lives always have more unhappiness than happiness. It includes almost every negative personality, like selfish, self-abandoned, timid and querulous, in its characters. The famous lines of this cartoon, for instance, “life is just a long, hard kick in you.”, can easily lead the audiences to bad feelings. Many Chinese teenagers use the screenshots from BoJack Horseman when they post their lives on social medias since the depressive and hurtful lines as well as those weak and decadent postures are similar to the feelings their lives give them.

“Life sucks and I’m just a failure product of this society.”

Through various Chinese social media and platforms like WeChat or QQ, it is quite often to see teenagers with such depressive words or photos about themselves, which were usually complaining about the heavy peer pressure or failures of their employment experiences. They called this “SANG”— a Chinese character which means a very upset or disappointed emotion towards life. For teenagers who face peer pressure of employment and living or love issues, they are likely to get tired of those “positive energy” in forms of pictures or articles. So when they encounter real challenges, they are not used to finding help or comfort from “Chicken Soup for the Soul”. Instead, they prefer to use so called “Poisonous Soup” and “SANG Culture” to abreact their negative emotions. As such subculture starts to spread more widely, byproducts like sad memes and even “SANG”-related marketing appears.

“Life has its ups and lows — composed of 1 percent of ups and the rest are the lows.”

This sentence is very popular among Chinese teenagers. Why these kids have so many worries and concerns? Why can't they see the positive side of life or they simply does not have this side? To solve such queries, a survey was delivered to test how well people know about this kind of emotion and for the people who are experiencing or suffering from this depressive emotion, we aimed to find out the causes of it.

Here are the survey questions (this is a translated version and is first delivered in Chinese):

1. I am a ____.

- A. Male
- B. Female

2. I'm aged between ____.

- A. 11-20
- B. 21-30
- C. 31-40
- D. 41-50

3. Did you know anything about the culture of "SANG"?

- A. Yes
- B. No

4. What general attitudes do you think teenagers have towards life?

- A. Negative. They think their lives are filled with dismay.
- B. Positive. They are willing to chase their dreams.
- C. Normal. They live an ordinary life.

5. Have you ever experienced the emotions of "SANG" or had such depressing life?

- A. Yes
- B. No

6. If yes, how often do you have these kinds of emotions?
- A. Everyday
 - B. Every 2-4 days
 - C. Every 5-7 days
 - D. Every month
 - E. Seldom
7. If no, is there any teenager around you who has experienced the emotions of “SANG”?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
8. How do you think the “SANG” marketing brought by the culture of “SANG” (as a brand called “SANG” Tea)?
- A. Bad. They help promote the bad effects of “SANG” culture.
 - B. Good. They help develop business through teenagers.
 - C. No comments. It’s just a kind of enterprise using the name of “SANG”.
9. What do you think are the causes of the culture of “SANG”?
- A. The promotion by television programs or cartoons.
 - B. The heavy pressure generated under the Chinese society and the educational system.
 - C. The negative emotions brought by the complicated feelings of teenagers.
 - D. The new generations are able to live through the hard life without money, which is the symbol of recreance.
10. Do you think the culture of “SANG” is helpful for teenagers?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe

We collected 157 answer sheets in total and 151 effective and valid. The demographics are 86.2% teenagers and the rest all aged between 23-30 picked randomly in Nanjing(43.05% of male; 56.95%

of female). The results shows that 90.26% of the sample do have heard of “SANG” or even know about it. Moreover, when being asked for the best summary of the current living situations of teenagers, 62.25% of the sample believe that their lives are quite normal, neither filled with positive energy, nor negative. Respite of that, the result also shows that nearly 83.44% of the sample have felt “sang” throughout their life; and the period of it in experienced sample is everyday selected by 16.67% of it, 2-4 days by 26.19%, 5-7 days by 16.67%, every month by 19.05% and the rest 21.43% of it seldom feel the “sang”. Meanwhile, 88.84% of the sample who never feel “sang” before, consisted of 16.56% of the sample, answer that there do have people around them who have felt “sang” before. Furthermore, the survey reveals that 41.42% of the sample disagree to use sang culture as a marketing strategy, only 9.93% of it take a positive view on it, and rest of the 48.34% of it take no side.

“Every time has its own problems, and every time has its own theme.”

After analyzing the results, it is clear that society plays an important role among the causes of “SANG”. We start to wondering why and how this sort of emotions prevails. We interviewed a famous socialist named Wang Jun and he said the sentence above. He told us, from the intergenerational perspective, teenagers from different times face disparate circumstances and generate various kinds of problems. For people who were born in the 1970s and 1980s, they once lived in a time which is relatively poor and rough, and their goal might be materialized. By contrast, the teenagers now usually live in an environment where they don’t have to worry about their survival. Therefore, they want their life to be more fun, more interesting and try to actualize themselves from a spiritual level. Meanwhile, as they grow up, China’s economy is developing into a brand new state. High housing price and employment difficulty go into their minds through social medias as they are young. Thus, they generate a sense of “crisis society” and develop fears and

worries towards their future. After all, it is the society that influences the teenagers most since they are very young.

“In today’s social networks, everyone is afraid to feel lonely and lose track to the world. People rely on social networks and everyone is an online content producer with propagation qualities.”

Later we interviewed randomly on streets and plazas in Nanjing and the sentence above is excerpted from words of a salesclerk from a computer store. Not only the society generates such emotion, but also helps the spread of “SANG”. The most significant embodiment is “SANG Marketing”. In China, teenagers love to drink tea a lot, for example, milk tea or fruit tea. A brand recently became popular in China named Orz Cha which means “SANG” Tea sells tea with hurtful names and with depressive words on its cups. Here is a translated menu of this tea brand:

Everyday A Cup of Negative Energy

Lazy Black Tea

Unrequited Love Green Tea

Daily Overtime–Work Sorbet

Constantly Low Salary Fruit tea

Never Afford a House Juice

Fat and Ugly Green Milk Tea

Ex Lives Better Than U CafeLatte

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There is no doubt that this behavior will exacerbate the situation of teenagers feeling low and depressed. However, such brands and slogans are easy to be seen on streets, especially in large cities. This culture not only derives from society, it also develops in the society.