

Do we need to start again?

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I was intrigued to read an article in the Guardian just before Christmas [with this title](#):

What is neijuan, and why is China worried about it?

I did not know the answer. I read it.

Neijuan appears to literally mean, based on a broader reading, 'to curl inwards'.

In English, the most appropriate translation is involution, but the term is used in a very specific context in its current Chinese form. It strikes me as representing an idea that has three specific meanings, and I stress these are my interpretations.

First, it represents the idea of a culture that has developed as far as possible. The ideas, beliefs and practices of that society have reached a point where they can no longer advance. It has no place further to go. The possibility that this might describe neoliberalism is obvious.

The second meaning is to describe the person within that failing system who realises that however hard they try, they cannot achieve within it. In a failing system, there is nothing for them to attain through their efforts. At best, that system can only preserve the positions of those already possessed, whether of possessions and status (for which, read power). There is no room to admit more to their ranks.

Third, in that case, the term describes the process of alienation that is now commonplace in what is called Gen Z - or those born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s. In the UK there might be ten per cent unemployment in this group when society would expect them to be in work, or in education or training. In China, estimates of this figure vary between 17 and more than 20 per cent, which is staggering.

I stress that these are not the usual dictionary definitions of involution. Nor are they exactly what I think the Chinese mean by neijuan. They are based on some reading around the issue and some personal reflection as to why the term might be so popular, which is because it reflects a state of hopelessness that undoubtedly exists, albeit this

is being appreciated more by some than others.

What is the consequence of this for the discussion of vision I keep talking about? I suggest four things.

Firstly, the appreciation of the need for a new vision is timely.

Second, that vision cannot adapt, extend the life of, or be based on neoliberal thinking. That is dead, having more than outlived its usefulness.

Third, it might give a name to the required change, although this suggestion is the most tentative of these four.

Fourth, this really does mean we need to start again if we are to create a new economics and a new politics based on it. I am not for a moment suggesting that I am the first to recognise this. I am suggesting that those who do so are right.

In itself, that makes this idea interesting.