

China's noisy 'dancing grannies' silenced by device that disables speakers

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. **Work in groups. Collect short answers to these questions on a board or shared screen.**

- What type of people use your local public park?
- Which groups meet there and why?
- Are there any rules or regulations about using the park?

2 Key words

a. **Find words in the article that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.**

1. come together in one place _____ (paragraph 1)
2. disagreements in which neither opponent can do anything to win
_____ (paragraph 3)
3. deal with a difficult situation _____ (paragraph 3)
4. a situation in which you have to make a difficult decision _____
(paragraph 4)
5. stop a machine or piece of equipment from working properly
_____ (paragraph 4)
6. something that is _____ works well and produces the result that
was intended (paragraph 8)
7. behaviour that frightens or hurts someone smaller or weaker (paragraph 10)

8. become involved in a situation in order to try to stop or change it
_____ (paragraph 10)
9. situations in which the police take someone to a police station because they believe he or she has
committed a crime _____ (paragraph 10)
10. behaving in a very unfriendly or threatening way towards someone
_____ (paragraph 16)

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. Students are encouraged to tell a teacher about any incidents of _____ they notice.
2. It takes courage to _____ your fears.
3. The police had to _____ when protesters started throwing stones and bottles.
4. We now face an embarrassing _____: Should we stay or go?
5. Pressing the red button will temporarily _____ the printer.

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Many people are too scared to confront the groups of middle-aged and older women who take over public parks and sports grounds to exercise along to music

Chi Hui Lin and Helen Davidson in Taipei

Fri 8 Oct 2021

- 1 Across China's public parks and squares, in the early morning or late afternoon, the grannies gather.
- 2 The groups, mostly middle-aged and older women who went through the Cultural Revolution, dance together in corner of a local park or sporting ground to loud Chinese music.
- 3 The tradition has led to standoffs, because the loud music often disturbs the peace in high-density residential areas. But many are too scared to confront the women.
- 4 Some people have looked for tech solutions to the dilemma of the dancing grannies. One went viral online: a remote stun gun-style device that is said to be able to disable a speaker from 50 metres away.
- 5 Reviews of the device were positive. "It is finally quiet. For two days the grannies thought their speaker is not working!", said one on Taobao, China's version of eBay.
- 6 "Great invention, with this tool I can control the neighbourhood now," said another.
- 7 China has an estimated 100 million dancing grannies. Square dancing allows older women, many of whom live alone or with younger family members, to socialise. They form strong connections, often shopping and doing other activities together.
- 8 State media has described the square dancing, which has its roots in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, as a "positive and effective way to reduce the medical and financial burden as well as increase the life quality of older people".
- 9 "Many participants are retired, their children are no longer around. Square dancing allows them to have a social life."
- 10 But neighbours complain it is out of control, with competing groups blasting their music over each other in small areas, and bullying those who try to intervene. Viral videos and reports have shown the groups arguing and fighting with basketball players to take over their court, and breaking into a football field and stopping the game to dance there, prompting a police response and arrests.
- 11 In 2019, Tianjin City started to allow police to fine the dancing grannies up to 500 yuan (£56) if their music is too loud in public.
- 12 Some disputes have become violent. In Shijiazhuang, neighbours fight back at the grannies by spreading stinky tofu, paint, and engine oil while they are dancing.
- 13 "Most of them are from the Red Guard* era, they don't respect society or the environment," said a young Chinese resident of Guiyang, who did not want to be named.
- 14 "Square dancing is a problem left over from history. Many elderly people feel that the whole China is built by their generation. They can say and do anything they want. They think young people have done nothing, and cannot question them."
- 15 I tried to communicate with them once, but the police stopped me," said the Guiyang man. "They thought I was going to do something bad."
- 16 It's not all hostile. One group in Lanzhou city, Gansu, found a solution that makes everyone happy. They use bluetooth earphones, and have their own version of a silent disco.

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**Red Guard = a mass student-led paramilitary social movement mobilized and guided by Chairman Mao Zedong in 1966 through 1967, during the first phase of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*

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3 Comprehension

a. **Decide whether the sentences are true or false according to the information in the article. Correct any that are false.**

1. The members of the square dancing groups are mostly elder women.
2. They meet in public parks and squares in the early morning or late afternoon to dance together.
3. They do this to earn money to pay for their health care.
4. People who live near the parks say the music is too loud and they have no peace while the groups are dancing.
5. The dancing groups are accused of bullying people who ask them to be quieter.
6. Some people in nearby apartment blocks have bought guns online and threaten to shoot the dancers.
7. Some cities make the groups pay money if there are more than 500 people in a group.
8. One group has tried using Bluetooth earphones so that they do not need to play loud music that everyone in the area can hear.

4 Key language

a. **Join the words to make word pairs from the article. Find them in the article to check your answers.**

- | | |
|----------------|-----------|
| 1. sporting | areas |
| 2. residential | burden |
| 3. tech | response |
| 4. stun | dancing |
| 5. square | life |
| 6. financial | gun |
| 7. social | ground |
| 8. police | solutions |

b. **With a partner, talk about their meanings and come up with a definition for each pair.**

c. **Use the word pairs to talk about the article.**

d. **Now use each one in a new and unrelated sentence of your own.**

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5 Discussion topics

a. Discuss these questions.

- What most interested or surprised you in the article? Why was that?
- Who or what would you like to use the speaker-disabling device on and why?

6 In your own words

a. Write to your local authorities (e.g., *the council, the mayor, the police, the park service, ...*) about the situation. Structure your letter as follows:

- Describe the situation
- Say why and how it affects you.
- Give an example.
- Ask for something specific to be done.

Do *either* task A or B.

A

You are in your 20s or 30s and live in an apartment overlooking a public park. You moved to the apartment because you wanted to live in a nice quiet area next to a park where your children can play. Your partner works nights and goes to bed at 6 in the morning. Someone must do something about these old people who meet and dance to loud music at 7am three times a week. The park doesn't belong to them.

B

You are in your 70s or 80s. You've spent many years working hard and now, in retirement, you live on your own. You don't have much money, and your partner died a few years ago. You were often depressed until you joined a square-dancing group that meets in the park three mornings a week. Since you started square dancing you are fitter, you have made new friends and you no longer feel lonely. You don't understand why young people can't respect that.