

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

Level: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Work in groups and collect short answers to these questions on a board or shared screen.

- What type of people and groups have you noticed using your local public park?
- Which kinds of official or unofficial events and gatherings take place there?
- How are people expected to behave there? Are there any rules or regulations about using the park or public space?

2 Key words

a. Write the correct word or phrases from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then, find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

absolute blaring bonds bullying burden
confront disputes hostile interaction intervene
(in) unison products (of) prompting roots standoffs

1. together or at the same time _____
2. disagreements or fights in which neither opponent can do anything to win

3. music that is _____ is loud and unpleasant
4. deal with a difficult situation _____
5. connections, relationships _____
6. the origins or background of something _____
7. the responsibility of paying an amount of money, especially when this is considered too much

8. regularly frightening or hurting someone smaller or weaker to establish dominance

9. become involved in a situation in order to try to stop or change it

10. causing something to happen or be done _____
11. serious disagreement, especially one between groups of people that lasts for a long time

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12. people who have particular attitudes or ways of behaving because of the place or time that they live in, or the experiences they have had _____
13. true or right in all situations _____
14. the activity of being with and talking to other people _____
15. behaving in a very unfriendly or threatening way towards someone _____

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. Unfortunately, these teenagers are typical _____ of the private education system.
5. The audience were clapping and cheering _____.
6. We are working hard to strengthen _____ with our neighbouring countries.

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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**

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- 1 Across China's public parks and squares, in the early hours of the morning or late in the afternoon, the grannies gather.
- 2 The gangs, made up mostly of middle-aged and older women who went through the Cultural Revolution, take to a corner of a local park or sporting ground and dance in unison to Chinese music. Loud music.
- 3 The tradition has led to alarming standoffs, with the blaring music frequently blamed for disturbing the peace in often high-density residential areas. But many are too scared to confront the women.
- 4 The dilemma of the dancing grannies has prompted some to seek out tech solutions. One went viral online this week: a remote stun gun-style device that claims to be able to disable a speaker from 50 metres away.
- 5 Reviews of the item were positive. "Downstairs 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 will be the boss in the neighbourhood now," said another. "This is not just a regular product, it is social justice!"
- 7 China is home to an estimated 100 million dancing grannies. Square dancing allows older women, many of whom live alone or with younger family members who they accompanied on a move to the cities, to socialise. They form strong bonds, often shopping or doing other activities, including group investments, together, the South China Morning Post reported.
- 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 becomes a place for them to have a social life."
- 10 But neighbours complain it has gotten 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, or, in one case, breaking into a football field and stopping the game to dance in the space, prompting a police response and arrests.
- 11 In 2019, Tianjin City added new regulations on the promotion of civilized behaviors, allowing police to fine the dancing grannies up to 500 yuan (£56) if their music is too loud in public.
- 12 Some disputes have escalated to violence. In Shijiazhuang, neighbours fight back at the grannies by spreading stinky tofu, paint, and engine oil while they are dancing. One media report described a high rise resident throwing human faeces out the window at them.
- 13 "Most of them are the products of 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 have the absolute voice and status. We young people have done nothing, and of course are not qualified to question them."
- 15 The stun gun and other devices for sale online are part of an emerging market in goods to push back against the noise pollution while avoiding interaction. "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. You know the golden rule of Chinese policy: the larger number of people matters. Everything is based on social maintenance."

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- 16 It's not all hostile. Last year one group in Lanzhou city, Gansu, found a solution that make everyone happy by using bluetooth earphones, holding 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. Answer the questions with information from the article. Provide details and use some of the key words in italics in your answers wherever possible.

1. When, where, and why do the older ladies gather?
2. Why does this lead to *disputes*?
3. Why does one resident say that the *standoffs* have their *roots* in Chinese history?
4. What do you know about the technical device mentioned in the article?
5. What two less dramatic and less *hostile* solutions are mentioned?

4 Key language

a. Find multi-word phrases in the article that match the meanings below.

1. causing an annoyance to other people by being loud and noisy (3 words, paragraph 3)
2. when there are a large number of people living in a certain place (3 words, paragraph 3)
3. the view that everyone deserves to be treated equally and receive the same rights and opportunities (2 words, paragraph 6)
4. a polite and reasonable way of acting (2 words, paragraph 11)
5. someone who lives in a tower block of apartments (3 words, para 12)
6. trade in goods that are just starting to be noticed (2 words, paragraph 15)
7. dangerous or annoying levels of unpleasant sounds (2 words, paragraph 15)
8. an important basic principle that you should always obey when doing a particular activity (2 words, paragraph 15)

b. Use a few chosen phrases to talk about the article.

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

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?
- In what other situations might young people be annoyed by the behaviour of older people, and vice versa?

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6 In your own words

a. You are going to write to your local authorities about the situation. Structure your letter as follows:

- Describe the situation.
- Elaborate on why and how it affects you.
- Give an example.
- Suggest a solution or 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 as you wanted to live in a nice quiet area next to the park so that your children would have a green space in which to play. Your partner works shifts and often comes home and goes straight to bed at 6 in the morning. Someone must do something about these old people who are making other people's lives unbearable. 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 times a week. Being part of the group has not only made you fitter, it has enabled you to make friends and you no longer feel lonely. You don't understand why young people can't respect that.