

## 2

### “Becoming Chinese” – a new social media fad

fad: trend  
(Modeerscheinung)



Source: Adobe Stock/duan

### 2 a

#### Warm-up: talking about a new social media trend

#### Speaking

Get into small groups and talk about the following:

- » What have you heard about the social media trend of “Becoming Chinese” or “Chinamaxxing”?
- » What do you associate China and Chinese culture with? Make a list and discuss which statements are factual and which might be stereotypes.
- » Have you come across the name of China’s “cyberpunk city” Chongqing (see photograph)? Would you like to visit the city and share a photo from one of Chongqing’s skyscraper platforms? Why / why not?

**-maxxing:** a trend popularised by TikTok that refers to optimising or “maximising” a specific aspect of oneself (e.g. physical appearance in “looksmaxxing”) in order to achieve an ideal or “maximum” state. It can sometimes encourage extreme or potentially harmful practices.

### 2 b

#### Understand what “Becoming Chinese” or “Chinamaxxing” means

#### Listening

Meanwhile social media has been flooded with Chinamaxxing content of all sorts. So this year, the celebration of the Chinese New Year has aroused more attention than usual.



Watch [the short video clip from the Australian news service SBSNews](#) and take notes on the following aspects:



cultural appropriation: adopting elements of another culture in a stereotypical way (appropriation: Aneignung)

hashtag / motto	
habits adopted	
What caused the trend?	
When / why did it explode?	
explaining the trend	
the Chinese view of the trend	
What is an important question?	

Afterwards compare your notes in class and complete them.

2 c

Reading

## Boosting China's soft power?

Read the text about the new fad of Chinamaxxing. Some parts are missing. Choose the correct part (A–J) for each gap (1–7). There are two extra parts that you should not use. Write your answers in the spaces provided. The first one (0) has been done for you.



Source: Adobe Stock/JUN LI

### Is this a 'very Chinese time in your life'?

<p>Ni hao: Mandarin Chinese for hi or hello</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>From warm apple-boiled water to indoor slippers and health exercises, people are sharing videos of themselves “learning to be Chinese”. Many come with the <i>Fight Club</i>-inspired caption “you met me at a very Chinese time in my life”, or the hashtag #newlychinese. (1) ___, the Chinese Communist Party has welcomed this boost to the country’s image.</p>	<p>“Tomorrow you’re turning Chinese,” she tells her 740,000 TikTok followers. “And I know that sounds intimidating, but there is no point in fighting it now.”</p>	<p>45</p>	
<p>Sinophobia: fear of China</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>Chinamaxxing is certainly adding more gloss to the recent flourish of Chinese soft power. Over the past year, we’ve seen the world clamour for Labubu™ dolls, wait in line at brand new stores to buy Mixue bubble tea and Luckin coffee, (2) ___.</p>	<p>Few could have seen this coming. It was not that long ago when the Covid pandemic sparked a wave of Sinophobia. Chinese diaspora spoke of racism and how people were avoiding the community and their businesses. Then, a stunned world watched the leadership in Beijing put its cities into hellish lockdowns. The restrictions ended only in early 2023, after rare protests. By then, expats had left China in large numbers, many of them saying too much had changed.</p>	<p>50</p>	
<p>to clamour: to strongly ask for</p>	<p>15</p>	<p>Some say Chinamaxxing stems from young Americans’ disappointment with their own country. But like so many internet trends, this one hardly paints the full picture. It’s a celebration of memes and fleeting moments that make up just one slice of Chinese life. Beyond that are young Chinese people who, like their American counterparts, (3) ___.</p>	<p>There was also an exodus from Hong Kong, where Beijing’s control was reshaping the city. This, along with China’s growing power and confidence, strained the relationship with the West, (5) ___.</p>	<p>55</p>	
<p>derogatory: abwertend</p>	<p>20</p>	<p>Some Chinese youth may find it strange that parts of their culture – long seen as “uncool” in the Western imagination – are now the object of fascination. Some may find it offensive that Westerners on TikTok are jokingly claiming they’ve been “diagnosed as Chinese”. But others say Chinamaxxing strikes a different note from derogatory jokes like [...] the “social credit” meme that mocks the Chinese government’s restrictions on personal freedoms.</p>	<p>Meanwhile, China’s investments in tech, infrastructure and exports began to pay off - and became more visible as it reopened post-pandemic relaxing visa rules to bring back tourists. It was hard to miss: a sprawling high-speed rail network, highways packed with electric vehicles, and a boom in green energy, robotics and artificial intelligence. Chongqing – a humid southwestern metropolis and one of the world’s biggest cities (6) ___ – turned popular and cool.</p>	<p>60</p>	
<p>critical juncture: kritischer Wendepunkt</p>	<p>25</p>	<p>One of the most influential figures behind the Chinamaxxing trend is Sherry Zhu, a Chinese-American TikTok content creator (4) ___.</p>	<p>Young people around the world are snatching Adidas Tang-style jackets off the shelves, bingeing on Chinese micro-dramas, and experimenting with Douyin make-up, a kind of make-up look that’s popular with girls and women on Douyin, China’s version of TikTok. The 22-year-old Claire, who shares political content on TikTok and only reveals her first name for that reason, says, for her, the “critical juncture” was last year. That was when she no-</p>	<p>65</p>	
<p>30</p>	<p>35</p>	<p>40</p>	<p>70</p>	<p>75</p>	<p>80</p>

Source: www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz6eijqvyp1o – Koh Ewe

ticed a shift in attitudes about China. A wave of Americans arrived on RedNote, a popular Chinese social media app, ahead of a TikTok ban in the US. Within days, these cultural

elements became the currency of these American “TikTok refugees” as two worlds (7) \_\_\_ were brought closer.

85

**Test format**  
**Multiple matching**

- A and scroll through their friends’ holiday feeds in the “cyberpunk city” of Chongqing
- B who regularly shares traditional wellness tips with her “Chinese baddies”
- C have suddenly found themselves in vogue, largely among Americans
- D When the first reports of a new disease first reached the West
- E which once made global headlines for a corruption and murder
- F As Donald Trump shakes up the world order,
- G as the world’s reliance on the Chinese economy became clear
- H are also worried about their future in a slow economy and a fast-changing world
- I and start adopting Chinese habits and foods
- J that rarely interact because of China’s internet firewall

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C							

**2 d**

**A Chinese jacket going viral**

**Reading**  
**Listening**

1. Read the short text about the Tang jacket, the most recent fashion item for Chinamaxxers.

Lunar New Year: the traditional Chinese calendar is based on the lunar year 🌙

Every Lunar New Year, brands release zodiac animal-themed merchandise and items in the lucky color red. This year, there’s one product that has cut through all the noise: the Adidas Chinese Track Top. It wasn’t explicitly marketed for the festive season, but has been unofficially dubbed the “Chinese New Year” or “Tang” jacket on TikTok and Instagram, where it’s been going viral over the past few months.



Initially only sold in China, then a handful of Asian markets before becoming available in Europe in February 2026, they have since become a must have among Gen Z – and a symbol of young people’s growing embrace of all things China.

The jacket’s nickname notes its resemblance to the Tang suit, a historic garment tracing back to China’s Qing dynasty (1644–1911), worn by horse riders from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. They share some key design details: ornamental, knotted toggles, known as frog buttons or pankou, and a standing Mandarin collar.



embrace of:  
interest in


toggles: Knebel-  
verschlüsse

Mandarin: civil  
servant

Source: Adobe Stock/BTG, Adidas

Source: edition.cnn.com/2026/02/16/style/adidas-tang-jacket-chinese-new-year-trend-intl-hnk – Stephy Chung

**Track 1**

2. Then listen to Hong Kong born and raised Giselle Lee and her conflicting emotions about this garment. Take notes and compare them with the  [transcript](#).

2 f

Language in use

BE

## Passing fad or cultural appropriation?

Read the text about how the “Chinamaxxing” trend shapes Western engagement with Chinese culture. Some words are missing. Use the words in brackets to form the missing word for each gap (1–15). Write your answers in the spaces provided. The first one (0) has been done for you.

### Between parody and politics

The Chinamaxxing trend is a unique example of digitally mediated cross-cultural admiration. It reflects the West’s general growing interest in traditional Chinese medicine and culture – and more (0) **broadly** shows us how social media can reshape the way we think about and engage with other cultures.

The trend signals a move from a surface-level (1) **fascinate** to a more reflective form of engagement with Chinese culture. For instance, many users point out how Chinese practices associated with (2) **moderate**, balance and a healthy long life can function as antidotes to burnout culture. It’s an example of “soft power”, a country’s ability to shape global (3) **perceive** of itself through its portrayal of culture and values.

The Chinamaxxing trend has led many to ask an important question: are we seeing cultural (4) **appreciate**, appropriation, or something in between? Many users adapt and remix the practices to fit their own lives, and may lose important context or histories in doing so. On TikTok and Instagram, traditional Chinese medicine may be reduced to a checklist of habits: avoid cold drinks, boil ginger, prioritise rest. These kinds of (5) **oversimplify** risk detaching practices from the important philosophies underpinning them.

At the same time, it would be reductive to dismiss the entire trend as mere appropriation. Many (6) **create** credit their sources, share family stories and collaborate across cultures. And many are (7) **they** members of the Chinese diaspora living in the West.

The Chinamaxxing trend has (8) **large** been driven by Gen Z users based in the United States. Although it’s hard to know for sure, some (9) **comment** think it may stem from this group’s growing disappointment with its own (10) **govern**. The popularity of this content speaks to several contemporary Western (11) **anxious**. Burnout culture, climate and economic (12) **certain** have made the West’s hyper-optimised self-care culture feel hollow.

This trend of celebrating Chinese culture comes at a time when some Western (13) **ideology** structures are coming under intense scrutiny. Perhaps this is making Western audiences question whether the anti-Chinese sentiment they’ve been exposed to through their own institutions ought to be questioned. The challenge is to remain (14) **reflect**. Engagement can deepen cross-cultural understanding – but only if (15) **curious** extends beyond memes. Drinking hot water may be simple, but understanding the worldview behind it requires more time and effort.

antidote: Gegengift

cultural appropriation: adopting elements of another culture in a stereotypical way (appropriation: Aneignung)

scrutiny: Überprüfung

Test format  
Word formation

Write your answers here:

0	broadly		
1		6	11
2		7	12
3		8	13
4		9	14
5		10	15

Source: theconversation.com – Justine Poplin

## 2 g

### Reading

## Hyping Chinese culture – not just a thing of Gen Z

Read the following text from the website of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.



lacquerware: objects decoratively covered with lacquer (Lack)

### BE Chinoiserie – an introduction

People had long been fascinated by the exotic nature of luxury products, such as porcelain, silk and lacquerware, that had been flowing into Europe from East Asia since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. These imports stimulated Rococo designers of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to imitate and adapt oriental motifs and ornaments for a wide variety of objects. They didn't distinguish between what was Chinese, Japanese or Indian, but combined motifs to create an exotic fantasy world.

Chinoiserie is characterised by a number of frequently occurring motifs. In 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, China seemed a mysterious, faraway place. Although trade between the two countries had increased over the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, access to China was still restricted and there were few first-hand experiences of the country.

Chinoiserie drew on these exotic, mysterious preconceptions. Objects featured fantastic landscapes with fanciful pavilions, sweeping lines of the roofs of Chinese pagodas, fabulous birds and figures in Chinese clothes. Sometimes these figures were copied directly from Chinese objects, but more frequently they originated in the designer's imagination. Mythical beasts such as dragons also became a common Chinoiserie motif, summing up all that was strange and wonderful about the East.



Wallpaper depicting scenes of Chinese life, imported from southern China to one of the "Chinese cabinets" in the Palazzina di Stupinigi, Piedmont, Italy

1. What is the text about? Present two or three main points.
2. What similarities do you see between Chinamaxxing and Chinoiserie of the 18<sup>th</sup> century?
3. Briefly describe the image on the right. What image of China does it convey? Does it appeal to you?

## 2 h

### Speaking

## Can fads and hypes promote a better intercultural understanding?

1. Get into groups and discuss if cultural aspects (fashion, art, habits, food, literature, music etc) can create more intercultural understanding. Make a list of pros and cons and find examples from your personal experiences.
2. Then get into pairs and act out dialogues based on the role cards.

### A



You are a dedicated Chinamaxxer and invite a friend to your place. They should wear slippers, drink tea and hot water and find a Tang jacket or other lifestyle item for you on some app. Try to convince your friend with arguments.



### B



You are convinced this Chinamaxxing is a short-lived fad and actually is cultural appropriation. You question your friend's fads and rituals. And you definitely won't drink bubble tea. But you are fascinated by some Chinese tech gadgets.

