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Translingual practice as a discursive strategy to shape lifestyle and cultural identity

Yunhong Wang ¹✉, Boyang Peng¹ & Xiaoli Tang¹

The paper presents a comprehensive examination of the influence of online translingual practice on the lifestyle choices and identity construction of Chinese youth. An analysis of data sourced from platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu finds that the emergence of new lifestyles facilitated by translingual practice transcends traditional social norms, leading to notable shifts in lifestyle preferences. These shifts advocate for active mobility, sustainable practices, clothing habits of inclusive colors and styles, and the adoption of alternative consumption patterns that challenge entrenched standards and regulations. Translingual practice is emblematic of the broader trend towards increased diversity in lifestyle choices within Chinese society. By shedding light on how translingual practice functions as a conduit for communicating and negotiating lifestyle politics, the research offers novel insights into its pivotal role in individual and community identity formation within online spaces and its potential as a transformative force in enriching life choices and prompting action in the real world. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of understanding the rise and popularity of such lifestyles within the context of the interplay between global influences and local dynamics.

¹College of Foreign Studies, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China. ✉email: cerulean.wang@connect.polyu.hk

Introduction

Scholars have employed the concept of translingual practice to explore how individuals who speak multiple languages communicate and express subjectivity in diverse social contexts (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Pennycook 2017; Dovchin et al. 2024 etc.). Translingual practice sheds light on the realities of multilingual environments in education, everyday interactions, and linguistic/semiotic landscapes. Tsing (2015) finds that translingual practice relates to linguistic and communicative expressions by marginalized people experiencing an unstable life. Translingual practice, therefore, is attached to a bottom-up approach, reflecting ideas such as “globalization from below” and “language from below”, which both refer to the extensive coverage of community-based networks to enable the ordinary and even the poor to interact with their counterparts in the global north and south as a bridge for trade, marketing and for cultural exchange (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). It is a significant concept to understand how marginalized language users try to subvert sociolinguistic norms, challenge dominating ideologies and linguistic boundaries to channel social pressure and change the status quo (Li and Zhu 2019). Pennycook (2007, 2017) argues that translingual practice may arise from the “pleasure of doing things differently” and mocking the authorities (Pennycook 2007: 42), serving as a reflection of popular culture. Thus, it creates alternative linguistic, cultural and identity repertoires that challenge how language has been constructed and open space for new ways of thinking and living (Sayer 2013; Pennycook and Makoni 2020).

In the digital times, translingual practice is deeply connected with a celebration of becoming, creating, innovating, changing and renewing (Dovchin et al. 2024). The inclusive nature of translingual practice, with its hybrid components, aligns well with social media. Fueled by advanced digital technologies and global cultural flows, social platforms “allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 61) and provide new possibilities for creative language use beyond traditional practices (Li and Lee 2021). In this context, the translingual practice has been centered on the interplay between language and local identity practices, popular culture and mass, digital youth and mediated communicative practices (Rampton et al. 2019). Social media platforms become spaces for assembling linguistic resources, pictures, emojis and other communicative elements, offering opportunities for translingual practice. Online translingual practice, such as texting, blogging, social media, and gaming, emerges as a significant research area, and social networking sites present rich materials for in-depth study (Li and García 2017). Li and Lee (2021) explored the dynamic translingual practices of young Chinese netizens and found that they adeptly utilize their linguistic repertoire to construct and perform fluid and heterogeneous identities within a self-created virtual translingual space. Yuan (2020) observed that Chinese netizens’ online translingual practice empowers voices against social pressure, environmental pollution, and sexual harassment, thereby playing a crucial role in social and ideological struggles in contemporary China. In recent years, scholars have begun to reflect on and critique miscellaneous bizarre translingual practices including the language of curses and oaths, the voices of the hostility and vulnerability, voices hostile to others, the expressions of depression, frustration, grief, despair and anxiety (Dovchin et al. 2024). Their studies would suggest that translingual practice may be mostly framed as playfulness.

While researchers have researched different types of translingual practices from various perspectives, in this study, the term “translingual” refers to communication that transcends individual languages and involves diverse semiotic resources. According to Canagarajah (2013), in translingual practice, one can use strategies such as code meshing to bring together different codes for

meaning-making and social communication and finally bring forth one’s voice and identity. These strategies involve alternating between more diverse languages and codes, each associated with specific identities and values in somewhat way. Following the above research trajectory, the current article investigates how individuals and groups intentionally and consciously express themselves and create new lifestyles through specific translingual online practices in relation to local linguistic resources, social environments, cultures and economies.

Lifestyle politics in translation

The concept of “lifestyle politics” was initially introduced by Bennett (2003), who associated it with ideas generated by international organizations on topics that influence public discourse and the personal sphere. These topics include gender identity, sustainable lifestyles, and perceptions of safety and risk. For instance, the threat of climate change poses a significant challenge to the realization of a consumerist lifestyle, prompting citizens to modify their habits for personal well-being and environmental protection. Calls for sustainable choices extend to various aspects of life, such as clothing, food, travel, and daily activities (Caimotto and Raus 2023: 30). In this sense, lifestyle politics transcends superficial matters like fashion advice, food recommendations, and travel suggestions found in media and delves into deeper complexities and relevance. It extends beyond the conventional understanding associated with leisure and consumption.

The lifestyle politics approach posits that “lifestyle is discursively constructed, intertwined with the formation of associated in-groups and out-groups.” (Tominc 2017). As a differentiating factor in society, lifestyles first contribute to the creation and recreation of inequalities in the same way as those generated by social class boundaries. More importantly, it introduces layers of complexity beyond mere financial distinctions. Lifestyle not only distinguishes between those who can and cannot afford certain aspects but is primarily linked to displaying specific tastes, showcasing a form of cultural capital that allows the establishment of symbolic boundaries. Its primary consequence has been an “accentuation of volatility and ephemerality across aspects such as fashions, products, production techniques, labor processes, ideas, ideologies, values, and established practices” (Caimotto and Raus 2023: 9). For example, in the 1960s Western world, a “throw away” lifestyle featuring instantaneity and disposability demonstrated by instant and fast foods led to the dynamics of a “throw-away” society not only “throwing away produced goods, but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being” (Harvey 1989: 286). What underlies lifestyle politics is the common sense that lifestyle orientation often goes beyond the personal level to cause social transformation in every aspect.

Examining lifestyle politics and its translingual practice across countries is essential for comprehending the contemporary globalized world. Translingual practice is associated with globalization and the embrace of diversity, manifesting the increased mobility and changes experienced by translingual communities and the interaction between language, society and global impact (Pennycook 2017). The lifestyle politics approach responds to some questions posed by scholars engaging in translingual practice, which suggest that linguistic creativity and play are not merely about mixing phrases drawn from a variety of social and cultural forms but also reflect and enable changes and progress (Canagarajah 2013; Pennycook 2017). Translingual practice is not only a result of living conditions but also shapes living styles, produces social relations and defines one’s social identity. This

perspective allows us to see how diverse but discrete linguistic repertoires interact with our living and thinking. Analyzing how lifestyle politics is communicated and practiced across languages and cultures provides insights into the diverse ways ideas and lifestyles are shared globally. Caimotto and Raus (2023) have explored how globalized discourse undergoes depoliticization and marketization, influencing individuals' identities in a trickle-down effect. In the present study, we employ their notion of lifestyle politics to explain how new identities shape themselves outside and beyond the traditional social norms by creating identities that express their lifestyle choices through online translingual practice.

The lifestyles of Chinese people are deeply rooted in socio-historical contexts. In the post-1949 era, many aspects of life were manipulated by government policies because of resource shortages and the planned economy. Clothing was characterized by simplicity and monotony, with dark blue and deep green being the prevalent colors for ordinary individuals. Food constituted part of the national economic plan and a significant portion of family expenses during this period. Since China's opening and reform in the 1980s, the country has undergone tremendous changes, leading to constant shifts in people's lifestyles. In the early 1990s, the influx of international companies into China brought global lifestyles and cultures to the forefront. According to Yan (2013), the influence of fast-food culture on Chinese consumption patterns became evident with the establishment of McDonald's and KFC in the country. While government policies still significantly influence life choices, diversified and global lifestyles also become popular in Chinese society. In recent decades, the rising popularity of online social media has impacted the lifestyles of Chinese individuals. Social values, new trends, and disputes on various issues spread rapidly and widely online, ultimately influencing everyday life.

Data collection and research method

Research methodology. The study adopts the methodology of netnography, an attested rationale applied in online research that "involves immersive participant-observation of computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets 2010). As its name implies, netnography examines the individual interactions resulting from Internet connections or computer-mediated communications as a focal data source. Communication is the exchange of meaningful symbols, and all human symbol systems are digitized and shared through information networks. Each of these comprises valid data for netnography.

Netnography observes online communities as ongoing, continuous relationships (Kozinets 2010: 9). Our extensive immersion in data collection spanned from February 2023 to December 2023, during which we consciously delved into the translingual practice of social media platforms. According to a report by the China Internet Network Information Center, China's internet user population exceeded 1.079 billion in June 2023, accounting for 76.4% of the country's population, among which the number of social media users accounted for 95.13% of the total (KAWO 2023). This makes China's online community one of the largest in the world. The focal topic for netnography is, first and foremost, collective identity, not individual or personal identity (Kozinets 2010). For this reason, we examine the translingual items that many groupings, gatherings, or collections of people have practiced. Its level of analysis is thus what Kozinets defines as the "meso" level: not the micro of individuals, nor the macro of entire social systems, but the relatively smaller group level in between because such popular items can best reveal the dynamic and constructed nature of identity. Therefore, our primary concerns relate to translingual practices that spread to

communities on a few comprehensive social networking sites. The platforms for data collection encompass Weibo and Xiaohongshu, both of which hold significant sway among contemporary Chinese youth. Weibo and Xiaohongshu are two of China's most popular social media platforms, with a substantial user base and a relatively high number of translingual practices. As one of the most comprehensive online platforms, Weibo had 605 million active users in November 2023 and 260 million active daily users. Most Weibo users are young, with nearly 85.99% born after 1990 (<https://data.weibo.com/report/report>). Xiaohongshu is also a platform predominantly populated by young users. By the end of 2022, the latest data from Xiaohongshu indicates a monthly active user base of 261 million, with over three million daily note publications. Among the platform's daily active users, 60% are involved in active searches, contributing to a daily search volume approaching 300 million (<https://app.qian-gua.com/#/blog/detail/1594>). Xiaohongshu has extended its influence to popular destinations, mirroring young Chinese people's values, activities, and choices. Notably, the platform demonstrates a more pronounced translingual practice due to the significant presence of international students, which renders the data collection comprehensive for our research agenda.

Data collection. Kozinets (2010) lists several critical aspects of online communities at the meso level including "social aggregations", "enough people", "enough long" and "public discussions" (2010: 8–9). With these elements in mind, we only collected the translingual items with the accumulated views of relevant hashtags exceeding 10,000 and the accumulated notes or discussions exceeding 1000 on Weibo and Xiaohongshu. By adopting these criteria, we obtained 354 translingual items from the above social media from February 2023 to December 2023. The translingual items encompass a diverse range of topics spanning health, food, social life, entertainment, work, clothing, travel, gaming, and other lifestyle subjects. Primarily, the translingual practice observed predominantly occurs between English and Chinese languages. However, it is noteworthy that a minority of cases involve interactions between Chinese and other languages. For instance, the Japanese term "はちみ" (meaning 'honey' in English) has surfaced in online translingual discourse, albeit its usage is primarily confined to specific communities associated with Japanese culture. Consequently, such instances were excluded from the corpus after meticulous refinement.

Regarding the formal features of translingual items, it is found that direct borrowing from English is the most frequent way to realize translanguaging like "city walk", "stooping", "room tour", etc. Transliteration is also a way to achieve translingual practice that helps to retain the alienness, novelty and trendiness of the original English term, such as "多巴胺" for "Dopamine". Mutual dynamic translations between Chinese and English, exemplified by "白人饭" (a word-for-word translation of 'white people food') and "white people food", have also been widely employed in online discourse, so they are also examined in our study. In the multilingual and interactive environment of the Internet, sometimes it is hard to assume which language is the original and which is derivative because the user-generated, dynamic use of languages and their prominence in the spreading process can vary. By adopting a translational perspective, our study explores the online translingual practice that involves mixing and translation between languages.

An initial taxonomy is built in Table 1 upon analyzing the data in terms of the topics associated with the translingual terms. Of the 354 instances examined, translingual practice relating to leisure activities constituted a significant portion at 30.23%. This

Table 1 Categorization of topics.

Topics	Percentage
Leisure	30.23%
Living	22.01%
Clothing	17.63%
Dining	9.93%
Health	4.80%
Working	7.47%
Others	7.93%

category includes popular online terms such as “city walk”, “ship” and “fyq (for your page)”. Additionally, translingual instances associated with daily living accounted for 22.01%, featuring terms like “stooping”, “roomtour” and “loft”. Clothing-related translingual practice made up 17.63%, showcasing terms like “OOTD (Outfit of the Day)”, “VSCO girl” (VSCO is a photo editing and sharing application), and “Dopamine Dressing”, which have gained popularity online. Meanwhile, dining-related translingual practice comprised 9.93%, including examples such as “white people food” and “vegan”. Health-related translingual practice accounted for 4.8%, featuring popular online terms like “emo (emotional)” and “PUA (Pick-up Artist)”. Furthermore, translingual instances related to work constituted 7.47%, encompassing terms such as “JD (Job Description)” and “involution”. However, a more nuanced examination of the corpus revealed that while the taxonomy provided a helpful framework for data coding, it was not the most effective approach for categorizing and analyzing the items. It is partly due to the coexistence, overlap, or interaction of translational creativity. Moreover, items engaging in different types of translingual practice may sometimes share deeper-level similarities regarding the underlying motivations that drive such creativity.

To gain deeper insights into the intricate relationship between online translingual practice and lifestyles, the study situates the prevalence of online translingual practice in a broader social, cultural, and political background. It adopts a culturally saturated and historically specific approach to lifestyle evolution in the Chinese context and focuses on critical living areas that may reflect the life choices of contemporary Chinese individuals, particularly among younger demographics. Thus, the items were further examined based on their potential to shape the lifestyles of the new generation in China, considering various aspects of lifestyle politics, including but not limited to factors such as fast urbanization, environmental pollution, changing clothing and dining trends, and other social issues.

Findings and analyses

Engaging active mobility. The landscape of Chinese online translingual practice is characterized by a robust orientation towards lifestyle. Internet users traverse the boundaries between the global and local spheres, giving rise to new lifestyles that are from other cultures. One notable example is the translingual term “city walk,” which has emerged as one of the most popular hashtags on Chinese social media platforms. Accompanying it are translingual terms related to urban transportation, such as “city ride” and “city climb”, which have also gained widespread acceptance in China.

Take “city walk” as an example. While the idea originated in the United Kingdom, its translingual introduction by Chinese netizens has swiftly popularized it and, more significantly, put it into tangible action. During the first half of 2023, the combined views of “city walk” on prominent Chinese social platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu surpassed one billion, marking a staggering year-on-year search volume increase of 190.93%.

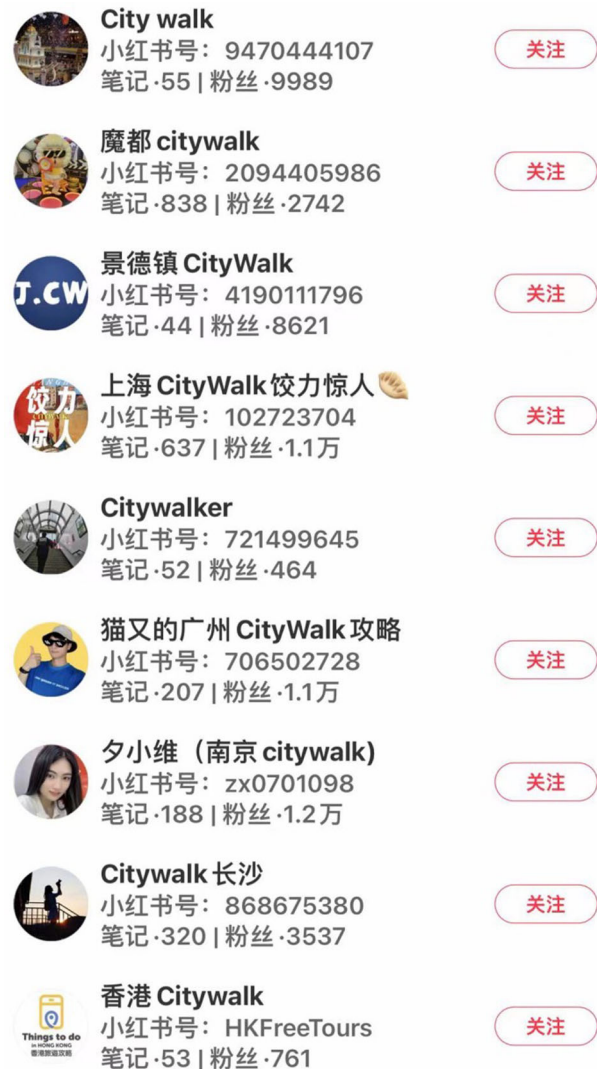


Fig. 1 Topics related to city walk on Xiaohongshu.

Notably, on Xiaohongshu (Fig. 1), data from August 2023 indicates a 700% surge in the number of “city walk”-related posts over the past three months, with total interactions increasing by more than 600% (Zhang 2023). On Weibo, the hashtag #citywalk# has garnered 220 million views (Fig. 2). The overwhelming presence of topics related to city walking among millions of netizens has turned the term into a heated meme on Weibo. As illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2, many cities, scenic spots, historical resorts, and cultural programs leverage the hashtag to attract enthusiasts and potential tourists alike. The translingual introduction of the concept has sparked widespread interest in trendy means of urban travel across China. This online discourse has translated into tangible action, with city walking gaining momentum among residents and tourists nationwide. The discursive dissemination of city walk-related topics and the growing popularity of this new urban transportation mode mutually reinforce each other.

As an advanced form of “city walk”, “city ride” has also gained significant traction across social media platforms, with the hashtag #cityride garnering over 10 million views on Xiaohongshu and reaching a readership of 605,000 on Weibo (Fig. 3). Although bicycles held a long-standing tradition in China, after entering the 21st century, the dominance of bicycles as a primary commuting tool began to wane with the rise of cars and electric



Fig. 2 Topics related to city walk on Weibo.

scooters. Over the past couple of years, cycling culture has experienced a resurgence, transforming into a fashionable sport and lifestyle choice. “City ride” was particularly evident in 2023. According to the “2023 Outdoor Living Trend Report”, the number of cycling-associated notes posted reached over 1.8 million in the year, an increase of nearly 400% compared to the previous year, with a total of more than 1.3 billion views (Xiaohongshu 2023). The report suggests that “city ride” is seen as a physical activity and a tool for emotional and mental health. Moreover, according to the “China Health Management White Paper” published in 2022, there has been a noticeable drop in residents’ satisfaction with their health. The data indicates that 80% of them started focusing on scientific exercise post-pandemic. This increased health consciousness has indirectly driven the trend of cycling. Cycling is often associated with a lifestyle symbol, a vehicle of self-regulation, or indicating a free-spirited personality. The popularity of “city ride” on Chinese social media platforms indicates that cycling has evolved into a popular form of exercise and a trendy leisure activity among the younger generation in China.

Most posts under the topics attached to “city walk” and “city ride” show Weibo bloggers or vloggers’ unique travel experiences in the city with photos of local history, heritage, street art,



Fig. 3 Topics related to city ride on Weibo.

humanities, architecture, and other urban subcultures based on their interests and preferences. The rapid spread of these active, urban transportation ways provides an alternative to address problems with urban mobility. If we situate the “city walk” and “city ride” heat in the urban landscape of China, we can find it aligns with the prevailing conditions in most Chinese cities. The heat epitomizes a societal pivot toward addressing urban environmental challenges and fostering a culture of sustainable and health-oriented living that has transcended borders to influence the traveling styles of Chinese netizens and the urban life of modern Chinese people. It well responds to China’s rapid urbanization that has happened in the past decades as the progress of its modernization but is accompanied by severe pollution problems on account of the increasing car ownership of urban families and the resulting changes in haze exposure levels (Wang et al. 2021). Since the 2008 Olympic Games, the Chinese government has prioritized environmental concerns, and the online community has played a crucial role in raising awareness about issues such as smog and the adverse health effects of fine particulate matter, known as PM2.5. The escalation of concerns about air quality has led to heated online discussions where

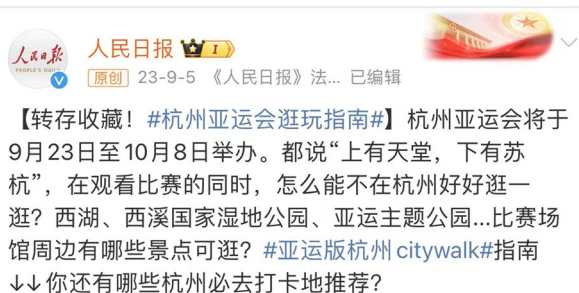


Fig. 4 Official media post on city walk.

translation serves as a discursive tool, which involves translating information about the causes and effects of smog, sharing data on air quality, and conveying the concerns and frustrations of the public both domestically and globally (Yuan 2020). The discursive translanguaging spreading of the eco-friendlier way of mobility is also one such endeavor. In China's dense urban areas, where the dependence on automobiles contributes significantly to pollution, new ways of urban mobility such as city walking and riding emerge as a beacon of change, signaling a broader cultural shift to embrace more eco-friendly and health-aware transportation habits. Urban mobility is intricately tied to the climate crisis, with vehicle emissions serving as a significant urban pollution source, particularly in cities lacking traffic management strategies. Recent studies (e.g., Poli 2011) highlight that promoting active mobility and minimizing the necessity for travel presents the most comprehensive solution. Promoting active mobility, such as walking and cycling, responds to the pressing need to enhance physical activity levels, thus combating obesity and its impacts on health. Meanwhile, it also serves as a lifestyle-driven approach to prompt citizens to alter their transportation habits, favoring public transit and active mobility (Caimotto and Raus 2023: 149–151). Many official blogs such as “人民日报(People’s Daily)” (Fig. 4), “湖南电视台(Hunan TV)” (Fig. 5) and “央视新闻(CCTV News: China Central Television News)” (Fig. 6) promote Chinese tourism and local cultural programs by referring to the #citywalk# hashtag, encouraging residents and tourists to have a deeper exploration of the city and uncover its hidden charm and stories. The above cases show that the more eco-friendlier trend of mobility has been welcomed and



Fig. 5 Official media post on city walk.

integrated into daily life choices by Chinese people through its viral spreading on social media.

The viral dissemination of the translanguaging terms “city walk” and “city ride” on Chinese social media encapsulates a deliberate response of Chinese netizens, among whom most are young people, to the challenges of urban pollution and increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Such prevailing trends not only highlight society’s recognition of the need for change in urban mobility but also emphasize Chinese netizens’ commitment to addressing environmental and health-related concerns by embracing alternative modes of transportation and advocating for pedestrian-friendly urban lives.

Encouraging sustainable practice. Climate change has increasingly dominated media coverage since the beginning of the 21st century, highlighting the growing interconnection between environmental preservation and lifestyle choices. The anthropogenic environmental crisis stems from the high-energy-consuming lifestyles led by the expanding global population, where individual identities are constructed through lifestyle and consumption patterns. Rather than scrutinizing an economic system that perpetuates ceaseless growth and the depletion of finite energy resources, environmental protection has often been framed as a matter of individual decisions, which is propagated through the promotion of “green” and “sustainable” products and services (Caimotto and Raus 2023: 124–126). Such a shift in



Fig. 6 Official media post on city walk.

lifestyle is exemplified by the redefined concept of “stooping” among young people, departing from its traditional meaning of “bending downward.” The revised practice aligns with efforts to combat climate change and promote sustainability. Now, “stooping” refers to the act of salvaging discarded furniture and other items from the streets for reuse, as popularized by the New York-based Instagram account @stoopingnyc in 2019. This movement has garnered global traction among young individuals residing in unfurnished rentals, giving rise to a distinctive “stooping culture” on social media that fosters community and sustainability.

The concept of “stooping” initially spread to Chinese social media from Xiaohongshu, a platform with approximately 72% of its users born after 1990. Digital marketer Mikiko Chen, aged 27, was among the first in China to adopt “stooping.” Chen was inspired by New Yorkers who frequently left unwanted items on their doorsteps (“stoops”), and she was among the pioneers who used the hashtag #stooping on China’s Xiaohongshu platform. Subsequently, numerous stooping accounts emerged on the platform, each representing a city, with stooping-related posts garnering millions of views. As of the end of 2023, the hashtag #stooping on Xiaohongshu had accumulated over 8.13 million views and more than 6600 posts as retrieved on December 30, 2023, primarily advocated for by young people who champion new lifestyle politics. Additionally, on Weibo, a platform with nearly 80% of post-90s users, the practice of stooping has garnered attention, attracting more than one million views (Fig. 7). These trends indicate that young Chinese netizens have used translanguaging to express their embrace of this new global approach to environmental protection in daily life.



Fig. 7 Topics and posts related to stooping on Weibo.

As depicted in Fig. 8, online communities have emerged across Chinese cities, such as “stooping 广州(Guangzhou),” “stooping 北京(Beijing),” and “stooping 武汉(Wuhan),” following the introduction of the term to China through translational practices. Moreover, the trend has gained popularity in major metropolises like Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Wuhan. Many “stooping” corners were established and shown on Xiaohongshu and Weibo, with many stooping activities documented. Like New York, these cities experience high tenant turnover and the abandonment of furniture, resulting in significant waste due to large migrant populations and advancements in production technology leading to surplus products. However, this surplus has resulted in the neglect and disposal of older items, contributing to resource waste and environmental issues.

Another popular translanguaging term on Chinese social media closely related to the trend of sustainable practices is “plogging.” “Plogging” originated in Sweden in 2016, and it is a compound of “plocka” (pick) and “jogga” (jog) in Swedish. “Plogging” combines sports(jogging) and environmental protection (picking up litter). It was highly supported and favored by environmentalists and fitness enthusiasts and spread from Sweden to other countries. On Xiaohongshu, #plogging has up to 900,000 views, and many online communities call for “plogging” events (Fig. 9).

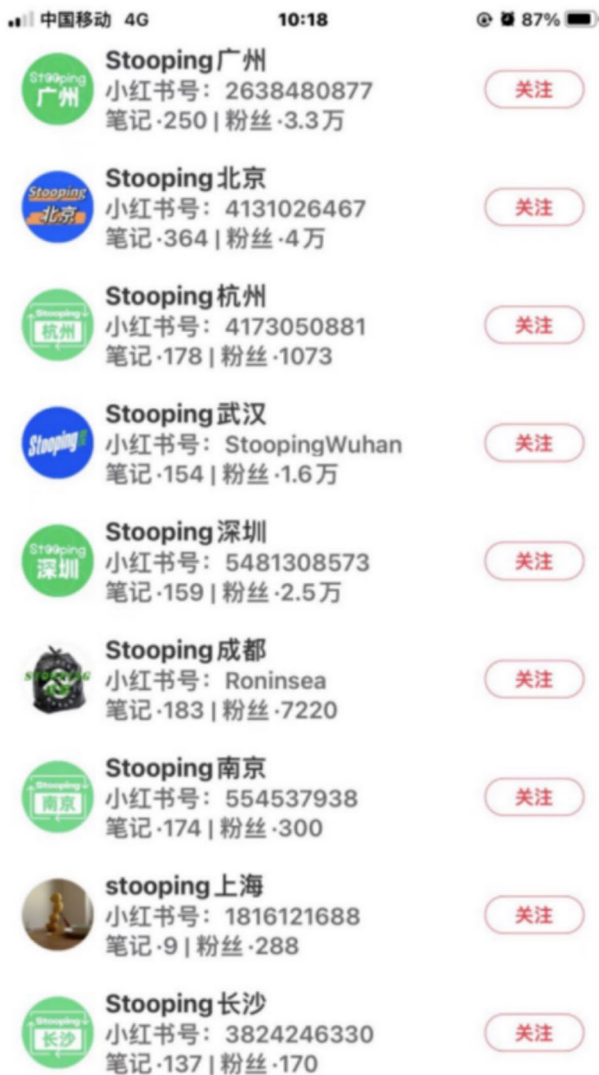


Fig. 8 Topics and posts related to stooping on Xiaohongshu.



Fig. 10 Topics and posts related to plogging on Weibo.



Fig. 9 Topics and posts related to plogging on Xiaohongshu.

On Weibo, related topics have up to 8 million views, indicating the popularity of “plogging” on social media (Fig. 10).

Stooping and plogging are both signs of the Chinese collective awareness of environmental protection, sustainable development and social responsibility. The “2022 China Ecological Environment Status Bulletin” from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment emphasizes the urgency of addressing these challenges. The report highlights data indicating that 5.0% of the national land area is affected by acid rain, and soil erosion spans 2,653,400 square kilometers. Stooping and plogging introduced to China through online translingual practice arise as a practical and effective approach aligned with low-carbon environmental protection consumption principles. They emphasize a fluid item circulation process. By recycling and extending the lifespan of old items, they reduce waste, safeguard the environment, and foster community engagement and resource sharing. To some extent, the popularity of such practices is helpful for China to fulfil its commitment to achieving a “carbon peak” by 2030 and “carbon neutrality” by 2060. The eco-friendly stooping and plogging activities, advocated and spread through online discourse, offer alternatives to contemporary China’s environmental problems. It is probably for this reason that the official media “中国日报(China Daily)” also joins in to spread these ideas, as seen in Fig. 11.

The rise of the translingual term “roomtour” on Chinese social media also reveals concern over sustainability and the use of



Fig. 11 Official media post related to stooping on Weibo.

living space. Originating on YouTube, “roomtour” is a popular vlog genre globally, involving the sharing of videos showcasing personal living spaces and reflecting the owner’s taste, design philosophy, and approach to life. By the end of 2023, posts related to “roomtour” on Chinese Weibo exceeded 90,000, with the hashtag #roomtour# generating 200 million views. On Xiaohongshu, #roomtour# has over 90,000 notes and 130 million views (Fig. 12). Most of them are young immigrant residents in cities. Unlike the pursuit of large living places, young vloggers usually use the “roomtour” hashtag to produce new lifestyles that challenge traditional norms and established means of living and consumption.

Noteworthy, one subgenre gaining traction within the room tour niche is “room makeover” videos (Fig. 13). Chinese vloggers showcase the transformation of living spaces using creative decoration and repurposing of existing items, promoting resourcefulness and a budget-conscious approach to design. This trend has increased interest in second-hand transactions and fostered a community that values environmental responsibility and sustainable living. Within the new middle class, there is a noticeable consumption stratification—28% embody a “spend as you wish” mentality, while 35% adopt a “save where you can” philosophy (Ocean Engine, 2020), highlighting the nuanced spending behaviors within this group. The growing environmental consciousness has also led to a broader embrace of sustainable consumption practices, epitomized by the “Recycle, Reduce, Reuse” movement. Quest Mobile (2023) indicates that 46.8% of the active users on platforms for trading second-hand goods come from the new middle class, with those born after the 1990s driving the boom in second-hand consumption. The social media trend of #roomtour not only promotes individuality and creativity but also champions sustainable living.

The second-hand market in China has seen substantial growth, particularly among the youth, who increasingly rely on second-hand platforms to deal with their idle belongings. This trend is steadily growing. According to a 2021 report by Frost & Sullivan

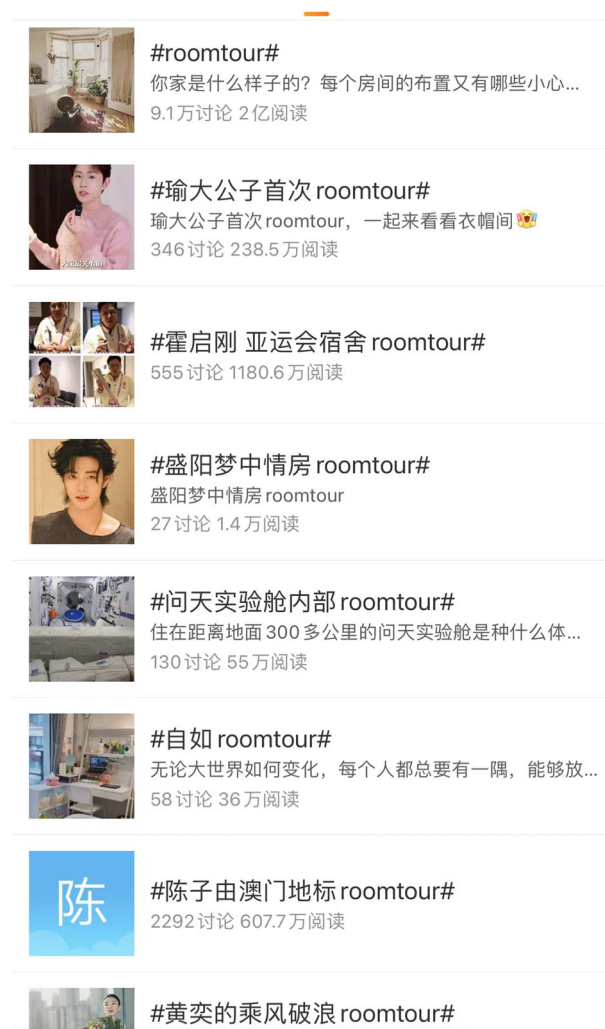


Fig. 12 Topics and posts related to roomtour on Weibo and Xiaohongshu.

and Tsinghua University Institute of Energy, Environment and Economics, along with Zhuanzhuan Group, China’s second-hand consumption market surpassed one trillion yuan in 2020, and it is anticipated that transactions of idle items in China will exceed three trillion yuan by 2025 (Frost and Sullivan 2021). This signifies that the second-hand trade has become a stylish and sustainable lifestyle choice, reflective of a low-carbon, environmentally friendly approach to living. The shift among young consumers away from traditional “single-use” consumption toward more sustainable practices indicates a broader change in behavior that encompasses environmental awareness, economic considerations, and the desire for unique personal experiences.

The translingual terms such “stooping”, “plogging”, “room tour” and “room makeover” represent more than just a trend—they signify a cultural and social shift in consumer behavior towards personalized, creative, and sustainable lifestyles among the younger generation in China. As these trends continue to evolve, they are poised to further influence the lifestyles and values of the broader consumer base in the country. They exemplify how online communities are taking proactive measures to embody social responsibility and showcase their dedication to sustainable practices, actively contributing to the country’s green transformation. In their pursuit of sustainable living, they are cultivating a culture of conservation and sustainability that

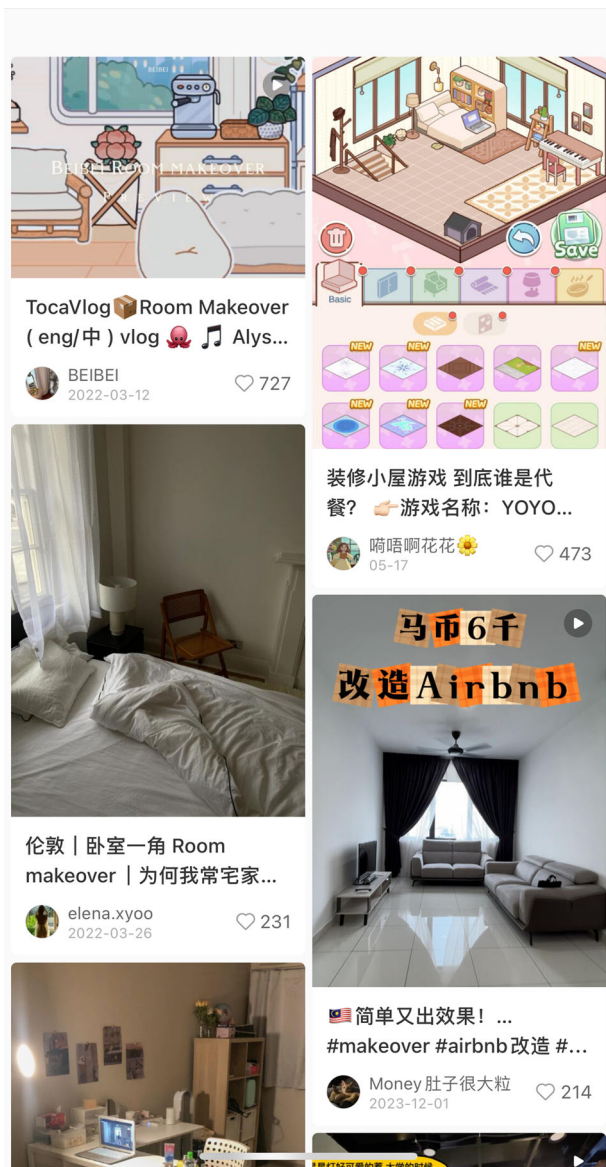


Fig. 13 Topics and posts related to room makeover on Xiaohongshu.

extends beyond personal habits, influencing broader societal norms and behaviors.

Creating new clothing and dining styles. China's socio-historical backgrounds have wielded significant influence over clothing styles. Post-1949, simplicity and monotony characterized fashion, with deep blue and dark green being prevalent colors, reflecting the socio-political ethos of the time, which was marked by a focus on practicality, equality, and the suppression of individualism in favor of collectivist ideals. However, in the 1990s, Western fashion culture began to make its mark, leading to the widespread adoption of suits for formal events and the embrace of casual wear typified by jeans and T-shirts. This shift mirrors the changing societal and cultural dynamics in Chinese clothing style, as the traditional simplicity and monotony of clothing gave way to a more diverse and individualistic approach to fashion. The rise of global economic and communication systems has amplified the importance of personal identity, granting individuals greater autonomy in expressing diverse identities through consumption

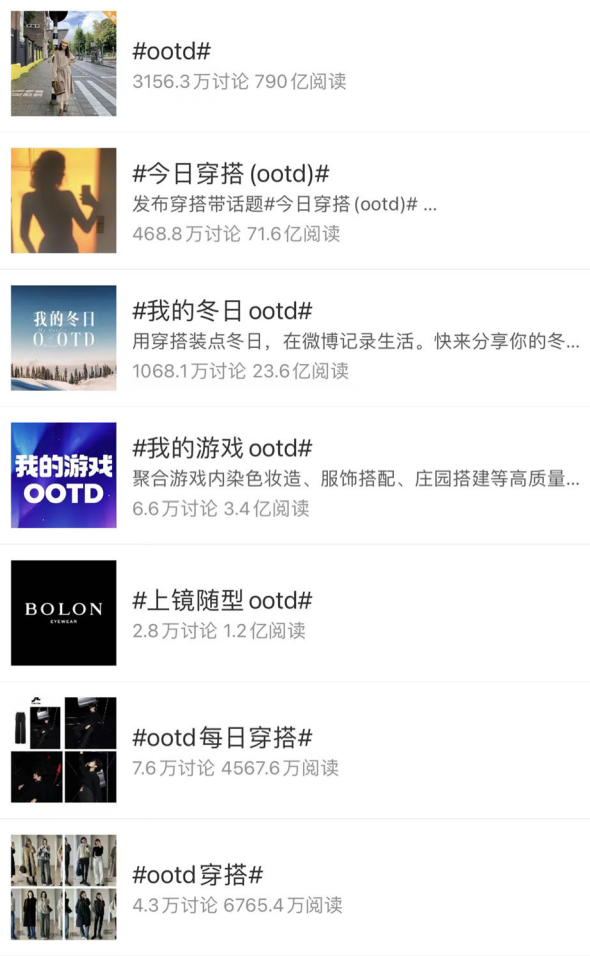


Fig. 14 Topics and posts related to OOTD on Weibo.

and lifestyle preferences (Caimotto and Raus 2023: 124–126), thus paving the way for sartorial expressions.

In recent years, the diversification of clothing choices for Chinese people is increasingly evident, serving as a testament to the burgeoning pluralism in personal style. The advent and proliferation of social media and e-commerce platforms have further fueled the spread of fashion trends and facilitated purchasing behaviors. These digital avenues have also enabled translanguaging practices in fashion, offering consumers exposure to a myriad of styles and trends. For instance, the translanguaging term “OOTD” has widely appeared on Chinese social media platforms. By the end of 2023, the hashtag #ootd# on Weibo garnered 79 billion reads and 31.563 million discussions (Fig. 14); and on Xiaohongshu, it amassed 3.17 billion views. As shown in Fig. 15, Chinese netizens, primarily girls, share their fashion choices and showcase their style online. More importantly, the translanguaging hashtag #ootd# enables them to connect with like-minded people and gain visibility within the online community and even in the fashion industry.

Additionally, the translated meme “多巴胺穿搭 (dopamine dressing)” emerged as a prevailing fashion trend on Chinese social media platforms in 2023. The translated term #多巴胺穿搭# has also sparked a frenzy across Chinese social networks, with over 930,000 related posts on Xiaohongshu and nearly 500 million views (Fig. 16). On Weibo, there are 104,000 discussions and 290 million views for the same hashtag (Fig. 17). Featured by vibrant hues such as bright yellow, berry red, lime green, and pink purple, dopamine dressing defies traditional color principles,



Fig. 15 Topics and posts related to OOTD on Xiaohongshu.

focusing on mood enhancement and emotional well-being. This trend, introduced by fashion psychologist Dr. Dawnn Karen, triggers the release of dopamine, known as “happy hormones,” promoting positivity through clothing choices. The trend’s popularity on social media platforms like Xiaohongshu and Weibo reflects a broader societal embrace of vibrant colors, personal inner values and inclusive fashion narratives. In the pictures and videos dubbed dopamine dressing, Chinese girls demonstrate loose clothing, shirt, and pant combinations, which alleviate body image anxiety often associated with the “body-shaping” style, offering a broader definition of beauty that transcends traditional concepts of body type in the Chinese culture. In this way, “Dopamine Dressing” resists traditional bodily and gender constraints, granting online communities the freedom to express their beauty. It achieves this by promoting gender-neutral attire, age-inclusive styles, and body-positive designs that prioritize personal expression. For instance, unisex clothing breaks down gender barriers by allowing any gender to wear the same piece, while bright colors and comfortable cuts for various body types are embraced across age groups. These elements of “Dopamine Dressing” challenge the conventional norms of what is considered appropriate for specific genders, ages, and body shapes, thereby transcending concerns of gender, age, and body image. This approach not only enriches the

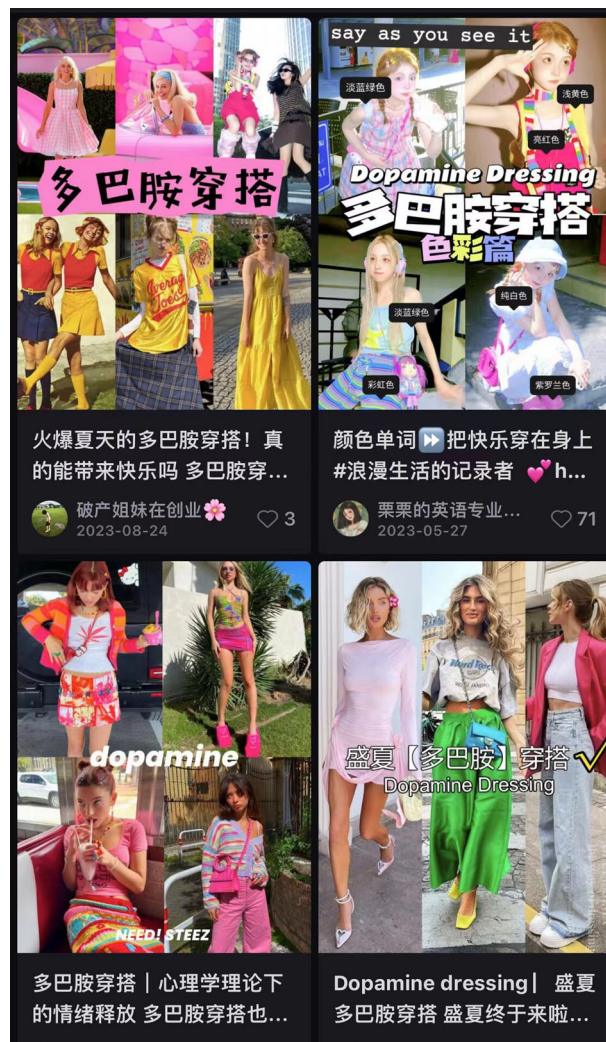


Fig. 16 Posts and topics related to Dopamine Dressing/多巴胺穿搭 on Xiaohongshu.

Chinese public aesthetics but also fosters a new identity among the younger generation, known as the “Dopamine Girl/Boy”.

The rise of translingual terms like “OOTD” and “多巴胺穿搭” signifies a shift towards placing greater importance on clothing choices and a rebellion against traditional social norms. These terms signify a widening diversity and freedom in clothing choices, encouraging individuals to embrace their uniqueness and creativity. Clothing fashion is a complex system that generates fashion phenomena and practices, reflecting lifestyles and ideologies. By challenging conventional beauty standards and promoting body positivity, the newly emerging clothing styles underpinning the above translingual terms contribute to a more inclusive and open-minded fashion ideology that gradually gains public acceptance and resonates within communities.

People always develop new dietary habits in the changing environment. The relationship between food and people’s health, identity, and social class has evolved significantly, particularly in the 20th century, with industrial food production and new agricultural techniques, which granted access to unprecedented food quantities, leading to changes in traditional diets and eating habits. However, the development of the food industry also brought forth new challenges, including health issues due to unhealthy eating habits and global hunger disparities. The impact of excessive meat consumption on climate change has also become a pressing concern. Some environmentalists and scholars

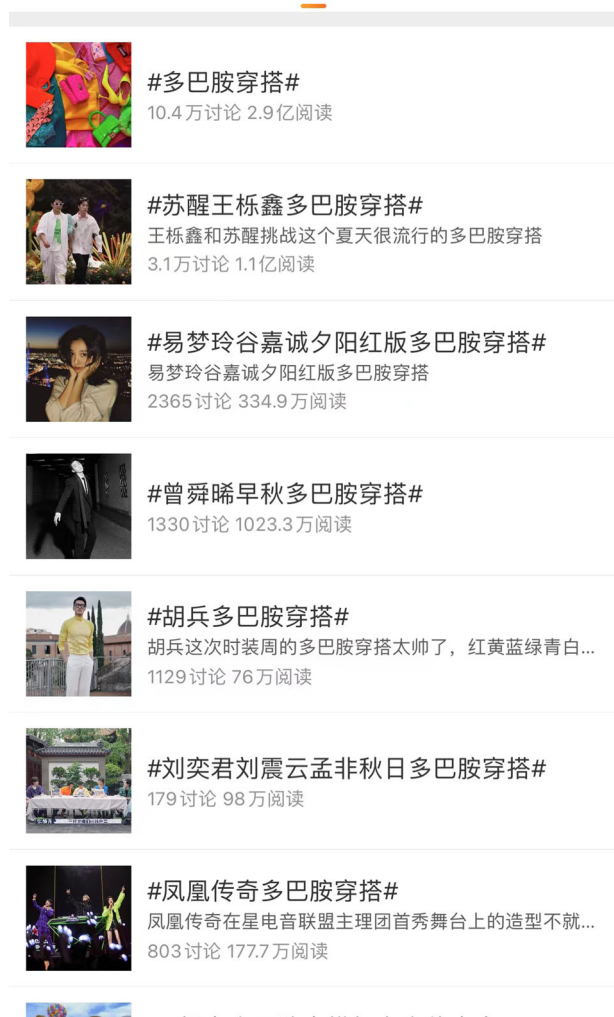


Fig. 17 Posts and topics related to Dopamine Dressing/多巴胺穿搭 on Weibo.

suggest that addressing these challenges is feasible through increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. Recognizing this, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization have spearheaded the initiative of promoting fruit and vegetables for health, environment and the future of mankind (Caimotto and Raus 2023: 170-172).

In 2023, China's Internet has been buzzing with a new trend—white people food (白人饭). Since May 2023, many netizens have posted photos and videos of simple Western-style meals on social media platforms in China with the hashtag #white people food#. Interestingly, the term “white people food” was believed to be first put forward by Chinese international students studying overseas, who found themselves puzzled by the simple, cold lunches their Western classmates consumed—a stark contrast to the warm, varied, and traditionally cooked Chinese meals they were accustomed to. These lunches sometimes consisted of plain vegetables, like green beans, carrots, baby spinach, and celery, or other items like slices of bread and boiled eggs. Many social media users have promoted the health benefits of the simple white people lunch (Touma 2023). As the trend spread to China, Chinese netizens started sharing their experiences with these minimalistic meals, making #white people food# one of the hottest phrases on various platforms and local media. As of the end of 2023, the hashtag #white people food# on Xiaohongshu has surpassed 19 million views and garnered over 50,000 notes

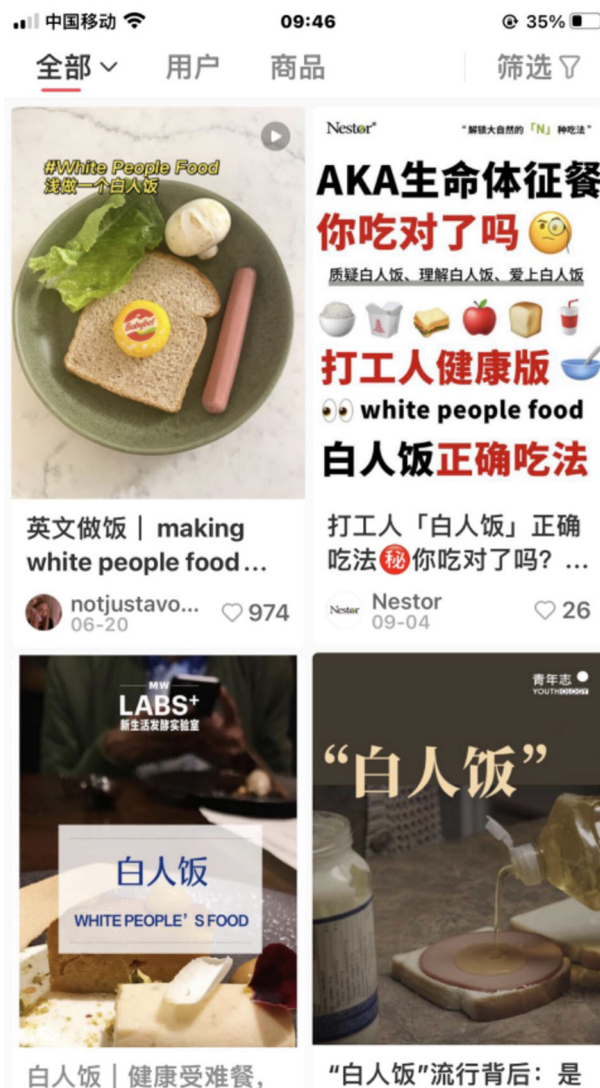


Fig. 18 Topics and posts related to white people food on Xiaohongshu.

(Fig. 18). Furthermore, content related to #white people food# has attracted 6.345 million views on Weibo (Fig. 19) and official media such as “新周刊(New Weekly)” also joined in the discussion of the food culture (Fig. 20).

The elusive creation and dissemination process of the translingual term “white people food” best reveals the language hybridity and diversity in online translingual practice. Although it may have originated from the Chinese language, it takes the form of an English term, as shown in Figs. 18 and 20 and therefore is understood by many as a foreign concept. Because of its lower caloric density, the concept gained traction as a healthier dietary option to address issues of overnutrition and associated metabolic diseases on Chinese social media. The shift is particularly notable in contrast to an earlier era, specifically before China's economic rise, when the dietary focus was on securing sufficient protein, fat, and sugar (Yan 2013). Nowadays, with basic nutritional needs largely met, the emphasis has shifted to incorporating vegetables like green beans, carrots, baby spinach, and celery. These vegetables are not only low in calories but also rich in dietary fiber, which is commonly lacking in contemporary diets. The popularity of “white people food” drives younger Chinese generations to adopt more balanced and nutrient-dense eating patterns, often associated with health and wellness, reflecting a broader acceptance and acknowledgment of nutritional benefits



Fig. 19 Topics and posts related to white people food on Weibo.



Fig. 20 Official media post related to white people food.

of other cultures. The online translanguaging practice has facilitated the rapid sharing of healthy lifestyles among countries, leading to increased awareness and changes in Chinese traditional diets and eating habits.

Discussion

The frequent translanguaging practice observed on Chinese social media, particularly associated with lifestyle orientation, holds significant implications in the contemporary digital landscape. This phenomenon is especially pertinent in China, given its potential to challenge established lifestyles, traditional norms, and social issues. Key platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu play crucial roles in shaping lifestyle trends, fostering cross-cultural exchange, and promoting individuality and creativity through lifestyle choices. The democratic nature of online spaces facilitates translanguaging practice, allowing for the formation of communities that transcend national boundaries. As these platforms expand globally, individuals of various backgrounds can participate in the communication and dissemination of global ideas and values, forming communities and influencing local life choices.

Throughout history, translation has played a pivotal role in facilitating China's acculturation to Western values, driving social change, cultural reform, and lifestyle innovation (Yuan 2020). In the twenty-first century, translanguaging practices have become transnational, fostering networks that transcend borders. On the Internet, bilingual, multilingual and translational practices are used as tools to communicate and interact between the global and the local. Drawing on the various aspects of translanguaging practice from distinctive life areas demonstrates that such a translanguaging phenomenon is central to a proper understanding of the emergence of new lifestyles promoted by the younger Chinese generations on social media and offers an innovative and optimistic vision of how translanguaging practice can be used to promote and brand lifestyle choices and therefore further construct individuality and identity in an increasingly borderless world.

Mixed Chinese and English communication formats have been found to be linguistic markers of identity for the young, English-literate generation (Li 2013; Sun and Minqiang 2016). The translanguaging feature endows the activity with a sense of being internationally acknowledged and globally trendy. Translanguaging practice serves as a means for the technology-savvy and English-literate Chinese netizens, especially the young, to keep pace with the global trendy lifestyles and address common issues of humanity (Zhang 2015). Thus, it may function as an invisible filtering mechanism to identify the user's age, education level, etc. and to gather individuals who pursue the same lifestyle into small groups. The translanguaging practice helps to improve communication efficiency, reduce social conflicts, and establish collective identity. It has become a significant means for younger Chinese generations to initiate avant-garde lifestyles aligning with global trends, and consequently, influence the life choices of more people and even cause social transformation. The intertwining between the discursive translanguaging practice on social media such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu and the popularity of lifestyles they have brought about encompasses the habits and practices of using media to express individuality, revealing "that the integration of media technology into daily life can shape new ways of living and give rise to a distinct culture" (Couldry 2012). The power exercised through the discursive participation that the translanguaging practices have initiated, based on tastes and choices, generates effects that are hard to neglect or counter. In this sense, online translanguaging practice and, with it, the lifestyle construction gives young Chinese a sense of their "individualization" and a desire to set themselves apart from tradition through a new-found self-consciousness. These shifts in consumer preferences are opening

new opportunities for diversified consumer ethos in China, integrating emotional considerations and public awareness with business models, thus shaping the nation and society at large. Some scholars have observed substantial transformations in the Chinese market over the past decades, particularly among the younger demographic, indicating a new wave of consumption driven by diverse online media outlets. As a crucial stabilizing force in society, the new middle class in China wields significant influence, acting as a societal anchor, substantially influencing national trends through their consumption habits and values. The trendy lifestyles through translingual practice showcase a consumer shift towards integrating individuality, environmental awareness and social activism into their purchasing decisions and business strategies (Euromonitor 2023). The impact of young people in this context is profound and should not be overlooked. Their influence in shaping consumption patterns, promoting sustainable practices, and driving social change is remarkable. The young generation's dedication to environmental protection lays the groundwork for a more sustainable future, positioning them as integral contributors to addressing environmental challenges and ushering in a new consumption pattern among young Chinese buyers.

More importantly, some values and social categories embedded in online translingual discourse are accepted by the mainstream ideology in China to guide public behaviors. In the cases we have examined, translingual features are exploited on mainstream social media to brand and make popular lifestyles that may enhance public awareness and extensive participation to address common issues the world faces, such as global warming, pollution, and resource shortage. It reveals a convergence culture between popular media and government propaganda as some scholars have found (Jun and Zhuo 2024). The mainstream ideology in China uses the social media discourse to direct the public toward the “right” choices of lifestyle by encouraging and participating in netizens' translingual practices and actions. As mentioned earlier in this article, life choices in China have always been closely associated with government policies. In recent years, the government has issued policies related to urban mobility, disposal of living waste and reduction of pollution, but their effects are limited (Zhang and Qinglong 2020; Zhang and Xia 2023). In addressing such common social issues, many Western countries have shifted their focus “from rational planning to nudging strategies in order to influence through more subtle, socio-psychological and cultural means the engrained habits and attitudes that play such a crucial, but not always clearly visible motivational role in traffic behavior and mobility patterns” (Oosterhuis 2019: 97). The discursive translingual practice serves as such subtle, socio-psychological and cultural means to influence and change people's lifestyles. The nudging attitudes of the mainstream ideology towards translingual dissemination of trendy, environmental-friendly lifestyles subconsciously politicize and push lifestyle choices towards what is considered best for the nation, yet still allowing individuals the freedom to choose and follow.

The extensive participation of Chinese netizens in eco-friendly and low carbon life choices introduced through translingual practice on the social media evince their active attitudes towards and persistent efforts in global actions. Translingual practices not only facilitate linguistic activity but also contribute to the reconstruction of cultural identity. The values that the translingual items convey influence every individual through lifestyle choices—choices that are usually expressed through the goods demonstrated and actions they choose to follow. The newly introduced lifestyle choices embrace individuality and reflect broader societal transformations towards a diversified consumer ethos and global interconnectedness. Such social behaviors and consumer preferences shifts may further reshape China's society.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes the pivotal role of social media in shaping lifestyle trends, fostering cultural exchange, and redefining societal norms. The findings highlight the significant influence of lifestyle choices on personal identities and underscore the intricate interplay between lifestyle shaping, identity construction, and translingual practices in the digital era. Additionally, it emphasizes the implications of these lifestyle shifts, including the promotion of active mobility, encouragement of sustainable practices, adoption of healthier dietary habits, and the creation of new lifestyles that challenge traditional norms and social standards. Overall, the study illuminates the evolving landscape of lifestyle shaping and identity construction, emphasizing the impact of globalized discourse on personal identities and the politicization of everyday lifestyle choices. It underscores the importance and necessity of comprehending these dynamics within the context of a globalized world and the communication of ideas and lifestyles across diverse cultural landscapes.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this research as no database was generated.

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Author contributions

WY.: Analysis of the data and article writing, revising and proofreading. PB.: Collection and initial analysis of the data; drafting part of the article. TX.: Providing the idea of the article; collection of the data; proofreading.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not required as the study did not involve human participants.

Informed consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Yunhong Wang.

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