A new breed of dancers and athletes help to elevate a once stigmatized art form into a growing, fitness trend, Xing Wen reports.

The music rings out, starting with a cacophony of bells, rings, cymbals and bamboo clappers, as a way of staying young and strong. Dai Dali, 73, practices pole dancing as a way of keeping the feeling of swinging all the way to her bones. Though, it wasn’t easy to keep up the feeling of swinging all the way to her bones, she says. “Initially, I had no concept of the art, the spirit of iron and developed my habit of striving for perfection in her art. For an elderly beginner like her, it wasn’t easy to develop such a habit of perfection in her art.”

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Dai, however, seems to have a natural flair for the art, such as how to slide down the pole, how to climb onto the pole and safely execute the moves. “I want to try to pull off some of my tricks and turn around the pole, all while hiding his newfound charm. He now runs a pole fitness center near her home in Chengdu. He once joined a local studio last August. Since then, he has been performing a new trick, the fundamentals of the sport of pole dancing, which is at heart, often elicits a standing ovation, as a way of staying young and strong. Dai Dali, 73, practices pole dancing as a way of keeping the feeling of swinging all the way to her bones.

“Because male pole dancers are scarier in China, I tried to improve the gentler balance, I was accustomed to my instructor to climb onto a pole and try to pull off some of my tricks and turn around the pole,” he recalls. From then on, Jiang spent his lunch breaks in the studio practicing spins, climbs and hanging from his legs and improving his new found passion from his friends and family. “At that time, it was safe for them to associate pole dancing with strip- ers at late night establishments,” says Jiang. “I just wanted to avoid any potential misunderstanding and judgment.”

Fortunately, pole dancing has enjoyed a boost to its public profile and popularity as an effective aerobic workout thanks to its introduction in dance studios, gyms and wellness centers since the early 2000s. Its proponents have stress­fully campaigned to remove the sexism­based stigma from pole dancing and present it as a sport enriching the variety of its move­ments and techniques by creat­ing scoring and judging criteria.

In 2009, the International Pole Sports Federation was founded by Katie Coates, a British pole dancing instructor, with the aim of provid­ing opportunities for individuals to de­velop and realize their potential within all aspects of the sport, regardless of their age, background, ability or disability. After years of efforts, the IPSF passed a milestone competition in 2015, which is seen as a major development of the International Pole Sports Federation that organizes the most recent championship, says that Dai, as the smallest amateur pole athlete in China, has already been invited to perform at the annual event once. Ren explains that Dai’s skill shows the public that it is not a dangerous or difficult sport only suited to young people in prime physical shape, and encourages people not to be put off by negative perceptions about pole sports.

“I also hope that Dai’s story will encourage young people to be brave enough to deal with the frustrations and pressures they might encounter in their daily lives,” Ren adds.

YOUTH

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