

# Who needs sleep when you can rise and run?



Yang Meiping

**Z**heng Huanan, a woman of remarkable vitality, defies conventional expectations at her current age of 81.

A familiar figure on the running track adjacent to the Huangpu River in Huangpu District, the silver-haired Zheng takes off wearing sandals, instead of athletic shoes — often to loud cheers from passers-by and young joggers.

Interestingly, Zheng had no previous experience in athletics and only took up running five years ago after the demise of her husband.

Consumed by a profound sense of grief, she refrained from venturing outside, but her son coaxed her to engage in social activities. “He told me that if I stayed at home, I’d develop dementia,” Zheng told Shanghai Daily.

She shifted her gaze to the riverfront running track near her house and

gradually became acquainted with a few runners.

“They greeted me friendly, which also lifted my spirits,” she explained.

“Some university students who run there every weekend were surprised to see me and took pictures with me.

“When I’m around young folks, I feel younger.”

Zheng claimed she did have some interest in sports.

“When I was in middle school, my PE teacher joked that he would send me to a sports school because I was so good at sports.”

But destiny had other plans, and Zheng took up a job in a bike factory, and sports took a back seat — until a few years ago.

“Like most of us, I became preoccupied with making a living.”

Zheng gets up about 4:30am every day. After some stretching exercises, she embarks on a running routine at

approximately 6am. Typically, she begins at Lupu Bridge and heads to Nanpu Bridge before returning to Lupu.

“It is about 7 kilometers and takes me about two hours. It does not seem fast, but I often stop to talk to people and take photos of flowers, ships and people I see or meet along the way.

“Sometimes, I go as far as the Wai-baidu Bridge. Then, it’s roughly three to four hours.”

A prolific social media user, Zheng posts nearly every day on her WeChat Moments.

“I did not use smartphones before, but now it’s like my daily homework. I feel like I missed something if I didn’t run and update my WeChat Moments.

“Only torrential downpours stop me. I run even in mild rain.”

Recently, she tried her hand at pickleball, a racket sport akin to playing ping-pong on a badminton court.

“There are many activities near my

house, and I want to try them all,” she said. “I tried a kind of dragon dance, and pickleball is also fun.” A TV reporter saw her playing pickleball and featured her in one of the TV programs, making her a celebrity of sorts.

Now, many people stop to chat and take photos with her. Among them is Liang Ping, 56.

“I saw an online video about her a month ago and felt encouraged by her perseverance and positive attitude toward life,” Liang told Shanghai Daily. “Since then, I started running as well, close to my place.”

Liang claimed that she suffered from hypertension, and running helped her.

Zheng said that when she felt sleepy in the afternoon, she would walk down Sinan and Fuxing roads or visit museums or galleries.

“I enjoy seeing the sights and watching people come and go. This city has lots of exhibitions. There are many ways to kill time.”

Zheng also takes joy in traveling. She has enrolled in a tourist program at a community college for seniors. In addition to the courses, they traveled to some of the places.

“After my first trip to Iceland in 2018, I joined almost every group tour they offered. I’ve also been to Nepal, Estonia and Sri Lanka, in addition to some popular destinations in China.”

Last month, they went on an excursion to Mount Lushan in Jiangxi Province.

She always carries her beloved *qipao* and high heels, even when traveling in the highlands. In Iceland, she wore a golden *qipao*, attracting the attention of people.

“I’ve got about 30 *qipao* and 30 pairs of high heels, which I have collected over the last two or three decades.

“I believe that ladies should wear high heels to match dresses to look more elegant. I can still run every day and walk in high heels at my age. So what’s the harm?”

“And I’m not alone. I’ve seen many elderly people exercising and enjoying the world outside their homes. That is all we need to do.”



Zheng (in black T-shirt) poses for a photo with other runners. — Ti Gong