

In the fitness of things: German star influencer's *baduanjin* routine goes viral

Li Qian and Chen Yian

German fitness influencer Pamela Reif recently added China's *baduanjin* (八段锦) to her workout routine, triggering an online craze.

Last week, Reif posted a video of her practicing *baduanjin*, a form of fitness qigong (气功), on Bilibili, a video site in China targeting the Gen-Z group.

The unconventional but refreshing sight of a Western face practicing a slow-moving traditional Chinese exercise has left countless netizens in awe.

Over a week, the 110-second video has received more than 780,000 views, getting more than 45,000 likes and 22,000 reposts on Bilibili. The hashtag translated as "What? Pamela is doing *baduanjin*?" also hit the trending topic charts on the Twitter-like Weibo, having attracted 160 million views so far.

Netizens left comments such as: "Finally, I can see the muscles stretching during *baduanjin* practice, because all the teachers I've seen before were all wearing big, loose robes." Or "It's like watching a foreigner make dumplings at Spring Festival."

"I'm really surprised," 28-year-old Shanghai office clerk Lisa Li told Shanghai Daily. "I've been following her for like three years, doing all those intense aerobic exercises. I never expected to see something like *baduanjin* in her workout videos. But it just piqued my interest to give it a try."

Reif is a perennial "top streaming" blogger and influencer in the fitness world. Currently, she has more than 11.2 million followers on Bilibili and 9.69 million followers



Pamela Reif is seen practicing *baduanjin* in a screenshot of a video posted on Bilibili.

on YouTube.

Baduanjin originated in China over 800 years ago during the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

Generally, it uses the human spine as the center, and through symmetrical movements of the left and right and coordination between one's front and back, achieves the goal of rehabilitating the body's *qi* (energy flow) and blood, strengthening the practitioner.

Traditional fitness exercises are quite popular among the elderly in China because they can be practiced anytime, anywhere, without specific equipment, and moreover, they are usually slow and accompanied by soothing music.

So, it's common for elderly people to dress up in loose robes and gather in parks in the morning to practice traditional Chinese fitness exercise like *baduanjin* or a more commonly known form: *tai chi* (太



International students practice *baduanjin* in Hebei Province. — IC

极), listed as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2020.

Reif's choice to shoot a *baduanjin* video cannot be a coincidence, considering that traditional Chinese fitness exercises have been gaining more and more practitioners across the world.

On YouTube, a video featuring

Chinese *baduanjin* champion Zhang Qi received more than 13 million views and 664 comments in an array of languages like English, Spanish and French.

"We love this one; we practice every day in Texas," said one called Elviawallacemartinez from the US.

Many young Chinese people are also getting into traditional Chinese fitness exercises in a "retro" turn to traditional Chinese health care.

Relevant videos have flooded video sites. A 12-minute-and-10-second instructional *baduanjin* video shot by the General Administration of Sport of China and posted on Bilibili in 2019, for instance, has gotten nearly 14 million views.

Anita Xu, a 34-year-old marketing director in Shanghai, has been practicing *baduanjin* for two years since she gave birth to her daughter.

"I've watched this video. It's good. I felt like it's kind of Chinese yoga," she told Shanghai Daily. "After practicing it, I felt my backache has been greatly relieved. I've also recommended it to several of my colleagues and they said it has helped relieve their neck and shoulder pain after long-time work on the desk."

Huang Zhenyuan, a traditional Chinese medicine specialist at the centuries-old TCM pharmacy Lei Yun Shang West, is not surprised with the popularity of *baduanjin* among young people.

"It's a great exercise for today's people as many spend long time on computers and mobile phones and they often suffer from cervical and lumbar diseases. *Baduanjin* can help a lot, and it's super easy, like one of my patients can even practice a 'standing posture' in a Metro train," he told Shanghai Daily.

In addition, it helps improve the health of internal organs and chase away some of the gloom. "Sleeplessness is a common problem in today's young people who are under great pressure, and *baduanjin* offers them a respite," he added.