

# EXERCISE:

## MADE IN CHINA

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**As an exercise scientist I am not only interested in what other cultures do for exercise, I practise what I preach and exercise each morning outdoors along Sydney's northern beaches.**

So when travelling the globe, I continue my morning exercise ritual no matter where I am and use it as an opportunity to see the world on foot.



*Exercising at sunrise. Photo via **China Mike**.*

On a recent trip to Shanghai China, I found myself awake nice and early and set off for a jog to see the sights. Mind you, it was literally freezing outside and I could have got my exercise fix far more comfortably by slipping into the hotel gym and pool (complete with a Swarovski encrusted ceiling!). But no, I wanted to see this city first hand. And it did not disappoint.

I bravely zigzagged across a very wide and busy street of cars, cyclists and other interesting modes of 'transport' and headed away from the high-rise buildings into Cheng Feng park as it was the only green space I could see on my map.

**I entered the park and was astounded to see literally hundreds (and hundreds) of Chinese exercising.**

Everywhere I looked there were people being active.



There were dancers of all types, fan twirlers, calisthenics, kite fliers, bike riders, tree slappers, bum bashers, front and back clappers, leaf sweepers (very popular to BYO broom!), tai chi enthusiasts, backward walkers and my favourite: the backward-lunge-walking-ball-twirlers (sorry, impossible to describe in words, it requires a physical demonstration!).

There was even a large group of people using what I thought was outdoor circuit equipment but on closer inspection, realised it was actually children's playground equipment – they were bending, lifting, pushing, pulling and moving every muscle. Oh they laughed and had fun. In fact, everyone seemed so happy. There were smiles, laughter, animated chatting, music and singing.

I was elated and enthused. With this sort of exercise en-masse, surely there won't be an obesity crisis in China too?

### **Hey, maybe I could bottle this elixir, bring it home and make my fortune?**

So I continued to jog laps to investigate further while ignoring the attention that a 6-foot-tall, green-eyed, Western woman attracts. (My limited Mandarin indicating comments such as "Why are foreigners so tall?" and overhearing other words to that effect).

I realised that while there was a good mix of both males and females, they had one thing in common: they were all over 60 years old!

And in some cases much older and barely managing a shuffle (Cliff Young style not as in the LMFAO song). These people were old yet they were active, outdoors, happy, glowing, having fun, slim, agile and looking healthy.

### **Not one overweight person among them. Clearly this exercise stuff works!**

But where was the rest of the population? Well, I found them later in the day when I ventured back to this park at different times to see how the face of it changed. Although I never saw another Westerner there, it attracted thousands of Chinese under the age of 60 throughout the day, particularly one-child families, and this is where I saw a more sedentary, unhealthy, overweight side to China – in the younger generation.

How sad that they are obviously more influenced by Western cultures, food and (sedentary) entertainment than by their older generation who clearly have a healthier balance.

**Exercise doesn't need to be fancy, it just needs to be done! And it doesn't have to be painful or a form of punishment, it can actually be FUN!**

So I returned each morning to soak up the wonderful, positive atmosphere in that park and as their curious staring was replaced with a smile, I too smiled back as I continued jogging... In a forward direction!

But I am determined to try at least one lap of backwards walking while clapping next time – as they say: “When in Rome”... Oh, that reminds me of the sights I saw when I jogged the streets surrounding The Vatican...