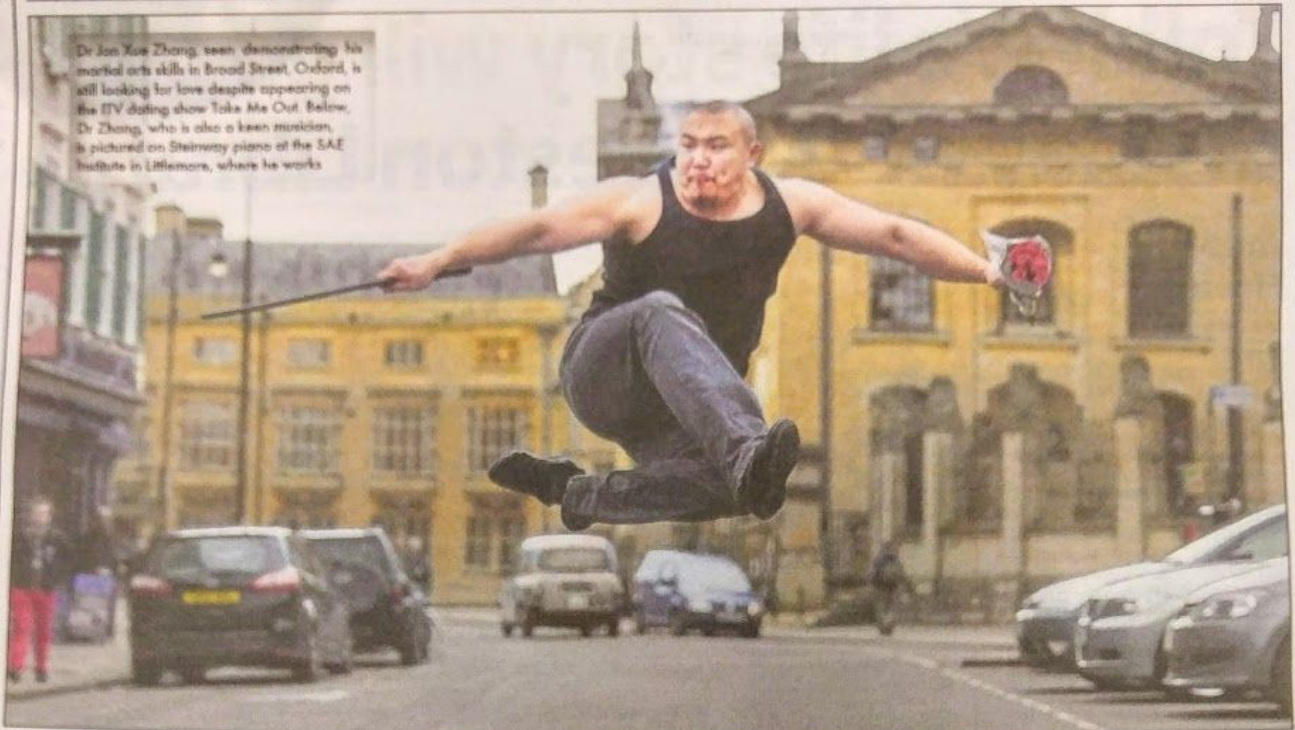


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Dr Jon Xue Zhang, seen demonstrating his martial arts skills in Broad Street, Oxford, is still looking for love despite appearing on the ITV dating show *Take Me Out*. Below, Dr Zhang, who is also a keen musician, is pictured on Steinway piano at the SAE Institute in Littlemore, where he works



A man of so many passions

ERIN LYONS discovers the varied pursuits of an Oxford resident who loves to fill his days

A martial artist, a musician and a scientist. It might sound like the set up for a joke about three people walking into a bar, but Cowley's Dr Jon Xue Zhang is serious about his seemingly unrelated passions.

"I've been training in martial arts since I was five years old and teaching for more than a decade but I also love music," he says. "I can play the violin and piano and am working on my own piano album. I love creating music and composing.

"I don't see it as one or the other, and as for science, I've always been fascinated by the mind so studied to get a PhD to better help me work as a junior researcher on a project about sub quantum physics."

Born in Telford but an Oxford resident for the past 11 years, Dr Zhang has also been using his martial arts skills to build a career as an actor and fight choreographer, appearing in Hollywood blockbuster *Doctor Strange* and US drama *24*.

He is confused when asked how he fits it all in on top of a full-time job as an academic support worker at the Littlemore base of the SAE Institute, which provides creative media courses across the UK.

He says: "I like to fill my days. I don't want to ever be wasting time."

This is something of an understatement, with the 29-year-old revealing he gets up each day at 3.30am to do martial arts training and meditation before most have topped hitting the snooze button. "If I get up at that time it means I can fit so much in before work, from the nine to five, and then I can



do things in the evening as well," he explains. This drive seems to be inherited from parents Jack and Jennifer Zhang, who emigrated to the UK from Taiwan and ran a successful computer business when he was growing up.

He says: "They worked really hard and gave me a good upbringing. I want to make sure I'm not part of a cycle where the next generation is less hard working than the one that came before.

"As for them, they just want me to be happy and I think they like that I'm involved in many different things, though they probably want me to settle down and find a girlfriend."

It cannot be said that Dr Zhang's singleton status is for lack of trying as last year he appeared on hit ITV dating show *Take Me Out* to

look for love in front of millions of viewers.

However, despite impressing the ladies with his nunchuck skills, and going on a date with fashion shop owner Trudy Nelson, the pair decided they would be better as friends. Right now he says he is more focused on pursuing his interest in stunt acting as it lets him get as close as possible to his childhood dream of being a superhero.

And recently he has used as the model and inspiration for the main character in *War Dogs*, a graphic novel by US writer and illustrator Pete Hernandez III - an experience that Dr Zhang describes as humbling and "a dream come true".

While he has pursued music and martial arts his entire life, his

academic interest in science came later, with Dr Zhang attending Oxford Brookes University to study a business and information systems degree, followed by a masters in marketing. After this, he studied for a doctorate in metaphysics at the university and developed a love of cognitive science.

He says: "I had an interest and so I decided to pursue it, it was as simple as that really. When I was younger I didn't make the best use of my time, especially academically, and so now if there is something I'm interested in I just go for it."

This passion of the science of the mind combined with his love of martial arts earlier this year when he was part of a virtual reality workshop at the SAE Institute that explored whether it was possible for someone to learn to fight through a virtual headset. He is hoping to continue to see how his interests overlap in the future but is not committed to following a set plan, saying: "Where I was a year ago, and where I thought I would be, are completely different to where I am now and that's okay with me."

"Following the things that interest me has led to some really exciting opportunities and I'm eager for that to continue."

But for all his hectic pursuits, Dr Zhang said the one thing he would not be able to live without is meditation, saying: "When you are most busy and feel like you have the least time, that is when you need meditation the most."

"I don't have to be sitting still. I find playing the piano or going through my martial arts is a kind of meditation in motion because it's a way to switch off and refocus myself."

Your views

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