

Stretch My Legs, Doc!

Kong Jing-wen has paid £5,700 to have both of her legs broken and stretched on a rack. The pretty college graduate is now lying in a hospital bed, after the doctors sawed through the flesh and bone of both legs in eight places. Each leg now has eight steel rods sticking out of it below the knee and these are connected to a steel cage surrounding each leg. Once the broken bones start to heal the doctors will begin to turn the screws on the cage pushing the steel rods apart and so stretching the leg. It is a slow and painful process that will take 18 months to add 8 cm to Sweetie's height.

Despite the agony, the cost and the inconvenience, the 23-year-old says she does not regret a thing. "It hurts, but it will be worth it to be taller. I'll have more opportunities in life and a better chance of finding a good job and husband." Her parents, who financed the operation agree. "It's an investment in our daughter's future. Because she was short, she used to lack confidence, but this should change that."

Kong Jing-wen is one of a growing number of perfectly healthy Chinese young men and women who are willing to have their legs broken in order to rise up the ladder in height-conscious China.

In part, the popularity of such surgery can be explained by the surge of interest in fashion and beauty in a country where things like fashion magazines and beauty contests used to be banned. Shops and magazines in the cities show endless images of long-legged western models, inevitably putting pressure on young women.

There are also domestic pressures. Height is listed among the criteria required on job advertisements. In some places, people under 5ft 3in are not even eligible to take a driving test.

Vocabulary

surge - a sudden large increase in something that has previously been steady
inevitably - as you would expect

You can see the whole lesson from your teacher, please ask them to send it to you before the class.

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