

# Meet Henry Cheng of Tai Chi Wellness Center

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So, before we jump into specific questions about the business, why don't you give us some details about you and your story.

I was born in Hong Kong. I was very fortunate that I began my studies with Master Pak Yu Kong in Hong Kong, 1968. Traditionally, Tai Chi is handed down from master to student. The master only teaches the basics to regular students. He may perhaps find only one or two students in his whole life time who deserve to learn all that the master can teach and receive the honor of being the next generation's master. It is an honor that can only be passed directly from one master to another. In 1982, Master Kong, passed the title of, "Wu Style Tai Chi Fifth Generation Master," to me. In accepting that honor, I have committed my life to teaching Tai Chi to improve people's health and well-being. I teach real Tai Chi, and adhere to the principles of the Tao. In this, I require my students to be humble, polite, affable and approachable – the same principles I require of myself.

I came to the United States in 1980. I was a blue-collar worker at the electric company, Sanyo. The company had given me a job that required me to lift 1000 refrigerators a day onto a conveyor belt in preparation for shipment. Needless to say, it was very exhausting. After working at Sanyo during the day, I would work as a waiter at a Chinese restaurant at night. In my spare time, I taught Tai Chi out of my garage and backyard. At the time, I worked like a machine, a human machine.

As it became known in the community that I taught Tai Chi, some of the local community centers asked me to teach at their centers. I started to become very successful and soon was working for various fitness centers. Through word of mouth, people were learning about me and my classes, as one person would refer me to another, one job would be followed by the next.

After years of freelancing, I was finally able to open my own business. I chose the name, "Tai Chi Wellness Center" as I wanted to people to know this is the place for wellness. The center now offers classes including beginning to advanced Tai Chi, self-defense, weapons (sword, saber and spear) and qigong, as well as Chinese brush painting and calligraphy. The center is also an art gallery with Chinese calligraphy and artwork filling the walls.

Soon the local and international media started interviewing me. My story and articles were published in newspapers, magazines and aired on TC. As a result of the attention, I was given the opportunity to work with the city, the YMCA of San Diego County and the National Arthritis Foundation to develop special curriculum and produce a video, "Tai Chi for Arthritis" which airs on PBS and other TV stations. Doctors nationwide and the Parkinson's Disease Association of San Diego have also invited me to make a video, "Tai Chi for Parkinson's Disease". Further, San Diego State University gave me the opportunity to work with them on a research project to determine how Tai Chi affects bone density. I was also asked to teach Tai Chi to doctors and nurses at the Scripps Memorial Hospital Rehabilitation Center and to write a training manual, "Training Strategies for Rehabilitation Health Professionals". With all this attention, my name

continued to spread more and more. Now I am not just working as a master at the Tai Chi Wellness Center. I am invited by many organizations, universities, colleges, hospitals and clinics to teach, give lectures and workshops for Tai Chi, self-defense, wellness, Chinese brush work and Taoism. These organizations include the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Research Center, San Diego County Parks and Recreation Center, Chinese Historical Museum, YMCA of San Diego County, The Arthritis Foundation, Parkinson's Disease Association of San Diego, Marriott Hotels, Center for Health and Wellbeing, Johnson & Johnson, Nokia, Intuit, Girl Scouts of San Diego – Imperial Council, Sea World San Diego, San Diego Zoo, SK Sanctuary, White Sands La Jolla, Whole Foods Market, Senior Olympics, UPAC and many more.



**HENRY** Meet Henry Cheng of Tai Chi Wellness Center in Clairemont



We're always bombarded by how great it is to pursue your passion, etc – but we've spoken with enough people to know that it's not always easy. Overall, would you say things have been easy for you?

At the beginning, it was very difficult. In 1980, people knew about aerobic exercises, but not many were familiar with Tai Chi. Most people did not understand how a form of moving meditation that is relaxing could be an exercise. I would knock on ten doors and nine would be slammed shut. Still, I did not give up. If one person opened the door, it was a good day for me. All I needed was that one person to lead me to ten and from that ten to the next hundred referrals. I know my work well and I worked hard to make it successful. I carried a briefcase like a salesman and went to different Tai Chi schools to check on what their knowledge was. From this, I could compare and ensure that I made my teaching the correct way, the real way.

So let's switch gears a bit and go into the Tai Chi Wellness Center story. Tell us more about the business.

I teach Tai Chi as described in the Tao (and the Tai Chi Classics) These are ancient writings that are the authorities on the authentic Tai Chi principles and methods. There are three kinds of Tai Chi: Tai Chi Competition, Tai Chi Exercise and the real Tai Chi. Of these, I only teach real Tai Chi. With real Tai Chi, one pays great attention to detail and teaches people how to do the internal work for their benefit. My center differs in many ways from other schools. Most schools do not have a real Master teaching the classes. At my center, there is only one master teaching and I teach all of the students personally. I teach without discrimination. Each student is taught the same. Also, many schools give tests and belts every few month and has become centered around a for-profit business. The Tai Chi Wellness Center does not do this – we revolve around wellness. There are no belts or tests. The equivalent to a belt at the center is the knowledge the student has within. Students know how much they know and how much others know by how well they perform. Students advance by authentically grasping the teaching. I am most proud that I do not just work at the Center, but I am also invited and involved with many different organizations to give lectures, classes, demonstrations and workshops. I have been invited to produce Tai Chi videos, have a television program which airs weekly and have been interviewed and published nationally and internationally. Besides martial arts, I also teach calligraphy and Chinese brush painting. The Center's studio space also serves as an art gallery to these works. This makes the Center different from most in that it does not have an atmosphere of competition or aggression. It is a peaceful place where people can arrive stressed and leave feeling, relaxed, light and happy. The artwork is a tool for healing itself. What sets the Center apart most is that the majority of schools teach the external arts and differ from the Tao teachings. For example, Tai Chi does not use force, we use flow. The philosophy is clear, but many schools, when teaching, use excessive force instead of the flow. I teach internal arts and the principles of Taoism. I teach my students in the way that matches the Tao philosophy. I teach everyone equally and ensure that the students grasp not just the form, but also the teaching and principles behind the form.

There are also many benefits from the real Tai Chi:

It reduces

1. Risk of falling in older adults
2. Stress, anxiety and depression
3. Blood pressure
4. Joint pain

The real Tai Chi also improves

1. Energy and stamina
2. Mood and overall well-being
3. Aerobic capacity
4. Flexibility, balance and agility
5. Muscle strength and definition
6. Sleep quality
7. Immune system function
8. Congestive heart failure symptoms
9. Self defense

Has luck played a meaningful role in your life and business?

I was very lucky to have met Master Kong, who has basically changed my whole life's path. Although I worked very hard to get the Tai Chi Wellness Center started, I believe I was very fortunate to have such a supportive family and wonderful students. I do not believe I would be where I am without their help.

