

National Wushu Training Center

If you've seen the movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," you've witnessed the beautiful acrobatic maneuvers, stunning aerials and jumping kicks that characterize traditional Chinese Wushu training. But in its truest form, Wushu improves physical ability, health, and willpower; it gives an individual an excellent method of exercise, a personal art form, a competitive sport and a basis for self-defense.

Unlike many other forms of martial arts, Wushu "focuses more on performance and competition for the individual rather than advocating violence and self-defense," according to Debbie Chen, owner and head coach of the Huntington Beach-based National Wushu Training Center.

"In the 1950s, China brought together all of their martial arts masters and asked them to create a new form," she says. "What emerged was a composed long fist – very acrobatic movement, which may not be very practical on the streets, but is fantastic to watch. In practice, it's really a personal journey that you go on, very rich and very deep in culture and involves all aspects of being - physically, spiritually, mentally and intellectually."

In operation in HB since 1986, the National Wushu Training Center recently moved to its current location and offers individual and group classes to students of all ages from very young children to the elderly.

"Wushu allows you to use the benefit of the part of the life you are in," says Chen. "As a child, you are flexible and fast. As an adult, you have more strength. The goal is to keep your mind fresh and your body active. Long fist forms, such as tai chi, are becoming increasingly popular in the US. Like yoga, this ancient Chinese art helps increase circulation, respiratory system and aids in rehabilitation after injury. Everything can be modified for your personal level of physical fitness."

One local client, Liang Hoat Tjio says that "for me, Wushu exercises are the best way to maintain my body for a healthy life and spirit while developing self-confidence by knowing that I am able to defend myself if need be."

A (recent) historical perspective

The 16-level curriculum, which has been adopted worldwide as the international compulsory curriculum, was developed by Chen's husband Eric, a former med student and track and field athlete.

"Eric developed the curriculum based on the scientific method of track and field and applied them to the methods and movements of China," she says. "The resulting program was so successful that it became recognized by China as the curriculum to follow for foreigners."

In our community, Chen specializes in training children and over the years, discovered an added benefit to the discipline.

"I noticed that many of the students who initially had an attention span of less than 20 minutes or were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), gradually began to respond to the way that this curriculum teaches them and their attention gradually became focused for up 45 minutes or longer."

Because martial arts at its core emphasizes respect, children learn to be respectful to their peer, adults and the art itself.

"Wushu has been a tremendous experience for our family," says Fountain Valley resident Jennifer Quang, whose 9-year-old

son Andrew has been practicing at the center for the past three years. "Because Andrew was shy, it took me about six months to convince him to join. But since that time, we've found that he concentrates better, he's very respectful, it's good exercise for him and he just loves it."

Chen calls the school "one enormous family" with students spanning generations.

"It's a village of its own, with students from Africa, Mexico, China and of course, Southern California and people here celebrate the diversity," she says. "We have people who were our students 20 years ago who now bring their children to the school. One of the main reasons we chose to stay in Huntington Beach is because of this family element and sense of community."

Several years ago Chen further extended the school's "family" of students when she started the Wushu International Foundation to "teach the art to kids across the border" with quarterly mission trips to Mexico designed to "foster international Wushu competition, facilitate cultural exchange and disseminate business strategies to promote wushu worldwide."

According to the WIF web site, the vision of the foundation is to "promote the ethical ideals that the sport of Wushu embodies, as well as developing the physical aspect of the sport itself. A tradition of respect, diligence, discipline, friendship, honesty, and trust form the basis of the wushu culture. By its sponsorship activities and publicity efforts, the Foundation hopes to promote this code of ethics among all athletes within the wushu community; thereby cultivating an atmosphere of understanding, harmony, and appreciation that crosses national and cultural boundaries." **HB**



National Wushu Training Center

5910 Edinger Ave.
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Hours:
Mon. – Fri. 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
Sat. 11 – 5
Closed on Sunday