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# The winning secret of USA Tai Chi Academy

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*Violet Li*

**The USA Tai Chi Academy** (formerly Jason Tai Chi Academy) is probably one of the largest Tai Chi groups in the North American. Last year they attended the Legends of Kung Fu & Taiji Legacy World **Martial Arts** Championship and won 98 medals. Recently they sent a delegation of 34 contestants to the same tournament held in Plano, Texas and won 134 medals and two Grand Champions. They were by far the largest Tai Chi school at the Tournament as well as the group winning most of the medals. Many heads were turning, wondering what their winning secret is.



*Violet Li*

Jason Leung is a Tai Chi master, who won numerous competitions in China and the U.S. In 2003, he started to teach Tai Chi at his church for free. Throughout the years, the number of students grew. To reach out to larger demographics, Master Leung approached the Houston City government and gained their support in 2009. Now the USA Tai Chi Academy has permission to utilize three community centers free of charge. Their membership has grown over 200 people with diverse demographic backgrounds. Master Leung is creative in promoting Tai Chi. Besides utilizing community centers, the Academy also offers Tai Chi classes in shopping malls before the stores open, which also brings consumer traffic to the mall and is appreciated by the stores.

Shifu Jason Leung teaches traditional Yang style, as well as the Chinese National competition forms of Chen, Wu, Wu/Hao, Sun and Yang style. The Academy also recruited three other instructors teaching on a volunteering base. It also appoints 12 senior students as teaching assistants. Different Taichi styles are taught in the classes, including Taichi bare hand forms, Taichi swords, sabers, staffs, short staffs, fans...etc. Members can take as many classes as they prefer at any location.

Originally, Master Leung kept all classes free. At the advice of others, the Academy now is accepting donations, and the suggested donation is \$30 per year. The income from the donations affords the Academy to invite two masters or grandmasters each year from out-of-town to teach or to host various events. In 2010, Shifu Jason co-organized World Taichi Day, which promotes Taichi as a form of exercise. He was acknowledged by Mayor Annise D. Parker of Houston with a certificate of proclamation. This year, the Chinese government selected the Academy as a recipient for a free week-long Qigong Workshop taught by Qigong Grandmaster Leu Shi Rong from Beijing, China.

As a successful entrepreneur at the electronics sales business, Master Leung understands that people tend to overlook the value of free classes. To make sure the students take Tai Chi serious, the Academy requires all students wear the same school T-shirt (\$9) for classes. According to Jason, there are executives in the classes. But no one cares about the socioeconomic status of the attendees, and everyone is treated equal.

Since he is sharing the benefits of Tai Chi with others, Master Leung thinks it is important that he is open with his students. He teaches them without holding anything back, and he also provides honest feedback when correcting students' posture without any reservation.

To prepare students for tournaments, the Academy ran a two-month-long mock tournament. Students could try out everyday. This helped them in building up confidence level and getting used to being judged. This strategy definitely worked. This year, each competitor won four medals on average.

Gigi Ip is a junior at Houston Baptist University studying sociology. About three and half years ago, she accompanied her mom to the Academy and started practicing Tai Chi herself. During the school year, she would take five lessons per week and practice for 30 minutes daily outside of the Tai Chi classes. She won eight gold medals, one silver medal and a Grand Champion for the Beginner Internal Form at the recent tournament. Gigi said that Tai Chi makes her healthier and less shy. She seldom talked to people prior to learning Tai Chi and now she can freely converse with others, and she is one of the teaching assistants at the Academy. Queena Tong has been a long-time practitioner at the Academy and she won the Intermediate Internal Form Grand Champion.

Seeing his students winning so many medals put a big smile on 62-year-old Master Leung's face. But what makes him feel more rewarding is learning his students are no longer suffering from the lower back pain or are becoming healthier and happier. To him, Tai Chi is a treasure, and he wants to share it with everyone. He considers Tai Chi much bigger than him. With that, he recently changes his school name from the Jason Tai Chi Academy to the USA Tai Chi Academy.

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