



**Name in English:** John Tu  
**Name in Chinese:** 杜紀川 [杜紀川]  
**Name in Pinyin:** Dù Jǐchuān  
**Gender:** Male  
**Birth Year:** 1941  
**Birth Place:** Chongqing, China  
**Current location:** Fountain Valley, California  
**Philanthropy:** Yes

## **Business Leader, Entrepreneur, Philanthropist**

**Profession(s):** Entrepreneur, CEO

### **Education:**

Diploma, Electrical Engineering, 1967, Darmstadt University of Technology, Germany

### **Awards:**

2007, Honorary Doctorate of Engineering, University of New Haven, Connecticut; 2007, Inaugural Distinguished Alumni Goldhirsh Award for Leadership, Guidance and Embodiment of the American Entrepreneurial Spirit, Inc. Magazine; 2006, Business People of the Year, Orange County Business Journal; 2000, Thomas Carvel Immigrant Entrepreneur Award, National Immigration Forum; 1998, Human Relations Award, American Jewish Committee; 1998, 100 Top Executives in the Company Industry, Smart Computing Magazine; 1997, Entrepreneur of the Year, Asian Business Association; 1996, American Dream Award, Asian Business League

### **Contributions:**

John Tu is a first generation immigrant and co-founder of Kingston Technology, the largest private computer memory firm in the world. In addition to the respect he has earned within his field and in the business world, John Tu has also shown a commitment to the betterment of society through his charitable giving.

He was born in 1941 in Chongqing, China amidst the worst days of the Sino-Chinese War to refugee parents. Following the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, John's family moved back home to Shanghai. The stay was only temporary however, as the Chinese Civil War engulfed China. John's father worked for the Nationalist Government as a minister of cultural affairs. In 1949, as the Nationalists fled after their defeat, the Tu family became refugees again.

Adapting to the new life in Taiwan was difficult for John Tu. John was characterized to be rebellious and seen as a problematic student in the eyes of his teachers, and as his teachers turned their backs on him, he too did the same to his studies. By high school, John would regularly cut class and eventually ended up not going to school altogether. His concerned parents suddenly made aware of the situation from his failing grades confronted him and John responded by releasing his years of anger against the educational system. To his surprise, his parents were very understanding and even accepted his perspective. His parent's understanding proved to be a pivotal point in Tu's life.

John regained his interest in education but his prior poor performance made it impossible for him to enter any good colleges in Taiwan. With no other options remaining, he decided to try his luck in foreign lands, and moved to Bremen, Germany to work in a Chinese restaurant owned by his uncle.

He learned, however, that his uncle, while having lived in Germany for many years, was still unfamiliar with both the language and the culture of the land. He couldn't provide any help to his nephew. Unwilling to accept such circumstances, and after two weeks of fruitless effort with his uncle, he boldly stepped out of the restaurant into unfamiliar grounds.

He made his way to a Catholic church and in broken English expressed his problems to a priest. The priest was able to refer John to a church affiliated school to learn German. This small first step gave him some familiarity with the German language and culture but the next step would be even more difficult. He would have to obtain an apprenticeship before enrolling in college. The church helped John land an apprenticeship at a shipyard, but John was mocked by his German co-workers with racist comments for the next two years. His living circumstances during this time weren't much better. The weather was harsh and he lived in a small loft that had no bathroom and shower.

Upon earning his certification, John entered the University of Darmstadt, and while he got by, he was still unable to find an interest in academics. The summer before graduation, Tu visited his sister in America for the first time and immediately fell in love with the land. Unlike Germany, the United States had significantly lower barriers for him as a newcomer, and he found a temporary job as a cook. He learned English through communicating with his co-workers who welcomed him and put him at ease.

John returned to Germany at the end of summer to finish his degree. After graduation he found a job at Motorola in Wiesbaden, Germany but he still didn't identify with the country. In 1969, John finally decided to realize his American dream and moved to Scottsdale, Arizona. Yet things only grew worse. There was no secure job or financial stability and his first marriage ended in failure. With little left to lose John decided to explore a new career in business, and opened a gift shop stocked with goods from Taiwan. Despite selling all his merchandise, he was barely even for the year. Upon examining his budget, he realized that rent was the biggest cost, and decided to become a landlord in 1971. It was the right time and the right place to make such a decision. By the late 1970s, the Arizona real estate boom had made John a millionaire. Sensing the market had run its course, John closed down his business and left Arizona for Southern California.

In Los Angeles, he met his now lifetime business partner, David Sun, an engineer working on add-on products for Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC). The two men decided to start a business selling add-on memory products designed by Sun under the company name Camintonn in 1982. It was a home garage-based business that had no office. Despite hype about the future of computers, Camintonn was initially unsuccessful in finding an interested buyer for its products. Nine months later, however, things began to change. DEC itself bought a prototype design for \$250,000 from Camintonn.

Camintonn flourished after the deal, and by 1984, it was selling \$800,000 worth of products each month. In 1986, John Tu and David Sun sold Camintonn to AST for \$6 million. A year later, Tu and Sun founded Kingston, now the largest private memory firm in the world. Despite his success and position as the company's CEO, John, a humble man, continues to work out of the same office as his fellow employees rather than having a private office, to keep close to their issues and concerns. It was only after being told that he was actually making things worse that he stopped helping out with the supply and packaging lines. Apart from spending time at Kingston and with his family, his second wife and two children, John is also an amateur drummer and band leader of JT and The California Dreamin'.

### **Philanthropy:**

John Tu is the main benefactor of Erin Gruwell's *Freedom Writers Foundation*. The foundation aims to promote the completion of high school and pursuit of higher education for underprivileged students that face social hardships. Through outreach, curriculum, and scholarships, the foundation hopes to replicate the model of success that Erin Gruwell experienced in her classroom to the rest of the country.

Gruwell's unorthodox teaching methods allowed students to express themselves and their feelings through writing after reading such books as "The Diary of Anne Frank." By getting them to participate she successfully helped students that were deemed 'not-intelligent enough', 'destined to drop-out', or 'un-teachable' to complete their education and even seek higher education.

To motivate her students in the beginning, Gruwell promised to reward those who successfully fulfilled their assignments with a computer. Money, of course was an issue, and it was then that John Tu, Gruwell's husband's boss, generously donated \$300,000 to the cause to purchase books, supplies, and computers. John also frequently visited the students and sometimes took them out to dinner to hear their stories. He played an indispensable role in both the transformation of Gruwell's first students and the extension of this effort to a national scale through continuing donations to the foundation that Gruwell founded.

John Tu, David Sun, and their company, Kingston, have also established a scholarship program in the Huntington Beach High School District for college-bound students that require financial assistance.

In John Tu, we see a humble man that has remained resolute in the face of numerous obstacles and achieved great success, while still remembering to care for others.

### **External Links:**

[http://myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=john\\_tu\\_07](http://myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=john_tu_07)

<http://www.goldsea.com/RTR/Tujohn/tujohn.html>

<http://www.kingston.com/company/awards.asp>

<http://www.kingston.com/asia/press/2007/corporate/01b.asp>

<http://www.cw.com.tw/article/index.jsp?id=32933>