



Experiencing Aikido in Vietnam

by Kerry Spence - 27/01/2008

After finishing four years of studying Chinese medicine and years more of generally thrashing myself with training I graduated from school and decided to take advantage of the situation and do some travelling.

This was the first time other than a brief trip to Australia that I had ventured outside of New Zealand. As I knew that I may not get another chance for a while once I start practicing Acupuncture/Chinese Medicine and wanting to make a clear break between Student Practitioner and Practitioner Becky and I decided that two months would be a good amount of time for us to see/meet her family and do a bit of travel around Vietnam, Thailand and China.

As two months is a long time for an addict, I decided that I would take my Gi with me and do some training in Ho Chi Minh City (a.k.a. Saigon). There are a few places to train and I checked out a couple that are affiliated to Aikikai through Shihan Thong Phong Dang in the United States.

There is a history of Aikido in Vietnam that stretches back to 1958 when Shihan Dang Thong Tri brought Aikido from France to introduce it to Vietnam. In 1967, O-Sensei Morihei Ueshiba and Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba issued credentials to Shihan Phong, officially sanctioning him to spread Aikido all over the Vietnamese territory in the Spirit of Love and Peace.



Kerry applying Koshinage to uke

In 1986, Shihan Phong moved to the United States and established himself there. In 1997, at the ceremony celebrating the 29th anniversary of the founding of International Tenshinkai Aikido Federation on February 20, 1997, in Westminster, California, Shihan Masatake Fujita, on behalf of Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba, presented Shihan Dang Thong Phong with the certificate of 6th degree Aikikai Black Belt.

With this history in mind I went along to Tenshinkai Dojo that was located next to a huge Pagoda in the centre of Saigon. There was an instructor there who was a student of Shihan Thong Phong Dang who welcomed me, through my trusty interpreter Becky, and I Gi'ed up to train.

Saigon is a tropical area and so training is conducted in above 25 degree heat. The lessons are 2 hours long and so anyone who knows or has trained with me in summer will know that I sweated so much that my Gi pants and top were soaked, hmmm nice for ukeJ.

For the first few lessons they did their thing and showed me numerous ways (8) of doing Koshinage. This was fun and I got a good chance to brush up on my Koshinage skills, didn't quite get all 8 but a few new ones are works in progress.



AIKIDO SHINRYUKAN

OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AIKIKAI WORLD HEADQUARTERS, TOKYO JAPAN

Their ukemi practice involves progressive increases in height from the ground, to a small punch bag, to people kneeling, to people bent over standing, to people standing with their necks bent to two people standing with a gap between them... I bailed out about half way through after the people kneeling. They love doing ukemi and flying through the air it was great to watch and they benefit through a slightly softer mat than at Hombu.

Due to the end of year festivities and celebrations the instructor was not around much and the yudansha take class in his absence. This gives the students a chance to play with aikido and if they have any problems they can go to the yudansha for help. I was for most of the time the highest ranked Aikidoka there and they were interested in a different approach than what they usually do so they asked me to show them how we do a few of the basic techniques, mostly they would give any student that spoke the best English to me and asked me to teach them.



Just warming up.

I think that the basic difference that most people will identify in the approach to aikido is a more dynamic style or a more static style; I think Hombu Dojo in Auckland has more of the former where the Dojos in Saigon have more of the latter. I think that apart from your preference of dynamic versus static, which is personal, the really important thing in aikido is to have an open mind and to have a good, positive spirit to your training.

This I think is what I liked about the people I have trained with in Saigon, they have an open mind and quickly pick up new ideas and ways of moving that they can see make sense and have a use. Anyone who has trained with Chau and Kelly at Hombu will know what I mean.

Anyway overall after being here for a month and a half and training around 3 times per week in Saigon I look forward to being back at Hombu, it has been a long break from Hombu for me (3 months).

I have had fun training in Saigon and bought a new summer Hakama (\$14.50 handmade to order and embroidered!).

I think that training here has made me appreciate the instructors, the structure, what we have as a group at Hombu Dojo and the level that we train.



Can't wait to visit Aikido Shinryukan New Zealand

Aikido Shinryukan New Zealand

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