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Translated into English by Di Au

## Aikido in Viet Nam and England

**Last October 27, 2007, Sensei (Master) Dang Thong Phong, one of the first persons to propagate Aikido in Viet Nam almost half a century ago, traveled to England to attend a Memorial honoring his Japanese teacher.**

Master Masahilo Nakazono (1918-1994) once came to South Viet Nam at the beginning of the 1960's to teach Aikido. He was also noted as someone who had helped the British expand this martial art.

From Japan, Aikido came to France and then to England within the context of the Cold War, promoting in Europe a martial spirit that was also peace-loving.

In Viet Nam, Aikido had arrived in the South prior to 1975, but nowadays its presence spreads over the whole country.

Before the seminar honoring Mr. Nakazono at Neath, Wales, in western England, with approximately 200 attendees, Master Dang Thong Phong had an interview with BBC on the history of Viet Nam Aikido.

He explained to Nguyen Giang that it was the Founder of Japanese Aikido himself, O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969), who had given to the Viet Nam branch of Aikido the name of Tenshinkai, which means the Heart of Heaven.

That happened in the years 1967-1968, when Mr. Dang Thong Phong went to Japan to train at the Japanese Aikido Headquarters, where he was (subsequently) promoted to third degree black belt.

He indicated that, as the first Vietnamese national to come to Japan to train in Aikido, he enjoyed O'Sensei Ueshiba and Doshu Kisshomaru's, his son, special attention.

"I had brought O'Sensei a gift, which was a group-picture of the Vietnamese (Aikido) students. He took it, raised it over his head and turned it back and forth to introduce it to everyone, and he spoke for a long time."

'Afterwards, someone translated to me from the Japanese language that O'Sensei was very proud that even in a war-torn country such as Viet Nam, there were many people who practiced Aikido".



*Master Jiro Nakazono, son of Sensei Masahilo Nakazono, and Master Dang Thong Phong at the memorial in Wales on 27.10.2007*

Still according to master Dang Thong Phong (born in 1935), Aikido was strong in Viet Nam before 1975, when it was taught in schools as well as at the military academy, and to the police forces.



*Mr. Loc Bui, a student of Master Dang Thong Phong who had come from California, and Master Gwynn Jones, one of the Aikido pioneers in Wales*

In 1986, master Dang Thong Phong resettled in the United States where, after having overcome many difficulties, he was able to open a Tenshinkai school (dojo) in Orange County, California, in 1988.

His school has drawn many students who are adolescents, and even children, of both Vietnamese and American descent.

The International Tenshinkai Aikido Federation has been recognized by Japan as an official entity with its activities taking place in the U.S.

Meanwhile, according to master Phong, in Viet Nam this same martial art has not yet reached a unified state. Despite the fact he has returned to Viet Nam a

number of times to teach at the local Aikido schools and to encourage them to join a federation so to enjoy international recognition, the results are still meager, he said.

According to master Dang Thong Phong, each year two Japanese masters are sent to Viet Nam to offer (additional) training, however, as an entity, a federation still does not exist there.

Master Dang Thong Tri once introduced Aikido into Vietnam from France, and next year marks the 50th anniversary of that event. Master Phong hopes, by then, this martial art will have a unified organization and become a part of the world's Aikido family.

After 1975, Aikido and other martial arts were denied permission to hold any activity in the South, and it took until 1979 when classes in non-competitive arts were allowed to resume. Since the beginning of the Innovation period, all forms of martial arts, including Japanese, Korean and Chinese, have enjoyed greater expansion than before.

Aikido is said to have a positive effect as an educational tool for children as they train their body and forge their will in a spirit of love and peace, while maintaining their respect for the values of nature and humanity.

Currently in England there are approximately 60,000 Aikido practitioners, while the number in Viet Nam could reach 10,000.

*Source:*

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/culturesport/story/2007/10/071024\\_aikidosenseidthphong.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/culturesport/story/2007/10/071024_aikidosenseidthphong.shtml)