

Shin-Gi-I-Tai

Mind – Technique – Body Training ... of Master Kiyoshi Yamazaki

Report by
IAN S. MacLAREN

Regular readers of *F.A.I.* will be well aware of my interest in *Kobudo* – the study of traditional weaponry, and some may recall that in 1990, I reported on a trip I made to Nottingham to train and study *Bo-Jutsu* (the art of the fighting staff) with **Master Kiyoshi Yamazaki**, 7th Dan, Chief Instructor of the Japan Karate Do Ryobu-Kai.

I was very impressed with Yamazaki Sensei and his teaching – he has a smooth, sharp style and an amazing knowledge of Karate and Kobudo. I had found him to be friendly and approachable, and so I was very pleased when **Terry O'Neill**, telephoned me to ask: "How would you like to host Yamazaki Sensei at your Dojo in three weeks time? – when I spoke to him last week he said he would like to meet you again." Needless to say, I was delighted, and asked Terry to put me in touch with him. I faxed him at his dojo in Anaheim, California and over a week and six faxes later, I had arranged for him to visit York on Saturday 9th October 1993. In the two weeks before he arrived, I resolved to spend my time researching the teachers and karate background of this interesting Master of Karate and Kobudo.

Kiyoshi Yamazaki was born in Chiba Prefecture, Japan in Showa 15 (1940). His father was a *Yudansha* (Black Belt Holder) in Kendo and he taught his young son this art from an early age. He moved to Tokyo to enrol at High School, and here he developed an interest in Athletics, breaking records in both the 1500 yard sprint and in the 5000 metre race.

It was at High School that he first studied Karate and he continued this study after his enrolment at Senshu University. He was so fascinated with Karate that as well as training at the University club, he also joined the *Ryobu-Kai* Dojo of **Yasuhiro Konishi**, the renowned Japanese Karate Master who was a personal friend and student of the founder of *Shotokan Karate*, **Gichin Funakoshi**.

Although Master Konishi called his style of Karate, *Shindo Ji Nen Ryu*, it was fundamentally Shotokan, and the young Yamazaki was pleased to discover that Senshu University also had a thriving Shotokan style Karate club. Over the period of his studies at Senshu, Yamazaki made rapid



Master Kiyoshi Yamazaki
Photo: Terry O'Neill

progress, and soon established himself as a member of the Senshu University Karate Team, along with the club senior, **Taji Kase**, later to become internationally famous as a J.K.A. (*Japan Karate Association*) Instructor. When not training at the university club, Yamazaki trained at Konishi Sensei's Dojo, the Ryobu Kai.

Yasuhiro Konishi was one of the great figures of the Japanese Karate world. As well as studying with Gichin Funakoshi, he also had as his teachers the great karate fighter, **Choki Motobu**, and the founder of *Shito-Ryu* Karate, **Kenwa Mabuni**. The Karate of Konishi Sensei was therefore a unique blend of the style and precision of Funakoshi's *Shotokan*, the deadly, practical *Karate-Jutsu* of Motobu, and the fluid style of Mabuni's *Shito-Ryu*. It was this powerful amalgam of Karate-Do and Karate-Jutsu that had such a profound influence on Kiyoshi Yamazaki.

As to his background in Kobudo, it is just as impeccable. His training in traditional weaponry was under the tutelage of the renowned Okinawan Master, **Shugoro Nakazato**. Nakazato Sensei is also one of the 'greats' of Karate – he holds a 'Shihan' teaching licence in *Okinawan Kobayashi Shorin-Ryu Karate*, awarded to him by the late Grandmaster **Choshin Chibana**.

Nakazato Sensei was taught weaponry by the great **Masami**

Chinen (1898-1976), Headmaster of the *Yamani-Ryu* style of *Bo-Jutsu*. Although primarily known as a *Bo-Jutsu* style, *Yamani-Ryu* taught all the traditional weaponry of Okinawa. Chinen taught a 'family' style of *Bo* (staff) he learnt from his father, **Sanda Chinen**. Chinen Snr. had been taught by the famous '**Pechin**' **Chinen** and '**Shichianaka**' **Chinen**, both – known as '*Meijin*' (great experts) of the *Bo*. They, in turn, had such teachers as **Master Soeishi** and **Master 'Tode' Sakugawa**.

From the above lineage we can see that the Kobudo teaching of Sensei Yamazaki is from a classical mainstream Okinawan source. This then was the 'pedigree' of the man I was looking forward to welcoming to my Dojo.

I had arranged to meet Yamazaki Sensei at York railway station at 11.00 am on the Saturday, but due to traffic in the city centre, I arrived at about 11.05 and entered the station from the car park (the back way). I waited near the ticket barrier, and, unbeknown to me, Yamazaki Sensei was waiting outside in the station concourse. We finally met up, and he introduced me to his very pretty companion, **Stephanie Crawford**.

An American student from Yamazaki's Dojo in California, Stephanie appeared nice and friendly ... little did I now the suffering she would eventually inflict on me! We hurried off to the Dojo and made the intro-

ductions – among the many people who had come to meet Yamazaki Sensei was F.A.I.'s chief historian, **Graham Noble**.

I showed Sensei to his changing room – he seemed a little surprised, and then smiled. He told me afterwards that he was impressed that we had provided a private changing room with refreshments; and that it reflected a traditional attitude to our Karate training.

We all lined up, bowed, and then started the lesson. After commenting on the Dojo decoration (I always try to put up the flags and a photograph of visiting teachers), Yamazaki Sensei then introduced Stephanie to the class, explaining that she was a professional teacher of aerobics in the USA. A skilled dancer and gymnast, she had also studied *Ju-Jitsu* in Japan and she would now 'warm' up the class. "*Warm up the class*" – we nearly burst into flames! This girl was *FIT*. I found out later she had been doing Ballet since the age of three and had studied Dance, Stretching and most forms of fitness teaching for the best part of her life. She took the class, some of us in our 40's and (in my case) in our 50's, and reduced us to exhausted heaps. In our mitigation, I must point out that Karate training is predominantly *Aerobic*, and fit as we are for our discipline and our age, we are simply not trained to professional *Aerobic* standards.

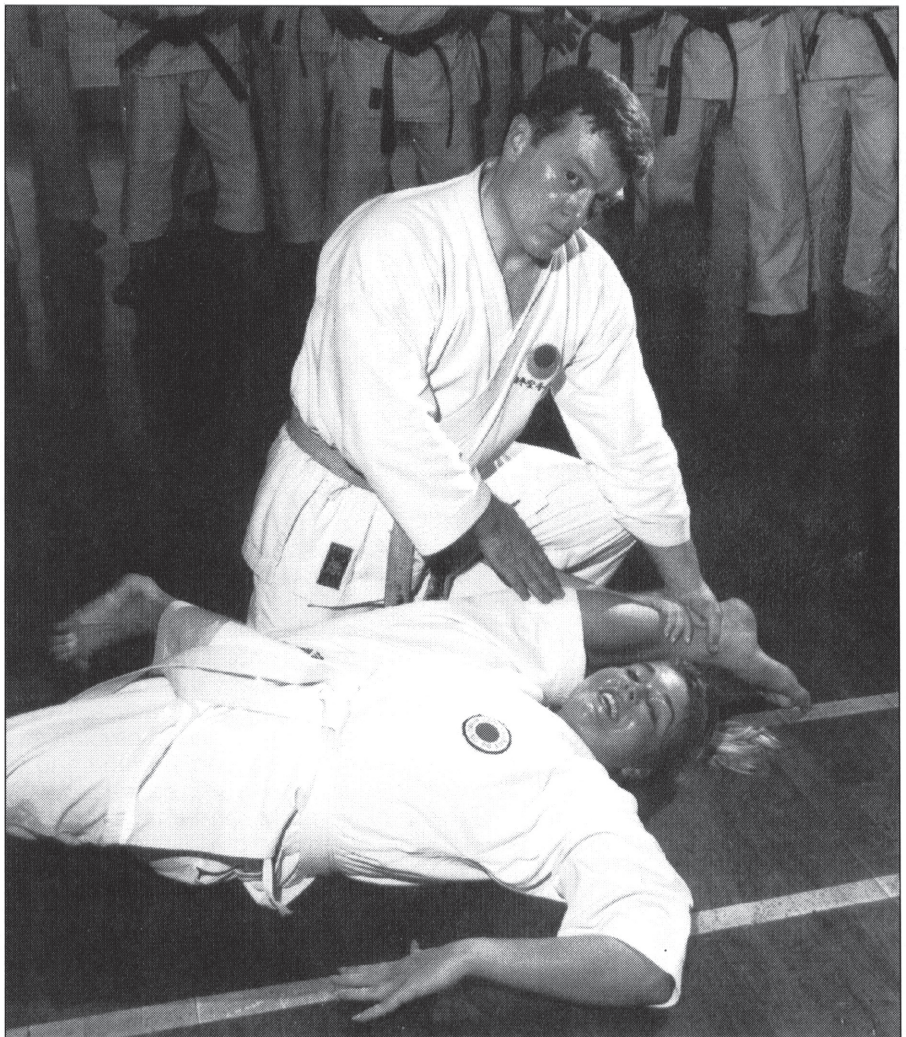
Stephanie also showed us how to stretch in a manner that would cause no injury. This was most beneficial and I have been using her 'wall' stretch ever since.

Her incredible range of movement so completely mesmerised the local press photographer that he used practically his entire roll of film on her ... neglecting Yamazaki Sensei in the process! To my consternation, he asked Yamazaki Sensei to move away so as not to "*spoil the picture!*" ... as I moved Stephanie's foot to an impossible location. Then, after asking her a few questions, he sped off to cover another event. (I later gave some background of our 'main event' and our Japanese visitor to the Sports Editor and we did get some reasonable coverage in the local newspaper).

During our fax conversation the week previous, we had agreed that the course would be in the form of a seminar, covering both Karate and Bo-Jutsu. The Karate session that followed was excellent, and it really showed the depth of Yamazaki's knowledge and skill. He would speak for a few minutes and explain why he was teaching a technique, for example *Soto-Uke* ('outside' block, using the forearm), and then showed both the classical and the '*Jutsu*' application of the movement. In the case of *Soto-Uke*, he showed how it



Kiyoshi Yamazaki and Ian Maclaren



The incredibly flexible(and fit!) Stephanie Crawford

Photo: G.D. Thompson

Photo: Kind Courtesy of the 'Yorkshire Evening News'

was used against a grab to the lapels. The reason for the hip movement and the stance shift then became clear. The counters ranged from the basic 'Tsuki' (punch) to a whole range of locks and throws. Yamazaki has a fine command of English and he encouraged the class to ask questions.

In between the *Kihon* (basics) and *Kumite* (sparring) teaching, we had a fascinating and highly informative discussion on many of the 'esoteric' principles of Japanese Budo philosophy: we discussed 'Shu-Ha-Ri', 'Shin-Gi-I-Tai' (Mind-Technique-Body); the theory of 'Bunkai Oh-Yu' and 'Henka Bunkai Oh-Yu' (extended applications and extended changing applications) and a host of other subjects. These concepts were illustrated by examples taken from Kata ('fixed forms') – the characteristic *Gedan Tsuki/Kosa Dachi* movement in 'Empi' kata was 'extended' to become a release from a two-handed grip; the *Gedan Juji Uke* (downward punch/crossed stance, lower 'X' block) from 'Heian Godan' kata was 'extended' to be used as a release from a two-handed grip to the wrists. All of these applications were interspersed with philosophical anecdotes and explanations.

When explaining the importance of analysing your Karate to fully understand the meaning of techniques, he used the analogy of building a house: "A teacher lays the foundations and helps build the walls – you decorate and put up the pictures". Many of the *Dan* grades there said it had been one of the most informative and productive sessions that they had ever had from a Japanese teacher, due mainly to the ability of Yamazaki Sensei to explain many of the deeper concepts of Karate-Do. We could have gone on and on, but the Karate lesson, which was scheduled to last 2½ hours, had already run into three hours so we had to call a halt. After a 10 minute break, we started the Bo class.

I regularly teach Bo-Jutsu at the Torbay and Lancaster residential Karate courses and quite a few individual clubs have gone on to invite me to teach Bo at their Dojo ... so I never miss an opportunity to improve or to add to my modest skills in this area. Knowing the immaculate weapons pedigree (which I have just shared with readers) of Yamazaki Sensei, it was with great anticipation that I lined up with the class for the Bo lesson. I already knew that he intended teaching intermediate level Bo kata 'Shushi no Kon Dai', so I did my usual background research into the kata.

This was one of the favourite kata of the legendary **Master Shinken Taira** and is featured in his rare book 'Ryukyu Kobudo Taikan' (Encyclopedia of Okinawan Traditional Weaponry). It is considered to be a

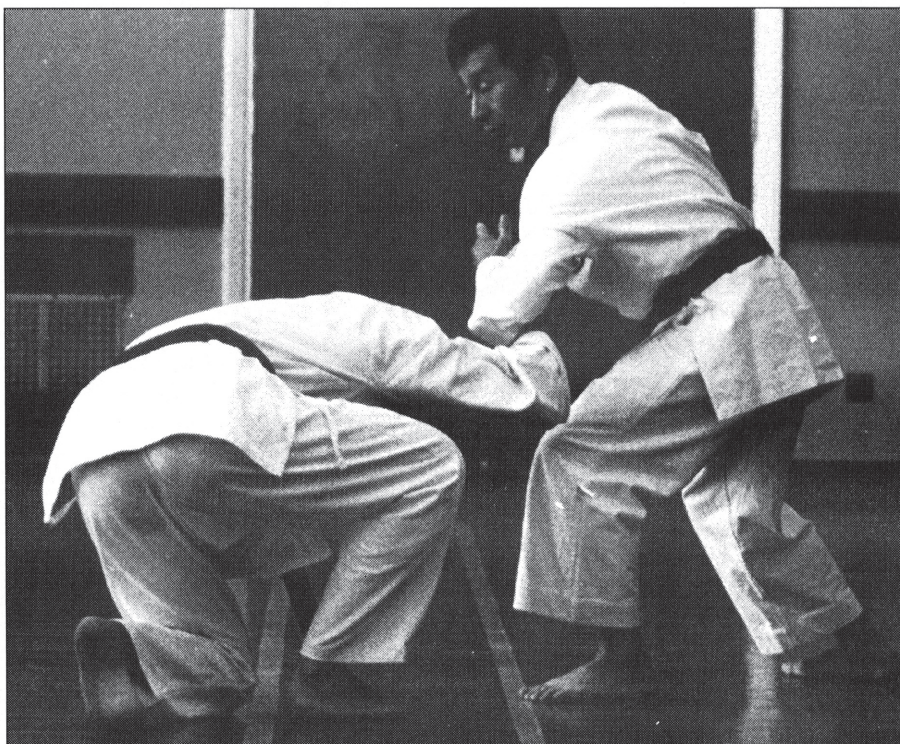


Photo: G.D. Thompson

Yamazaki Sensei demonstrates one possible application of a Kata movement

classic mainstream Bo kata of the *Kobayashi Shorin Ryu* schools.

We started the lesson with the usual 'Kihon', to check that our basic handling skills were there. Among the techniques we used were 'Tento Uchi' (literally: Strike from Heaven – 'Overhead Strike'), *Kasumi Uchi* (Crab Claw Strike – a strike to the temple); *Gedan Harai Uchi* (Lower Sweeping Strike) and a blocking/striking technique, *Mawashi Tate Uke* (Vertical Turning Block). These movements were then combined into an exciting 'Kumi-bo' set that was very satisfying to do – it gave a good feel to the strikes and blocks, and you **knew** that it would work.

We then started into the kata session, and to our surprise we found that all the techniques we had been using in the 'Kumi-bo' had been taken from the kata – Yamazaki Sensei had taught us Kihon, Kumi-bo and the basic movements of the kata all at once. There are about 45 moves to 'Shushi no Kon Dai' – not as long as 'Chatanyara no Kon' or 'Sakugawa no Kon' but still long enough to make it difficult to assimilate in the space of one hour. I was lucky in that I had been taught the kata back in 1974, but I had not practiced it for quite some years, and to be honest, I had almost forgotten it. At the end of the hour, I was feeling at ease with the movements, and I have regularly practiced it over the last few months – I won't forget it again!

All too soon the session was over. We made our 'Rei' (bow), many people (including myself) took photographs and I then did my impression of a 'Kamikaze Cab' to get our two visitors to the railway station in time to catch the train back to London. Then I dashed back to the

Dojo and had a chat with the many senior grades who had come to York to attend the course. They were unanimous in their praise for the open, in-depth teaching style of Sensei Yamazaki. They were also suffering from the 'why didn't I ask' syndrome; many of them had found that during the lesson when they had been invited to ask questions, they had dried up – simply couldn't think of any. As soon as Yamazaki Sensei had left it was "why didn't I ask ...". They all swore that next time they would bring along a written list!

Yamazaki Sensei has been in contact with me since the course, and he hopes to be in the U.K. in October 1994. If he is able to come, I will arrange another weapons seminar, and if we can muster enough *Sai* (tridents), I will try to persuade him to do both *Bo* and *Sai* over the weekend. Keep your eye on F.A.I. – I'm sure I can persuade the Editor to let me notify you of the course through the magazine!

I would like to extend my thanks to **Ron Silverthorne** for all his help in arranging this most enjoyable and informative visit. Ron runs the *Ryobu Kai* group in the U.K.

CONTACTS:

Yamazaki Sensei can be contacted by writing to him c/o The Japan Karate Do Ryobu-Kai, 1510, South Euclid, Anaheim, California 92802, U.S.A.

Ron Silverthorne, c/o Japan Karate-Do Ryobu Kai England, Crawley Leisure Centre, Haslett Ave., Crawley, Sussex or telephone 0860-650127.

Ian MacLaren can be contacted by writing to him c/o Kenshinkan Karate Club, Moor Lane Youth Centre, Wains Road, Dringhouses, York.