

## THE HOUSE OF SHOTO. By Dr Wolf Herbert.

The May 2022 issue of the Japanese martial arts magazine "Hiden" ran an intriguing feature on Shotokan's Kanazawa-dynasty. It included a review of the late Kanazawa Hirokazu's (now: Soke) career and specific understanding and embodiment of Karate, a talk with his three sons – Nobuaki, Daizo and Fumitoshi, and an article on his granddaughter Hiyori.

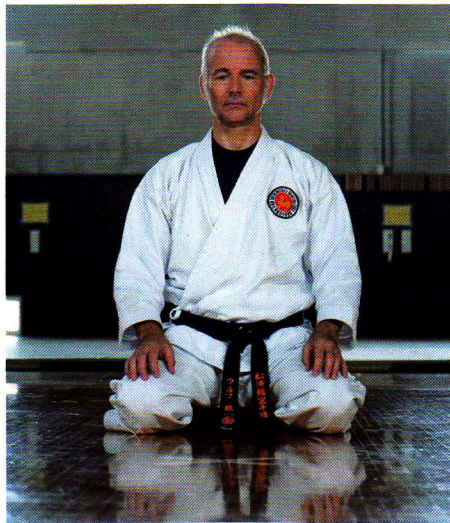
Besides that, it contained three columns on hallmarks of Soke's Karate. The one which impressed me the most was about "uraate". *Uraate* roughly means "to aim at a hidden side" or "a hit/strike of the back/reverse side".

I knew that Kanazawa Hirokazu was able to break only the very board which was indicated by another person, in a stack of four or five. He spoke of it in terms of control of power and inner, subtle energy (Ki). In Chinese martial arts circles there are anecdotal accounts of people who succumbed to internal injuries after days or who even passed away years later after having been punched. Certain ways to punch into the stomach in Okinawan Karate inflict pain in the spine rather than on the surface. This also belongs to the lore of "uraate".

In the feature which can now also be seen on YouTube ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5krJ18Ae\\_l0&list=PLly\\_CjHLJoO7bgKOML7m1i2L2kBSSElvQ&index=17](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5krJ18Ae_l0&list=PLly_CjHLJoO7bgKOML7m1i2L2kBSSElvQ&index=17)) Kanazawa Nobuaki (now: Kancho) demonstrates how he breaks only the third (last) board of three pieces of wood held by two assistants. He explains it quite in the way Soke did, referring to conjuring up a clear image of an entity outside himself, who splits the board and a strong connection with correct breathing and the unification of body and mind. Soke's legacy lives on!

The Karate of Kanazawa-Senior is reassessed and explained how it evolved due to his encounter with Shioda Gozo (Aikido) and Yō Meiji (Tai Chi Chuan). Kanazawa Daizo recalls his father saying: "You can perceive the form of the mountain you are climbing up, once you scale a different one (from where to look at it)."

Soke also practiced stick fighting, *nunchaku* and Kata from styles other than Shotokan. He permanently enhanced his perspective, but never forgot the place he was anchored on, which was Shotokan. His excursions into foreign territory always were intended to help him refine his own Shotokan-style. Harmony (*chowa*), breathing techniques and the regulation of the flux of the inner energy (Ki) were pillars of Soke's Karate. His familiarity with Chinese traditional medicine and philosophy also informed his Karate and made it one of a kind. I always thought of



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him as a Daoist sage more than a stern Zen-Buddhist warrior (which he also was).

Kanazawa Nobuaki Kancho asked his father in his later years what he deemed to be the most important thing in life. His answer was: "Sincerity! To be sincere in regard to Karate, to other people and also to your kin!"

I happen to be a member of the Kanazawa-organization SKIF (Shotokan Karatedo International Federation), although I always had one foot in the JKA. As a young lad I adored and idolized Kanazawa Hirokazu. I was fortunate enough to train with him in small groups and to also participate in the shooting/filming of teaching material under and with Soke (still available via VP Masberg).

I was prone to thinking Kanazawa-Soke's Karate was the ne plus ultra. In

the meantime though, I have ascended a few other mountains. Reading the special edition of the "Hiden" made me happy and realize that Kanazawa-soke's Karate lives on in his family and organization. In the next instant however there was this impulse: Shotokan is something so much bigger than a single person or organization!

Shotokan, as we all know, means "the house of Shoto". As we know, Shoto was the nom de plume of Funakoshi Gichin. It consists of two characters meaning "pine" and "wave" respectively. Funakoshi commented that he chose this pen-name because he liked to listen to the soothing sound of the wind in the pine trees and the waves rolling in from the sea when he was in Okinawa.

There exists a poem written by the Confucian scholar and poet Chen Shungze (1663-1734, jpn. Tei Junsoku) with the title "the sound of the waves in the pine alley" (rendered in a classical four character compound: *shokei tosei*; the "sho" and "to" correspond to "Shoto" in Funakoshi's sobriquet ("to" in particular is quite a sophisticated, rarely used character).

Chen Shungze was born into a Chinese family residing in Kumemura/Okinawa and educated partly in China. His poems were widely read in Ryukyu and Japan. As a man of letters Funakoshi quite likely knew the writings of Chen Shungze and I assume he might have been inspired by the poem in question when he picked out his pen-name. His Japanese students put a plaque on Funakoshi's first dojo in Tokyo 1939 reading "Shotokan", which subsequently became the name of his "style".

Funakoshi seemingly was not happy



Nobuaki Kanazawa Kancho chooses – and breaks the third and last board in a rack of three.

with the moniker. Kanazawa Hirokazu told me, Funakoshi had the habit to murmur to himself: "Karate ni wa ryuha nashi!" There are no 'styles' in Karate.

The Japanese on the main island insisted on giving a name to the "school" one belongs to in case one practiced a martial way or other traditional arts. This unfortunately also leads to division, exclusivity, rivalry and feelings of superiority. Sad to say it also happens within a certain "style", e.g. Shotokan!

"The house of Shoto" in a metaphorical understanding can on the other hand help to surmount separation and infighting. The house of Shoto has Chinese roots and design, an Okinawan foundation and is a Japanese construction with Western reinforcements, furniture and façade. It has become a formidable castle possibly beyond anything Funakoshi could imagine.

Somehow it is like Antoni Gaudi's cathedral in Barcelona – continually under construction with no end in sight. As practitioners of Shotokan we are all inhabitants, conservators, builders, renovators and innovators of "Shoto's hall."

Funakoshi Gichin has forged the spiritual fundamentals for his house, his third son Gigo, aka Yoshitaka, has bestowed the dynamic power characteristic to the Karate known as Shotokan. Nakayama Masatoshi was the first measurer and codifier of the techniques in use and added sports scientific expertise. There are innumerable contributors to the house of Shoto, just to name a few:

Ohshima Tsutomu with his stalwart orthodoxy, Kase Taiji, rooted firmly in Fudo-dachi while he delivered strikes and punches with the same hand he used for receiving or blocking (*hente*). The perfectionist Osaka Yoshiharu laid out the ideal template of how to perform Kata. Enoeda Keinosuke showed us a Karate of unbridled raw power. Yahara Mikio honed the compression/expansion of the legs and body culminating in an explosive release of tension. Nishiyama Hidetaka manifested minimalistic efficiency through the synergetic alignment of all the body parts employed in a technique. Asai Tetsuhiko whirled his limbs in nimble circular Kung fu moves and loosened up any kind of stiffness, which accorded a new quality to "his" Shotokan. Naka Tatsuya excels with his inquisitiveness and how he shakes his hips in Okinawan fashion.

Westerners like Rick Hotton with his relaxed heaviness and Scott Langley with his profound understanding of biomechanics, added value to the performance of Shotokan. Then there are the many practical guys, who brought in old and new know-how in regard to how to efficiently apply Shotokan Kata. Plenty of other Shotokan teachers have been featured in this magazine and every one



*Not great quality but a rare photograph of Master Gichin Funakoshi (shuto uke – wearing iron geta).*

of them had their unique insights to offer. The Shotokan Karate Magazine as such is a testimony to the cooperative "building", re-thinking and refurbishing of the house of Shoto. A myriad of books on the subject also furnished constructive elements.

I believe that everyone who has trained more than two or three decades has detected something special that defines his/her Karate and makes it work. One can learn something from everybody with this kind of experience. One should listen and experiment and see if one wants or can integrate the respective discoveries into one's own way of practice.

The Kanazawa-dynasty is a terrific enrichment in complementing Shoto's project, but far from alone. We all are dwellers and contributors in the castle of Shoto, but we should not perceive it only out of the little corner we stand in.

If we look at the entire house of Shoto

we are not dependent on a federation or a particular master. We are free to move and embody and express Shotokan in our personal manner. Shotokan should be something like a Platonic idea and we strive to manifest it in our practice. It is a kind of spiritual umbrella covering all organizations and individuals involved with Shotokan. It transcends groups and every other potentially divisive formations.

The idea of Shotokan survives the demise of us mortals and all the Sensei who have gone before us. And if we teach ourselves, it makes us humble to know we are just a little link in a chain or small piece of the magnificent structure named Shotokan, which shelters us. I hope I did not sound too pietistic, but if we try to see the big picture, petty departmental thinking or exclusive truth claims should fade away. For this our art of Shotokan is just too beautiful.