In the evening of the day right after we observed the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birthday in Japan, the unbelievably sad news informing me that my long-standing friend, Kiyoshi Yamazato untimely passed away at a hospital of Naha shocked me.

As a native of Kumejima Town (then Gushikawa Village) of Central Ryukyus, Kiyoshi was a born swimmer. He moved to Naha City in early childhood to get a better education at the primary school attached to Okinawa Normal School where his father worked. He entered Okinawa First Middle School, from which was admitted to enter the Kumamoto Junior Cadet School before Okinawa became a battlefield. As the school was closed because of the end of war, he entered the Hirado First Middle School of Hirado (Saga Prefecture) where his parents already lived as evacuees.

Returning to Okinawa after a year or so, he graduated from Ishikawa High School and the Foreign Language School in 1949. For a short time he worked for the Okinawa Government which was then under United States jurisdiction. Accepting a scholarship from the Japanese Government, he left the governmental job in order to study biology at Saitama University receiving his B.Sc. in 1954 with a senior thesis entitled “Histological studies of sexual dimorphism of some fishes.”

He was appointed as an assistant of Department of Biology, University of the Ryukyus in the same year, where he remained until his retirement in 1996. He was made lecturer in 1957, assistant professor in 1960 and full professor in 1969. In 1955 he took leave to study at University of Michigan, where he obtained M.Sc. in 1957, under a GARIOA Fellowship of the U.S. Government. On the way home, he participated a summer field course at Hopkins Marine Station of Stanford University, which thoroughly brainwashed him to coral reef biology.

Resuming his work at the Department of Biology in University of the Ryukyus as a lecturer, he began to explore the newly emerging field of coral reef science. Ichthyology in the department became the responsibility of N. Nishijimamoto, a M.Sc. graduate of Washington University at Seattle. Kiyoshi and the late Prof. Hirata of Kagoshima University organized a joint program to survey the coral reefs in the Central Ryukyus with both cruising along the shore and mapping onshore (intertidal and raised reefs), which included the geodetic studies of the reef terraces.

Kiyoshi and I met for the first time in the summer of 1960 on the campus of the University of the Ryukus, which was originally the premise of the historical site of the Shuri Castle. His kind advice not only led me to the spectacular tidal flats of southern Okinawa (e.g. type localities of Dasycladaceae and Udoteaceae, described by the late Professor Y. Yamada) and modern coral reefs at Kumejima, Kudakajima and the scenic coast of Okinawajima, but also galvanized a circle of young bloods of the Biology Department.
During my appointment as visiting professor at Department of Geography, University of the Ryukyus for the next few years, we paid visits alternately often (between Room 307 of Department of Geography and his Camelot of the Department of Biology. We took advantage of opportunities to survey around the main islands of the Central and South Ryukyus in terms of geology and geomorphology of reefs and the fossil analogues: occasionally accompanied with his brilliant students (mentioning only few: M. Nishihira, S. Shokita, and Y. Nakasone).

In order to pursue his zeal, he again returned to East-West Center of the University of Hawaii to study physiology of corals and obtained Ph.D. in 1966 with the dissertation entitled "Calcification in a solitary coral, Fungia scuariet Lamarck in relation to environ factors", under the supervision of Profs. Sidney C. Hsiao (chairman), D.C. Cotois, E.S. Reese, S.J. Townsley and P.B. van Weel.

The late Drs. Siro Kawaguti, Shinjiro Kobayashi, and Kiyoshi were key mentors in biology, when we initiated the working group of Studies of Fossil Hard Tissues, under the auspices of the Palaeontological Society of Japan and the Ocean Research Institute of University of Tokyo in late 1960'. Geochemical mentors were Drs. K. Kigoshi, M. Sakanoue, Y. Kitano, S. Horibe, and H. Sakai. Learning the physiological paths of reef forming calcifiers from Kiyoshi and other biologists, we explored a pioneering phase of geochemical proxies of ecological constraints, including ratios of isotopes, both radiogenic and stable.

In 1972, when Okinawa was restored to Japan, Kiyoshi was appointed as the Director of the Sesoko Marine Biological Station, which has become one of core foundations of the Tropical Marine Science Center of the University of the Ryukyus. He kindly invited us who were in Naha port above the R/V HAKUHO to visit the Sesoko Station. Accompanied by Mr. H. Nakamura, Kiyoshi and I were absorbed in collecting many crown-of-thorns starfish (COT). We were on board the Marco Polo for the 2nd ICRS the following year, where the COT threat was one of the major topics. Events tended to advance him as the indispensable administrator in the chaotic restructuring of the University of the Ryukyus into the Japanese educational system.

Kiyoshi was a gifted organizer of commanding profile. With the devoted collaboration of the Yaeyama Branch of the Mariculture Experiment Station of Okinawa Prefecture, we accomplished an interdisciplinary project to elucidate the temporal response of reef ecosystem of the Kabira Cove, northwestern Ishigaki with a temporal scale from seasonal to millennial. It was funded by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture through the Ocean Research Institute of the University of Tokyo. The biological works were supervised by Kiyoshi and the late Professor M. Horikoshi (University of Tokyo), chemistry by Drs. Y. Kitano (Nagoya University) and K. Kaneshima (University of the Ryukyus) and geology and geography by me (Photo 1). It was one of the pioneering studies of an ecological approach to an environmental overview of coral reef systems in Japan. The team consisted of many young promising names, who have become the prominent scholars in each discipline of reef science: e.g. K. Aioi, H. Mukai, M. Murakoshi, M. Nishihira, H. Ota, and Y. Shirayama, in biology; T. Omori in chemistry; S. Matsuda in geology). Kiyoshi and Dr. Kawaguti were key persons, knowledgeable of the details of local conditions in our daily surveys. Without them, we could not have accomplished our objectives.
Kiyoshi was so gifted with administrative work, though he never drowned in it. He devoted vast amount of his time and energy to found a center of research of coral reefs in Japan. He succeeded in introducing a new department of marine sciences, which included a laboratory specializing in coral reef studies at the University of the Ryukyus. We also talked so often about the possibility of inviting the ICRS to Japan, since we initiated the original, though vague, idea at the end of the 3rd meeting at Coral Gables, Florida in 1977. It took more than a quarter of century to realize our idea. The foundation of the JCRS (Japanese Coral Reef Society) in 1997 made our dreams come true, as the 10th ICRS was held in Okinawa 2004. He was the first president of the JCRS, and also the president of the Local Organizing Committee of the 10th ICRS. He was also the Director of the Research Institute for Subtropics (now, Okinawa Science and Technology Promotion Center). In 2007, he received the first JCRS Prize, which honored life time of devotion to coral reef research.

Above all else, Kiyoshi Yamazato will be remembered as an outstanding mentor, enthusiastic organizer, as well as leading participant, of both domestic and international research programs on coral reef biology. Friends and colleagues of the coral reef study community will sadly miss Kiyoshi’s vitality, good will and friendly smile (Photo 2). He willed his message to us as he stepped down from the presidency of JCRS. He was deeply in the restoration of endangered coral reefs using scientifically sound techniques, addressing the concerns that poorly thought-out projects could end up as a meadow of monotonous, if not monospecific, communities of branching corals.

He is survived by his wife for 50 years, Masako, and a hardworking son, Shoji. Shoji succeeds his father’s profession as a coral reef conservationist in Okinawa.