

A brief description of methodologies used for studying Reiki's early history

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For over a century, very few historical facts were known about the origins of Reiki, apart from the name Mikao Usui as its alleged founder, the existence of an organization called the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai, and a memorial stone erected in 1927 referring to Usui and his practice.

In recent decades, scholars have attempted to reconstruct Usui's life in order to explain the origins of Reiki. Initially, the prevailing scholarly approach worked within a *document-* or *founder-centered* framework, seeking to explain Reiki primarily through historically verifiable information about Mikao Usui. Around 2022–2023, however, it became increasingly plausible that another figure, Rev. Tokio Yokoi, may have played a role in Reiki's early development. This led me to shift from a *founder-centered* to a *process-centered* approach. Rather than asking how Reiki was founded by a single individual, the question became through which historical process Reiki and its later narrative—preserved, for example, in the memorial stone—may have emerged, involving actors such as Yokoi, Usui, members of the Gakkai (including high-ranking naval officers), Hayashi, and Takata.

Within this revised approach, early Reiki is understood as emerging through successive phases, including an initial phase of formation and transmission, followed by processes of articulation and later canonization, and only then becoming historically visible and retrospectively attributed to a single founder. This methodology also looks for patterns comparable to those found in the development of other spiritual practices in the Taishō-era Japanese religious milieu, such as Omoto, as a way of identifying likely elements in Reiki's development.

Within this perspective, three broad periods can be distinguished. First, a pre-1919 background in which Yokoi is known to have been engaged with questions of spiritual healing, including how healing in the Biblical tradition might be understood. Second, a formative period from around 1919 to approximately 1922/23, during which Yokoi may have transmitted aspects of this knowledge to Usui in a teacher–student relationship. Third, a subsequent period in which Usui became the public face of the practice and contributed to its wider circulation.

These periods correspond to three overlapping phases in the development of Reiki: (1) the formation of an early healing practice centered on hands-on treatment and moral-spiritual cultivation; (2) a formative–articulative phase in which elements such as treatment guidelines, ethical teachings, and modes of transmission gradually took shape; and (3) a later phase of consolidation and transmission, in which the practice became more structured and was passed on to students. The memorial stone of 1927 represents the first clear moment in which these elements were retrospectively organized into a coherent founding narrative.

In 1925, Usui trained the retired naval officer Chujiro Hayashi. Hayashi was associated for a time with the Gakkai but later operated more independently, establishing a Reiki clinic and further developing therapeutic applications of the practice.

In the 1930s, Hayashi trained Hawayo Takata, a daughter of Japanese immigrants in Hawaii. The form of Reiki transmitted to her did not emphasize the institutional context of the Gakkai and did not mention Usui's oral teacher Yokoi. Instead, the narrative she received presents the development of Reiki as the work of a single founder, Usui. Notably, several elements of this narrative closely resemble known aspects of Yokoi's life and interests. This suggests that the narrative preserved in Takata's teaching may reflect an earlier, more complex historical constellation, later streamlined into a single-founder account. At the same time, this form of transmission enabled Reiki to be detached from specific nationalistic or institutional contexts belonging to Shōwa-era Japan and to remain connected to broader religious and spiritual themes.

Until her death in 1980, Takata taught Reiki to thousands of students and acknowledged (at least) 23 Reiki masters. Through her teaching, the narrative that became known as 'the Takata story' spread internationally and shaped the global understanding of Reiki for decades.

Reframing the Early History of Reiki: The Converging Paths of Mikao Usui and Tokio Yokoi

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1. Abstract

This article reframes the early history of Reiki in light of new biographical data concerning Mikao Usui and Rev. John Tokio Yokoi, placing particular emphasis on their shared Christian backgrounds and exposure to the *Holiness Movement*, and similarities in their life events making historically plausible that they knew each other either by name or personal. I draw on a *curriculum vitae* of Usui, rediscovered in 2025, new biographical studies, and contextual research into Protestant mission activity and spiritual reform in Meiji and Taishō Japan. The study proposes that the origins of Reiki were shaped by a confluence of Western Christian mysticism and Japanese religious syncretism. A central hypothesis is explored: that Tokio Yokoi might be the original spiritual founder of Reiki, and that Mikao Usui later may have become its public proponent under sociopolitical pressures that may have led to the marginalization of figures such as Tokio Yokoi. This exploration has incorporated an analysis of the most recently discovered sources.

I continue with a general introduction of Reiki and briefly line out the account on studies concerning Reiki's history. Next, I define methodological principles for my way of working, and finally, I compare details of Reiki's founder to be found in the contemporary four authoritative sources to be introduced hereafter, holding information and analyzing whether they fit (better) in the biography of the historical Mikao Usui or of Tokio Yokoi.

2. Introduction

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO REIKI

Usui Reiki Ryōhō 靈氣療法, commonly known as Reiki, is a spiritual healing practice that emerged in 1922, allegedly established by Mikao Usui 臼井甕男 (1865–1926). Renowned for its non-invasive approach to healing through the gentle laying on of hands, Reiki swiftly gained recognition. Within the span of just four years, from 1922 to 1926, Usui imparted his knowledge to a few, select individuals who became Reikimasters, among whom was Chujiro Hayashi 林忠次郎 (1880–1940). Hayashi, in turn, trained a Japanese woman named Hawayo Takata (1900–1980), a resident of Hawaii and daughter of Japanese immigrants, in the late 1930s. Takata dedicated herself to disseminating Reiki teachings until her passing in 1980. By the time of her passing, she had instructed thousands of students and publicly acknowledged at least 22 Reikimasters, thereby facilitating the global proliferation of Reiki. In the West, Reiki is recognized as a CAM modality best known for its practice of laying on of hands and explained as active manipulation of one's biofield.

I assume that Hayashi knew Mikao Usui personally and that a decade later, Hayashi transmitted information about Usui's life and work to Takata that may have included conflated or already mythologized elements.

When Takata gave Reiki classes or lectures on Reiki, she mentioned some specific details regarding the life and work of Usui which, according to her, she had heard firsthand from Hayashi. Examples include that Usui travelled to the US for study, that he studied in Chicago, that he was an ordained Protestant minister, that he was Principal and teacher at Dōshisha University, that he was challenged by his students about his faith during one of his classes at Dōshisha, that he therefore resigned from Dōshisha, stayed a few years in a Zen monastery, and meditated on Mt. Kurama for 21 days until a moment of revelation, and so on. Takata died in 1980, and her trained Reikimasters have spread her teachings around the world including Takata's story on Usui as alleged founding of Reiki.

Suggested literature

- Jojan L. Jonker, 2016. "Reiki: The Transmigration of a Japanese Spiritual Healing Practice". Nijmegen, Radboud University.

A CHRONOLOGY OF STUDIES ON REIKI'S HISTORY

Until the death of Takata in 1980, not much, if any, research is done on Reiki's history due to the authority given to Takata. A groundbreaking first step is then made in 1991, when the American Reikimaster William Lee Rand asked Dōshisha if they knew the name Mikao Usui. I read in their letter to Rand that Mikao Usui did not exist in their archives. However, the question was not turned around, if there was a story about an ordained minister, head of Dōshisha, problems with his students, resignation, study in the US, etc. They would immediately have said, "Yes, Tokio Yokoi!"

Next, the Memorial Stone in Tokyo was discovered in the 1990s. Because it did not mention that Usui worked at Dōshisha, the text seemed to confirm the answer of Dōshisha affirming the incorrectness of Takata's narrative.

In 2017, Justin B. Stein completed a doctoral study about Hawayo Takata's life and work. Seemingly, he did not verify the Takata story with Dōshisha University for accuracy. As a result, Stein labeled Takata's story as, simplified in my own words, a 'fabrication'. Takata was dismissed by many as a fantasist or even a liar, for example on Wikipedia. See here the birth of an academic-stamped bias ("the story is not true") that unfortunately has been adopted by many, including us at one time.

The year 2023 became a turning point for a potential restoring of Takata's integrity. In 2023, the Australian Reikimaster Elizabeth Latham made public that she recognized Rev. John Tokio Yokoi as the person Takata speaks about in her narrative. Indeed, Yokoi has been ordained Protestant minister, was President of Dōshisha, resigned for several reasons, had studied in the West, et cetera. It was quite a challenge to integrate this fact into what was already known and assumed about Usui. In her 2023 publication *The Samurai Reiki Master*, Latham concludes that Yokoi is the founder of Reiki and spread Reiki under the pseudonym Usui. She doubted whether the person Mikao Usui ever was related to Reiki.

In 2024, the book *Tokio Yokoi. From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki* was published, in which I focus on the question of whether Yokoi could have acquired the necessary knowledge to develop Reiki practice. He answered confirmatively. Furthermore, he elaborates on the hypothesis that Yokoi spread Reiki under a pseudonym, but also he indicates other options like that Yokoi was the seeker and Usui the man who spread Reiki, a hypothesis further developed in this article. In other words, this hypothesis holds that two men participated in the early history of Reiki and that the history of Reiki has known two phases: before and after 1922.

Then, in 2025, Olaf Böhm's publication *Reiki - A Journey to Oneness with the Universe: Early Documents and Practices of Usui Mikao Sensei's Reiki Therapy* comes out. This concerns material later than 1922. In this book he discusses a book written by Okuna Shigejirō 奥名滋次郎 in 1928, called "*The Voice of Heaven's Flute*" *Tenrai no koe* 天籟の聲. This book offers some details about the life of Reiki's founder, allegedly Mikao Usui of which some date prior to 1922.

Finally, also in 2025, a *curriculum vitae* dated 1904 is discovered in Taiwan, believed to be handwritten by Usui for a job application in Taiwan. This CV among others records two positions held by Usui in Christian educational institutions founded by American missionaries. For the purpose of this reflection, I proceed under the provisional assumption that information on this CV is authentic and correct. In conclusion, at this moment of writing, there are four authoritative sources of information; the 1970s Takata story, the 1904 *curriculum vitae*, the 1927 Memorial Stone, and the 1928 book by Okuna.

This brief review clearly shows that, for decades, studies on the history of Reiki have focused on the person Usui, due to the alleged inaccuracy of Takata's story. Unsurprisingly, in 2023 there was strong resistance to introducing another person who may have been involved in the early history of Reiki.

I conclude that truly verified evidence concerning the history and development of Reiki is scarce. Furthermore, the presumption that this newly surfaced information from 2025 excludes any relevance to Yokoi is problematic; excluding such possibilities risks introducing a self-imposed bias that limits critical engagement and scholarly deliberation.

Suggested literature

- Walter Lubeck, Frank Arjava Petter, William Lee Rand, 2001. “The Spirit of Reiki: From Tradition to the Present Fundamental Lines of Transmission, Original Writings, Mastery, Symbols Treatments, Reiki as a Spiritual Path and Much More”, p303.
- Justin B. Stein, 2017. “Hawayo Takata and the Circular Development of Reiki in the Twentieth Century of North Pacific”, pp236-237.

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AS POINT OF DEPARTURE

I find it necessary to examine the situation discussed above with methodological care. Given my background as scholar in Religious Studies (and after having consulted Dori-Michelle Beeler PhD in Anthropology), I affirm that certain fundamental principles guide my approach to historical inquiry into religious and spiritual traditions. Four principles are particularly relevant here. First, it is a well-established understanding that the histories of religions and spiritual practices are often constructed from a multitude of narratives, with verifiable facts constituting a minority. Wouter Haanegraaff qq Second, documents produced by practitioners or adherents—whether written or inscribed—should not be assumed to offer objective or complete accounts; rather, they often project an idealized self-representation intended for posterity. I consider the Takata story, the Memorial Stone and Okuna’s account as such. Third, as explained, the chronology of research on Reiki history itself goes back to 1991 (Rand). For decades, statements have been made and presented as facts that should have been retracted later but were never. As a result, there is a diversity of opinions in the academic discourse as well as in the discourse of practitioners, which often contradict or even exclude each other. None of this is without emotion. Sometimes "sacred cows" of both practitioners and researchers are kicked against, unleashing undesirable counterforces that threaten objective and neutral research, and in some cases it is made personal. Examples of such sacred cows that led to polarized discussion are the way of writing the *kanji* for Reiki, the translation of the five Reiki precepts into English, the interpretation of Reiki symbols, and now the question regarding the true Source of Reiki.

These methodological principles encourage a flexible and critical approach to emerging information, allowing for multiple lines of inquiry and the possibility of revising previously held assumptions. When the distinction between narrative and fact is disregarded, scholarly discussions risk becoming confused and doctrinal rather than analytic. In the specific case of Reiki's historiography, there is an unfortunate tendency among some critics to seek definitive accounts based solely on perceived facts. I believe that striving for an optimum between stories and facts will lead to the best achievable result when it comes to reconstructing the historiography of Reiki. By definition, it will never be a reconstruction based on 100 percent facts.

I elaborate a little further on the theme “facts”. The tendency to prefer “facts” is evident in reception of the new information about Usui. Since 1991 (Rand) and even more since 2016 (Stein), it was widely regarded as "fact" that the narrative presented by Hawayo Takata was largely fabricated. Following the discovery by Elizabeth Latham that aspects of Takata's story correspond with elements of Tokio Yokoi’s biography, a new "fact" emerged: that Takata had somehow incorporated aspects of Yokoi’s life into her account. Now, with the appearance of Usui’s *curriculum vitae*, yet another new “fact” is being asserted—that Takata’s references to Usui’s Christian background pertain directly to Usui himself. This sequence of shifting "facts" persistently blocking any role for Yokoi underscores the limitations of an inflexible factualism, which risks prematurely excluding figures such as

Tokio Yokoi from the historical narrative of Reiki. There appears to be an underlying imperative among some scholars and practitioners to invalidate Takata's contributions entirely, lest the emerging "facts" be called into question.

If I aim to avoid introducing new biases into my scholarship, the discovery of Usui's 1904 *curriculum vitae* and the 1928 publication by Okuna invites a broader reconsideration. It suggests that Usui and Yokoi may indeed have operated within overlapping social and religious spheres. Multiple plausible lines of investigation open from this possibility.

My position is that the historical reconstruction of Reiki's origins must proceed cautiously and with the recognition that it will always reflect a blend of narratives and verifiable data. Rather than seeking definitive accounts based on newly surfaced documents alone, scholars must remain open to the evolving and multifaceted nature of the historical record.

Based on this position, I share information about the lives and work of Mikao Usui and Tokio Yokoi, indicating that both must have influenced the development of Reiki. This part outlines a concise historical account of Reiki's early development, focusing on the roles of Mikao Usui and Tokio Yokoi based on research available in 2025. It does not provide a full biography of either figure but highlights points, relevant to Reiki's formation.

3. Converging Paths of Mikao Usui and Tokio Yokoi

WAS TAKATA REFERRING TO TOKIO YOKOI?

A central puzzle in Reiki historiography concerns whether Hawayo Takata, when describing the founder of Reiki, was actually referring not to Mikao Usui of Taniai, but to Rev. Tokio Yokoi. In her recorded lectures from the 1970s, Takata consistently stated that the founder of Reiki was a Christian minister, President of Dōshisha University in Kyoto, and a man who studied in Chicago. She also described his 21-day retreat on a mountain, during which he experienced a profound spiritual awakening, after which he went to heal the poor in the slums, veiling himself as a poor man to serve the common people.

For decades, these claims were dismissed as apocryphal, due to the lack of historical evidence connecting Mikao Usui with any Christian ordination or foreign theological education. However, the rediscovery of Usui's 1904 *curriculum vitae*, published in 2025, has reconfigured the debate. According to the CV, Usui worked for Christian missionary schools, studied in the United States, and held various roles in government, mining, and private education.

These elements provide partial confirmation of Takata's claims, yet critical gaps remain. The CV does not mention any Christian ordination, theological leadership, or affiliation with Dōshisha University. Nor does it reflect the kind of deep theological engagement, pastoral leadership, or public preaching on the miracles of Christ that Takata describes. In all these fields, Yokoi seems to have been more successful and of higher status than Usui.

This is where the life of Tokio Yokoi aligns with remarkable precision. Yokoi was an ordained Congregationalist minister, baptized and trained through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). He was ordained by Rev. G. Cochran, a missionary in Tokyo, and served as pastor of both the Imabari Church in Shikoku and later the Hongō Congregational Church in Tokyo. He was a core member of the Kumamoto Band, a group of early Japanese Christian converts mentored by missionary Leroy Lansing Janes. Yokoi received theological training at Dōshisha, a Congregationalist seminary founded by Joseph Hardy Neesima. In 1897, Yokoi became President of Dōshisha University—a position that virtually required formal ordination and doctrinal alignment with

Congregationalism. During his tenure, he preached sermons on Christ's miracles and resigned under theological pressure when confronted by students—exactly as Takata recounts.

Further, Yokoi studied in the US, represented Japan at the 1893 *World's Parliament of Religions* in Chicago, and later pursued theology at Yale Divinity School. He lived among the poor in Imabari and Tokyo, advocated for social justice, and deeply engaged in comparative religious philosophy—including Christianity, Confucianism, and Buddhism. These facts correspond to nearly every element of Takata's narrative, including the description of a scholar who lived humbly and devoted himself to healing and teaching.

Takata's claim that the founder disguised himself as a poor man has typically been interpreted symbolically, as an expression of humility. But if the figure she described was not Usui, but Yokoi, the phrase may take on a literal or encoded meaning. It may refer to a deliberate transition of identity, in which Yokoi's healing system—emerging from a Christian-Holiness context—was reframed under the culturally neutral and spiritually syncretic name “Usui”, hence the pseudonym hypothesis. This would make the Reiki founder's biography both historically valid and spiritually inclusive at a time of increasing nationalism in Taishō Japan.

As the direct student of Chujiro Hayashi, Takata was likely the most accurately informed Reikimaster concerning the founder's life because she was an indoor student at Hayashi's place for many months. Her oral account, long dismissed as legend, aligns with striking accuracy when measured against the documented life of Tokio Yokoi. The conclusion follows: Takata's story was not false—only misattributed. The name was changed, but the man was real.

Suggested literature

- Helen J. Haberly, 1990. “Reiki: Hawayo Takata's Story”. Olmstead: Archedigm Publications.
- Jojan L. Jonker, 2024. “Tokio Yokoi: From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki”. Mijnbestseller.nl.
- Elizabeth M., 2023. “The Samurai Reiki Master”. 3rd ed. Sydney: Self-published. Appendix 2.
- Mark R. Mullins, ed., 2003. “Handbook of Christianity in Japan”. Leiden: Brill.
- “*Curriculum Vitae* of Mikao Usui,” rediscovered 2025, internal source confirmed in private research presentation.

HOLINESS MOVEMENT

The relationship between Tokio Yokoi and the Japanese *Holiness Movement* provides a critical lens for understanding the theological and ritual foundations of what later emerged as Reiki Ryōhō. The influence of the *Holiness Movement* becomes more visible and relevant with the newly discovered documents in mind and is recognizable several times in Reiki's history.

While Yokoi is best known as a prominent Protestant minister, theologian, and social thinker associated with the Kumamoto Band and Japanese liberal Protestantism, recent scholarship has positioned him more specifically within the stream of Holiness Christianity that emphasized Baptism with the Holy Spirit and divine healing.

In *Tokio Yokoi: From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki*, I identify Yokoi's theological orientation as one focused not on the full range of Pentecostal gifts (such as glossolalia or prophecy), but rather on the healing aspect of charismatic Christianity. Drawing on the typology offered by Mullins, I place Yokoi within the group of indigenous

Japanese Christian movements that, while not formally Pentecostal, emphasized the charismatic reality of healing as a manifestation of sanctification and grace.¹

This orientation places Yokoi in continuity with the Holiness tradition, which was brought to Japan by Protestant missionaries and adapted by native theologians. As Ikegami observes, Japanese Christians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries sought to experience the Holy Spirit through sanctification and healing, often interpreting this experience through indigenous lenses such as *shūyō undō* (self-cultivation movements) and esoteric rituals paralleling i.e. *kaji kitō* or *chinkon kishin*. I further suggests that Yokoi's search for a Japanese equivalent to Baptism with the Holy Spirit culminated in his creation of the *reiju* ritual—the transmission of healing energy or “spirit”—as a ritual analogue to Christian baptism by fire, particularly in light of John 20:22 and Mark 16:15–18.

The Pentecost is compared with Confucius' experience of direct enlightenment, called *lingh-chi* in which the origin of the *kanji* for Reiki is recognized. A ritual for direct transmission was found in the foundation formed out of the *Teiyū Kondankai*, discussed in the next section.

The *Holiness Movement*, emphasizing personal sanctification and divine healing, gained traction in Japan during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tokio Yokoi was active during this period and engaged in theological discussions that intersected with *Holiness* ideals. Given Mikao Usui's interest in spiritual healing at some point in his life, it is plausible that their paths crossed within this movement's circles.

Yokoi's alignment with Holiness ideals was not merely doctrinal but deeply experiential. His biographical arc—framed by an early mystical experience of Christ's love on Mt. Hanaoka at the age of 18, his exposure to Western theology at Yale, and a culminating enlightenment on Mt. Kurama (status 2024: if it was Yokoi who climbed Mt. Kurama)—reflects what many Holiness theologians described as the “second blessing” or sanctifying baptism that granted gifts of healing and moral transformation. This can be characterized as a form of “Japanese Pentecostal-like sanctification” embedded in the theological grammar of indigenous Christianity rather than in imported church structures.³

In conclusion, Yokoi's theological evolution—shaped by both Protestant liberalism and Holiness emphasis on divine healing—created the foundation for a uniquely indigenous Japanese healing ritual, later known as Reiki. His reinterpretation of biblical healing through Japanese metaphysical and ritual systems allowed for a radical indigenization of Holiness doctrine, positioning Reiki Ryōhō as an heir to Christian charismatic spirituality contextualized within Japanese religious culture.

Suggested literature

- Mark R. Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 157.
- Ikegami Yoshimasa, “The Holiness, Pentecostal, and Charismatic Movements in Modern Japan,” in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 127–132.
- Jojan L. Jonker, *Tokio Yokoi: From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki* (Mijnbestseller.nl, 2024), esp. pp. 28–35.

HONGŌ CHURCH IN THE PROXIMITY OF TOKYO UNIVERSITY

In 1893, Usui graduated from an institution for the study of classical Chinese where he studied psychology, a new Western field of healthcare at that time.

Tokio Yokoi became involved with the Hongō Congregational Church in Tokyo after resigning from his pastoral position in Imabari in 1886. He succeeded Ebina Danjo as pastor of the Hongō Church, which was one of Tokyo's most socially active Protestant congregations during the Meiji period. Yokoi's tenure at Hongō Church placed him at the center of Tokyo's Protestant intellectual and reformist circles, where he contributed to theological discourse and supported figures like Uchimura Kanzō. His involvement with the church continued until at least 1897, when he became Principal of Dōshisha School.

This period is the first possibility that Yokoi and Usui might have met each other either in social circles around the Hongō Church and University in Tokyo, or because of a mutual interest in the philosophies of the *Holiness Movement*. Indirectly, Usui must have heard of Yokoi in either San Francisco (next section) and/or through Yokoi's publications on Christianity in Japan and/or because they were colleagues in being both commissioned by a missionary school.

1893 YOKOI REPRESENTS JAPAN DURING THE *WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS*

Takata states in her narrative that Usui studied in Chicago. This could not be verified. However, there is an important relation between Yokoi and Chicago.

In 1893, Yokoi represents Japan in Chicago during the *World Parliament of Religions* and stayed there for a longer period of time. Yokoi was part of the Japanese delegation and spoke about Buddhism in Japan. Yokoi's presence shows he was not just a theological student, but a recognized voice in international religious discourse.

Yokoi encountered Swami Vivekananda, who spoke of divine energy and inner realization. It would have been typical for such a conference that he also met Anagarika Dharmapala or became familiar with his teachings, who linked Buddhism with spiritual healing. And, because he was part of the Japanese delegation, through Shintō and Buddhist Japanese delegates, he may have deepened his appreciation for native traditions. This aligns closely with the spiritual syncretism and healing orientation that would later emerge in Reiki.

POTENTIAL ORIGIN OF REIKI'S RITUALS AND SYMBOLS

In 1897, Yokoi co-founded the *Teiyū Kondankai* (丁酉懇談会), a study group dedicated to the comparative study of religions. This initiative was part of a broader movement in Meiji-era Japan to explore and understand various religious traditions, both domestic and foreign. Some notable figures were instrumental in developing the academic study of religion in Japan.

The *Teiyū Kondankai* aimed to analyze and compare religious beliefs and practices, fostering a scholarly environment for discussing the nature and role of religion in society. One of the purposes of the *Teiyū Kondankai* was to eliminate superstitious thought found within Buddhism and Christianity in order to establish an ethical faith that could be seen as a kind of “new faith and religion” and a “movement of religious reform”.

Out of this Gakkai, a foundation came forth that more specifically studied rituals for ‘direct transmission’ such as *kishin*. I (Jonker 2016) had already suggested that Reiki's initiation was related to *chinkon kishin*. Reiki's initiation ritual *reiju* seems to have based on indigenous Japanese Buddhist and Shintō rituals that were studied in this foundation (Jonker 2024). Perhaps also indigenous symbols were studied that may have been the source for the Reiki symbols.

In her narrative, Hawayo Takata recounts that Usui once visited various Buddhist centers in search of a ritual capable of facilitating a direct spiritual transmission. This detail may correspond to historical activities associated with the *Teiyū Kondankai* and its subsequent developments. At the time, it is unlikely that such esoteric practices were cataloged or readily accessible; thus, Usui—or perhaps Yokoi—would have been compelled to undertake a personal quest, visiting temples and inquiring firsthand about the existence of such transformative rites.

Suggested literature

- Yamanaka Hiroshi, 2018. “Religious Studies in Japan”. Volume 4: pp1-2.
- Jojan L. Jonker, 2024. “Tokio Yokoi. From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki”. Mijnbestseller.nl.

THE *HOLINESS MOVEMENT* IN SAN FRANCISCO

In the period 1897–1898, Usui worked in San Francisco, USA.

It is known that the Japanese community in San Francisco was active during this period. The Japanese Consulate in San Francisco, established in 1870, played a central role in diplomatic and community events. In either case, obviously, he also had social contacts.

During the late 1890s, the *Holiness Movement* had a notable presence in San Francisco, particularly through the Peniel Mission, founded by Theodore Pollock Ferguson and Manie Payne Ferguson in Los Angeles in 1886. By the 1890s, the mission had expanded into San Francisco, where it contributed to the city’s religious landscape by promoting personal sanctification, divine healing, and social outreach. Figures like Franklin Rhoda, though not formally part of the mission, were influenced by similar perfectionist and revivalist ideals.

USUI COMMISSIONED BY A MISSIONARY SCHOOL IN ASAKUSA

In the period 1899–1901, Usui established and supervised a night middle school in North Asakusa, Tokyo, run by the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society for the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Yokoi resigned from Dōshisha in 1899/1900. This were both engaged with Christian Missionary schools at almost the same time. Given the social status of Yokoi and the attention Yokoi’s resignation received, it is highly likely that Usui at least must have heard of Yokoi in this context.

USUI COMMISSIONED BY MISSIONARY SCHOOL IN FUKAGAWA

From 1899–1903, Usui is commissioned by the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society for the Methodist Episcopal Church, to establish a charity school and an elementary school in Fukagawa, where he served as supervisor. At that time, Fukagawa was a district within Tokyo city.

It was the denomination WFMS of the Methodist Protestant Church established in 1879. and focused on Asia, especially China and Japan. Unfortunately, the archives of these Churches do not hold the name Usui (email conversation with the archivist).

A closer look at the educational context of Meiji-era Japan reveals a significant detail often overlooked in discussions about Mikao Usui's background. According to Mullins (2003) in the *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, many Protestant mission schools—especially those founded during the Meiji period—required their faculty to be committed Christians. This mandate stemmed from the schools' foundational aim to provide not only academic education but also Christian moral and spiritual formation. In this light, it is plausible that baptism and active Christian commitment were formal or informal prerequisites for employment.

Usui's 1904 *curriculum vitae* indicates that he was not merely a teacher but held the position of "supervisor" at such a school. As noted in the same literature, the term "supervisor" in this context was functionally equivalent to "principal." If principals were held to the same, if not higher, standards of Christian affiliation, then it becomes increasingly likely that Usui was required to be—at minimum—a baptized Christian. This insight calls for a reevaluation of Usui's religious identity and challenges the prevailing view of him as a figure outside the framework of institutional Christianity.

REMARKABLE TIMING OF USUI'S JOBS AT THE MISSIONARY SCHOOLS

In 1899–1900, both Tokio Yokoi and Mikao Usui appear to shift away from religious institutions toward more secular careers. Yokoi resigned from his position at Dōshisha University to pursue politics and journalism, while Usui transitioned from employment at Christian schools (from 1899) to working in a mining company in 1904 and later applied for a government post in Taiwan.

This synchrony may reflect broader socio-political pressures stemming from the 1899 Yamagata Religion Bill (宗教法案, *shūkyō hōan*), which aimed to increase state control over religious institutions. Though ultimately rejected, it marked the beginning of a policy trend that subjected Christian schools, such as Dōshisha, to heightened scrutiny under State Shintō ideology (Thomas 2016; Abe 1970).

Further restrictions followed. In July 1899, new treaties subjected Westerners in Japan to Japanese law. In August, the Education Ministry's Order No. 12 banned religious instruction in accredited schools—public and private—while the Private Schools Act pressured Christian mission schools to secularize in order to receive state recognition (Mullins 2003, 328–329). Mission schools thus faced a dilemma: compromise their Christian mission or forgo accreditation.

Simultaneously, nationalists like Inoue Tetsujirō argued that Christianity, as a foreign faith promoting allegiance to a universal God, undermined Japan's imperial order, which demanded loyalty to the Emperor as a moral and spiritual authority (Cary 1909, 243).

Within this historical context, questions naturally arise regarding Usui's role at the missionary school beginning in 1899. Was his appointment merely administrative, or did it reflect a deeper ideological alignment—perhaps even a form of state oversight within the increasingly tense landscape of Meiji-era religious education? The timing is suggestive: as Japan's nationalist sentiment grew in response to both internal modernization and international pressures, figures working within Christian institutions may have been expected to align, at least nominally, with the prevailing national ethos.

Usui's subsequent employment with the colonial administration in Taiwan (discussed in the next section) strengthens this interpretation. His transition from religious-affiliated education to government service implies a degree of ideological compatibility with emerging imperial interests. Rather than viewing Usui as operating

solely within a spiritual or esoteric framework, this trajectory suggests he may also have been shaped by—and participated in—the broader political currents of his time.

Suggested literature

- Mark R. Mullins. *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements*. University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003, pp. 328–329.
- Otis, Cary. *A History of Christianity in Japan*. Fleming H. Revell, 1909, p. 243.
- Thomas, Jolyon Baraka. “Varieties of Religious Freedom in Japanese Buddhist Responses to the 1899 Religions Bill.” *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 3, 2016.
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PROXIMITY YOKOI AND USUI THROUGH TAIWAN

Between 1904 and 1911, Usui served on a research committee under the *Minseikyoku* (Civil Affairs Bureau) of the Japanese colonial government in Taiwan. Part of this committee was to investigate traditional Taiwanese customs (臨時台湾旧慣調査会). I consider Taoism, Chinese medicine, and energetic healing practices based on *chi* as such customs. This bureau was led by Gotō Shinpei, whose administrative reforms shaped the island’s modernization. Usui’s CV notes his work for “missionary schools” and later the Taiwan Government, suggesting involvement in ethnographic and educational policy under Gotō’s leadership.

In parallel, Yokoi, then a member of the Japanese House of Representatives, was convicted in 1909 for accepting bribes related to the Taiwan Sugar Company—a corporation closely regulated and subsidized by the *Minseikyoku*. His involvement implies direct entanglement with the same bureaucratic sphere in which Usui worked.

While no document directly links Yokoi and Usui, both were active within the orbit of Gotō Shinpei’s Taiwan policy apparatus, one as a colonial researcher, the other as a politician engaged in Taiwan-linked economic lobbying. Their concurrent engagement with the *Minseikyoku* during a formative period in colonial administration suggests geographic and institutional proximity.

Suggested literature

- Matsuda, Hiroko, 2019. “Colonial Taiwan: Negotiating Identities and Modernity”. Routledge.
- Leo Ching, 2001. “Becoming “Japanese”: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation”. University of California Press.
- Stefan Tanaka, 1993. “Imaging History: Inscribing Belief in the Nation.” In: *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*, University of California Press.
- Usui Mikao CV (rediscovered 2025, Taiwanese Reiki archives).
- Gotō Shinpei and Taiwan – see “Taiwan under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1895–1945: History, Culture, Memory”, 2006, edited by Liao Ping-hui and David Der-wei Wang, Columbia University Press.

UNTIL 1919: BOTH USUI AND YOKOI HAD SECULAR JOBS

Both Yokoi and Usui were through secular means less constrained by religious regulation and this may explain their shifts in career. A strategic distancing from religious labels in a

nationalistic, imperialist climate where spiritual heterodoxy could draw suspicion. Usui's career seems a realignment with economic and colonial opportunities, particularly during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and Japan's expansion into Taiwan and Korea. Yokoi on the other hand became a politician and reporter.

For the purpose of this article, it suffices to continue in 1919.

POSTWAR DISILLUSIONMENT AND THE SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE OF 1919–1922

The years immediately following World War I, particularly the period from 1919 to 1922, marked a profound turning point in Japan's religious and cultural atmosphere. The global crisis of meaning that erupted after the armistice extended beyond the Western world, striking Japan with equal force. The spiritual and moral exhaustion induced by rapid industrialization and the psychological toll of war, combined with the humiliation Japan faced at the Paris Peace Conference—where its call for racial equality was rebuffed—generated widespread disillusionment and a crisis of national identity. Yokoi was a part of the Japanese delegation and experienced this first-hand. This was further compounded by economic instability, including the rice riots of 1918, postwar inflation, and growing labor unrest.

In response to these multifaceted pressures, Japanese society entered what would later be termed the *Taishō spiritual boom*, characterized by a rising public interest in esotericism, folk religion, healing modalities, and universalist spirituality. Emerging religious movements such as Ōmoto-kyō gained visibility by offering holistic alternatives to both traditional sectarian institutions and the ideology of State Shintō. For educated individuals who had previously distanced themselves from organized religion—among them Mikao Usui—this moment represented fertile ground for renewed, non-institutional spiritual engagement.

By contrast, Tokio Yokoi's trajectory during this period took a more tragic turn. In 1919, he was expected to accept a diplomatic post at the Japanese embassy in the United States. However, due to a sudden and severe illness, Yokoi became bedridden and remained in declining health for the rest of his life. This personal misfortune likely intensified his interest in healing practices, particularly those that promised spiritual and physical restoration. Also, the question arises whether he physically would be capable of enduring a 21-day retreat.

Little is known about Usui's activities between 1911 and the early 1920s. This historical lacuna coincides strikingly with the years of national unrest and spiritual searching, suggesting the possibility that Usui, like many of his contemporaries, was engaged in a period of introspective transformation shaped by the shifting religious landscape of postwar Japan.

Suggested literature

- Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 176–180.
- Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 156–160.
- Jojan L. Jonker, *Tokio Yokoi: From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki* (Mijnbestseller, 2023), p183.

WHO CLIMBED MT. KURAMA AFTER AN INTENSIVE RETREAT AT A ZEN CENTER?

Both the Takata narrative and the 1928 publication by Okuna Shigejirō describe the founder of Reiki spending time (Okuna states three years) in a Zen monastery prior to a 21-day retreat on Mt. Kurama. While this formative spiritual experience has traditionally been attributed to Mikao Usui, there are plausible historical and spiritual grounds to consider whether Rev. Tokio Yokoi may have been the original seeker. The broader question, however, is why either man would have chosen a Zen center as the site of preparation.

In the religious climate of early Taishō-period Japan (1912–1926), Zen centers—particularly those within the Sōtō school—offered a distinctive environment for spiritual retreat. These institutions emphasized practices of inner cultivation (*shugyō*) through silent meditation (*zazen*), bodily discipline, and moral clarity. They were also relatively open to lay practitioners and intellectuals who, like Usui or Yokoi, may have been seeking spiritual renewal outside of sectarian or institutional religion. In this context, Sōtō Zen monasteries functioned as socially acceptable spaces for private spiritual transformation, offering a disciplined and culturally familiar setting for experiential inquiry.

Notably, there are significant conceptual and functional parallels between Sōtō Zen and the Holiness Movement, particularly in the role of the body, sanctification, and direct experience. The Holiness tradition emphasized *entire sanctification* as a post-conversion spiritual rebirth, often accompanied by outward signs of healing, moral purity, and divine presence (Mullins 2003). Similarly, Sōtō Zen framed awakening not as doctrinal assent but as an embodied state of presence and harmony achieved through rigorous spiritual training. As Dōgen, the founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen, emphasized, practice and awakening were one and the same—mirroring Holiness theology’s insistence on the visible manifestation of inner grace (Heine 2008). In both traditions, the purity and spiritual condition of the practitioner were viewed as essential for effective transmission, whether of the Dharma or divine healing. This conceptual proximity helps explain how either Usui and/or Yokoi might have found in Zen a compatible terrain for seeking transformation—rooted in discipline, spiritual illumination, and healing.

If Yokoi was the one who retreated into a Zen monastery following his disillusionment at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the choice would have reflected both theological and personal motivations. As a former Congregationalist minister steeped in Holiness revivalism and international diplomacy, Yokoi likely faced a profound crisis of faith after Japan’s racial equality clause was rejected by the Western powers. Turning to Zen could have represented a symbolic return to a Japanese mode of spirituality while continuing his quest for direct divine experience. The monastery would have offered a quiet, apolitical space in which to reconfigure his understanding of sanctification—perhaps now as *reikan* (靈感), a Japanese term for spiritual inspiration that is theologically analogous to the “second blessing” or Spirit-baptism in Holiness theology (Jonker 2024). The case for Usui also remains viable. Little is known about his activities between 1911 and 1922, a period coinciding with national disillusionment, spiritual searching, and the rise of new healing movements. According to the 1904 CV, Usui had a background in psychology, Chinese medicine, Christian scripture, and divination—suggesting openness to cross-traditional spiritual influences. His lack of institutional affiliation gave him freedom to engage in syncretic practices without doctrinal constraints. A Zen retreat would have offered him not only a method of spiritual purification but a structure for solitary realization. If Usui did not himself originate the practice of Reiki, it is conceivable that he received or adapted it from a more theologically mature figure—possibly Yokoi.

It is also reasonable to consider that Yokoi may have served as a teacher or spiritual mentor to Usui. Yokoi was significantly older, more educated, and widely known in both religious and political circles. He had served as president of Dōshisha University, held office in the Japanese Diet, studied theology at Yale, and preached on the miracles of Jesus.

By contrast, Usui's CV, while confirming his work at Christian schools and in the United States, does not reflect equivalent theological depth or social stature. If Yokoi had experienced spiritual awakening during his own crisis, it is plausible that he encouraged Usui to undertake a similar path of discipline and contemplation—perhaps even guiding him toward Mt. Kurama. In this view, Usui's retreat becomes the continuation of a spiritual tradition already cultivated by Yokoi.

The identity of the person who climbed Mt. Kurama may ultimately remain uncertain. Yet from a scholarly perspective, the convergence of historical, conceptual, and biographical elements allows for a dual hypothesis: Yokoi as the originator, retreating into silence; Usui as the transmitter, emerging into public view. For purposes of neutrality, I refer to the retreatant simply as *the seeker*—the individual who underwent a period of ascetic purification and reemerged bearing what would become known as Reiki.

Suggested literature

- Steven Heine, 2008. "Did Dōgen Go to China? What He Wrote and When He Wrote It". Oxford University Press.
- Jojan L. Jonker, 2024. "Tokio Yokoi: From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki". Mijnbestseller.nl.
- Mark R. Mullins, ed., 2003. "Handbook of Christianity in Japan". Leiden: Brill, esp. pp157-160 (*Holiness Movement*) and pp284-285 (Indigenous Christian Movements).
- Yamada, Shoji, 2009. "Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West". University of Chicago Press, (for insight into Zen practice and its appeal to lay intellectuals in modern Japan).

1922 – MOMENT OF ENLIGHTENMENT ON MT. KURAMA - *REIKAN*

The description that the seeker received "vision-light" (Takata) or "*Reikan*" (靈感) (Okuna)—often translated as "spiritual inspiration", "divine illumination", or "spiritual intuition"—does align conceptually with the theology of the *Holiness Movement*, particularly in its late 19th and early 20th century form, which emphasized direct spiritual experience, sanctification, and divine guidance.

Here is how the concepts connect:

Reikan (靈感) in Japanese Context

- *Reikan* refers to a sudden experience of spiritual insight or divine revelation. It can be associated with mystical awakening, inner vision, or a sense of being spiritually "moved" or directed.
- In Shintō and Buddhism, *Reikan* sometimes denotes an intuitive connection with *kami* (spirits) or the dharma.
- In modern usage, it can also overlap with the idea of *reiju* or spiritual initiation/attunement, common in Reiki.

Holiness Movement Concepts

The *Holiness Movement*, especially in its Wesleyan and American revivalist branches, emphasized:

- Sanctification as a second blessing: a post-conversion spiritual purification or awakening.

- Divine leading or "inner witness": believers were encouraged to seek and expect direct experiences of the Holy Spirit, often resulting in transformation, healing, or spiritual gifts.
- Testimonies of illumination or divine vision: common in Peniel Mission circles and holiness revivals were reports of believers "receiving light," hearing divine messages, or being overcome by grace.
- Spiritual intuition: sometimes described as being "prompted by the Spirit" or "walking in the light."

Theological and Experiential Parallels

Concept	<i>Holiness Movement</i>	<i>Reikan</i> Description
Spiritual illumination	Descent of the Spirit, inner light	Sudden divine insight or awakening
Mystical experience	Entire sanctification or divine encounter	Vision or sense of spiritual contact
Personal transformation	Moral cleansing, holy living	Moral/spiritual renewal post- <i>Reikan</i>
Divine guidance	"Led by the Spirit" or "moved by God"	Inspired action or insight attributed to divine source

Therefore, I conclude that the account that the seeker received *Reikan* closely mirrors the *Holiness Movement's* idea of sanctifying grace or divine encounter. Both Yokoi and Usui can be placed in an environment where Holiness ideas were circulating—such as through missionary schools or associations—then interpreting *Reikan* through a Holiness lens becomes not only plausible but historically grounded.

THE FOUNDING OF THE USUI GAKKAI AND THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF TOKIO YOKOI

The Usui Gakkai was established in 1922, traditionally attributed to Mikao Usui as its founder. However, the absence of a formal founding document bearing Usui's signature opens the possibility that the organization was not solely his initiative. A more plausible scenario is that the Gakkai was founded *for* Usui, likely in collaboration with the influential figure Tokio Yokoi.

Yokoi, a former Christian minister, intellectual, and political figure, held a senior position in Japanese society compared to Usui and was significantly older than Usui. It is conceivable that he facilitated the Gakkai's institutional foundation by leveraging his existing connections with high-ranking officers in the Imperial Navy. Whether through direct acquaintance or by reputation, Yokoi would have been known to such individuals, and his involvement would have lent the emerging Gakkai an air of credibility and alignment with elite circles. This hypothesis offers a compelling explanation for the rapid legitimization and military patronage the Gakkai received in its early years.

According to Hawayo Takata's account, a pivotal moment occurs in 1922 when Usui is said to have "disguised himself"—a phrase that has intrigued many interpreters of Reiki's origin story. In 1993, Reiki historian Elizabeth Latham reported experiencing a mystical dream in which a man identifying himself as "Usui" appeared to her. When she later recognized the face as that of Tokio Yokoi, she interpreted the vision to mean that Yokoi had adopted the pseudonym "Usui," effectively suggesting that the two were the same person. For Latham, Yokoi and Usui were not separate individuals but one and the same.

However, a more metaphorical reading of the dream opens the possibility for a dual identity. The statement "I am Usui" might be understood as "I am the originator of what is now known as Reiki, associated with the name Usui", or as "I am Usui in Takata's account". This interpretation allows for a collaborative scenario, in which Yokoi was the true originator of the practice and Usui its public face and disseminator. In this view, the identity of "Usui" becomes symbolic—a vessel for a transmission shaped by two intertwined lives.

It can be reasoned that in the period 1922-1926, Mikao Usui takes over Yokoi's work.

By the early 20th century, State Shintō and nationalism were on the rise. Public figures with Christian affiliations were often suppressed or concealed themselves to avoid suspicion or marginalization.

Being a Reverend with name and fame throughout the entire Japanese Empire, I consider that Yokoi was too famous to spread the completely indigenous Japanese developed Reiki anonymously. In fact, that Yokoi was a Reverend was in itself reason enough that he could not spread Reiki. There is the possibility that Yokoi and Usui decided that Usui would take it over. Hence, Yokoi transmits all knowledge to Usui and takes a step back in the anonymity.

Later, during the erection of the Memorial Stone, it is decided that all traces of Christianity had to be eliminated given the *Zeitgeist*. This partly succeeds. In written text either on paper or in stone like the Memorial Stone, no references to Yokoi or Christianity can be found. However, in the oral traditions, stories about the life and work of Yokoi survive and merge with those of Mikao Usui, especially in the case of Miss Takata who was not influenced by the contemporary Japanese *Zeitgeist*; she could speak freely. Even more, it is not only plausible but historically consistent that Christian traces would be deliberately removed from written records like Usui's Memorial Stone, while being preserved in oral traditions such as Hawayo Takata's narrative. As already discussed, after the 1899 *Religion Bill* (*shūkyō hōan*), Christianity in Japan came under tighter state scrutiny. Plus, by the early 20th century, State Shintō and nationalism were on the rise. Public figures with Christian affiliations often suppressed or concealed them to avoid suspicion or marginalization.

This also may explain why in the Usui narrative it is never made clear where and how Usui got his inspiration for developing a healing system. The omission of Universal Christian mysticism as held by the *Holiness Movement* created a vacuum in the narrative regarding the history of Reiki. Later on, people tried to fill this vacuum with alleged Buddhist roots inspired by the indigenous Japanese *reiju* and symbols, plus the fact that Usui is portrayed in Buddhist clothing.

All this helps suggest that information concerning facts and events after 1922, allegedly contributed to Mikao Usui, indeed concerns the historical Mikao Usui.

In 1927, the Usui Memorial Stone is erected with a text composed by some of Usui's students. Since the discovery of Usui's CV in 2025 (covering his career till 1904), it has become clear that the text is not complete and not entirely correct. A study psychology is mentioned but his three-year work at two Christian schools had to be left out given the Tashō *Zeitgeist* where Christian elements had to be concealed.

I analyze this part of the text of the Memorial Stone.

He engaged himself in history books, medical books, Buddhist scriptures, Christian scriptures and was well versed in psychology, Taoism, even in the art of divination, incantation, and physiognomy. Presumably sensei's background in the arts and sciences afforded him nourishment for his cultivation and discipline, and it was very obvious that it was this cultivation and discipline that became the key to the creation of Reiho (Reiki Ryoho).

This text can be interpreted as compatible with inspiration from the *Holiness Movement*, though it does not directly cite it. Here is why such an interpretation is plausible. The part, *He engaged himself in history books, medical books, Buddhist scriptures, Christian scriptures and was well versed in psychology, Taoism, even in the art of divination, incantation, and physiognomy...*

describes a person as having a broad and eclectic spiritual and intellectual background, combining:

- Christian scriptures — specifically notable, as the *Holiness Movement* is a Christian revivalist movement that emphasized personal sanctification, spiritual experience, and even healing through divine grace.
- Psychology and medical texts — aligning with the *Holiness Movement's* concern for inner transformation and moral therapy, often seen in their advocacy for spiritual healing.
- Disciplines like Taoism, divination, and Buddhist scriptures — indicate syncretism, which was not uncommon in Japanese spirituality, and would naturally blend with Christian mystical elements if encountered.

This could refer to Usui if more details were known about his whereabouts during his life despite the discovered *curriculum vitae*. However, it is also possible that the Stone refers to Yokoi's life when comparing the Stone's text with Yokoi's known biography. Or did the biographies of Yokoi and Usui blend into one narrative?

As mentioned earlier, the *Holiness Movement*, which influenced Japanese Christian circles from the 1880s onward (especially via Methodist missionaries and the Peniel Mission), taught:

- Entire sanctification as a second blessing.
- Healing by faith as a manifestation of sanctified living.
- Mystical experiences including surrender, divine union, and visions.
- Personal discipline and spiritual cultivation.

Now consider this phrase from the text:

...it was this cultivation and discipline that became the key to the creation of Reiho (Reiki Ryoho).

This language resonates with *Holiness Movement* terminology, especially the emphasis on inner sanctity leading to spiritual power, including the power to heal — a central tenet of Holiness theology.

Therefore, it is reasonable and historically supportable to interpret the text as showing influence or inspiration drawn from *Holiness Movement* concepts, particularly as they circulated in late Meiji and Taisho-era Japan.

The issue is further compounded by the Memorial Stone (Usui's memorial), which for many years served as one of the few tangible sources of information about Usui's life. Over time, this inscription achieved an almost mythological status among Reiki practitioners, solidifying a sense of historical authority. However, critical analysis reveals that the stone omits any mention of Usui's involvement with Christian missionary schools as his CV shows—an omission that, for academic scholars, is not unexpected but may challenge the assumptions of practitioners who have invested authority in the text. In fact, a translation of the text by Hyakuten Inamoto states:

He had no regular job to make a living, but led a free and easy life. He liked to study and tried hard to learn things in his youth, and traveled to several countries in Europe and America to study. He was not successful in business, and often faced adversity, but he always endeavored to improve himself through training.

The Memorial Stone does not match the professional life presented in the 1904 CV nor the detail in Okuna's work who states that Usui had eleven jobs. In fact, it seems to deliberately omit or obscure parts of Usui's Christian and institutional past, favoring a more Zen- or seeker-like persona consistent with early 20th-century Japanese syncretism and the Tashō *Zeitgeist*. More generally speaking, the tone and purpose of the Memorial Stone is memorial, reverential, and Buddhist framing while that of the CV is bureaucratic and factual. Therefore, because they represent distinct genres, the Stone is not meant to be an objective resume.

So, who's life is summarized on this Memorial Stone? Yokoi's under the pseudonym Usui or the historical figure Mikao Usui? Given the hypothesis that is expanded in this article—Yokoi is the originator and Usui the evangelist—it is the historical Mikao Usui, making clear that Usui was inspired by the philosophy of the *Holiness Movement*, and making it highly likely that Usui must have been a Christian. This is substantiated by the resemblance of certain concepts as mentioned on the Memorial Stone and the *Holiness Movement* (discussed in the next section). If you prefer Yokoi than explore a lengthy discussion of this hypothesis in Jonker 2023, *Tokio Yokoi. From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki*.

CONCEPTS MEMORIAL STONE CONVERGES WITH CONCEPTS OF THE *HOLINESS MOVEMENT*

The Usui Memorial Stone mentions elements such as Chinese medicine, Buddhist scriptures, Christian scriptures, psychology, and divination—suggesting a complex matrix of religious and therapeutic influences. This section explores conceptual and cultural convergences between three traditions present in the intellectual and religious environment of late Meiji and Taishō Japan: physiognomy and Taoist medicine, Holiness revivalism and divine healing, and early 20th-century Japanese spiritual healing movements. The analysis draws on academic literature to establish plausible lines of influence, particularly regarding figures such as Tokio Yokoi or Mikao Usui.

1. The *Holiness Movement*: Healing as Moral Transformation

The *Holiness Movement* emphasized that sanctification must manifest outwardly. As Mullins notes, it often regarded bodily health as a visible sign of inner spiritual purity, and conversely, illness was frequently interpreted as evidence of moral failure or lack of faith. Public comportment, appearance, and even facial expression were thought to reflect one's

sanctified condition. While the movement did not doctrinally endorse physiognomy, its rhetoric and praxis often implied it—particularly in revival accounts describing the “shining faces” or radiant eyes of sanctified believers. This reflects a wider 19th-century Protestant culture in which moral character was interpreted through physical cues, dress, and demeanor.

Faith healing was central. Influential Holiness figures such as A.B. Simpson, Carrie Judd Montgomery, and John Alexander Dowie integrated scriptural mandates like James 5:14–16 (“anoint the sick with oil”) into ritual practices of laying on hands and spiritual diagnosis. They often founded alternative institutions—healing homes, missions, and hospitals—that paralleled conventional medicine but were grounded in divine power.

2. Taoist Medicine and Physiognomy in Traditional Chinese Healing

Physiognomy (*xiangfa*, 相法), as practiced within Taoist-informed Chinese medicine, was a recognized diagnostic method with a lineage traceable to the *Huangdi Neijing* (Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon) and later Han–Tang commentarial literature. Physicians read facial features, complexion, tongue, and eyes to diagnose imbalances in *qi* (氣), *yin-yang*, and the five elements (*wuxing*, 五行). This was not folklore but structured theory, part of a broader effort to read the internal state of the person through the visible and tactile body.

As Kuriyama has demonstrated, classical Chinese medicine was never strictly dualistic; it understood the body as an integrated expression of the spiritual and cosmological forces that pervade the world. Thus, a Taoist physician would examine the patient’s face and pulse not only to assess physical health but to interpret the condition of their life force and alignment with cosmic rhythms.

3. Conceptual Convergence and the Emergence of Syncretic Healing

While Taoist medicine emphasized diagnosing energetic imbalance and restoring harmony through bodily manipulation (acupuncture, breathwork, energy flow), Holiness healing diagnosed spiritual blockage and sought physical transformation through prayer, repentance, and sanctification. Both systems rested on the principle that the healer’s own spiritual or energetic condition was crucial to effective healing. In this sense, the logic of practitioner purity and embodied presence is shared.

Taoist-Physiognomic Medicine

Reads *qi* through physical signs
 Diagnoses imbalance via visible cues
 Healing via energy flow (e.g., *ki*)
 Practitioner must be energetically balanced

Holiness-Divine Healing

Reads sanctity through external behavior
 Diagnoses moral failure as root of illness
 Healing via prayer and sanctification
 Practitioner must be morally sanctified

It is within this framework that Reiki may be situated as a syncretic response to multiple traditions of healing. As observed in *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, Japanese Christian leaders—including figures like Tokio Yokoi—were exposed to Holiness theology and divine healing during their time abroad. Yokoi’s contact with Holiness revivalism, particularly in the US, likely introduced him to doctrines of sanctified healing and spiritual embodiment. Meanwhile, as the Usui Memorial Stone suggests, Mikao Usui was familiar with Chinese medicine, psychology, and divination—components resonant with Taoist and traditional East Asian metaphysics.

Conclusion: Reiki as a Spiritualized Healing Synthesis

While Taoist medicine used the body to diagnose spiritual or energetic states, Holiness theology used the spirit to transform the condition of the body. Both traditions were

holistic, relational, and centered on the healer's moral-spiritual state. Reiki emerges plausibly at the intersection of these two systems, incorporating physiognomic sensitivity, energetic manipulation, and moral cultivation. In light of these converging traditions—confirmed in both East Asian medical texts and Protestant healing theology—Reiki can be interpreted not simply as an esoteric invention, but as a spiritualized medicine deeply informed by global religious currents at the turn of the twentieth century.

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- R. G. Tiedemann, "Indigenous Christian Movements in Japan", in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Brill, 2003), pp284-285.

4. Conclusion

This article has proposed a reframing of the early history of Reiki by examining the overlapping biographies of Mikao Usui and Rev. Tokio Yokoi in light of newly rediscovered documents, including Usui's 1904 *curriculum vitae*. Through comparative analysis of four primary sources—the Takata narrative, the Usui Memorial Stone, the 1904 CV, and the Okuna 1928 account—an alternative lineage has emerged in which Yokoi appears not merely as a theological influence but as a plausible originator of the spiritual healing system later known publicly as Reiki.

Rather than displacing Usui, this study situates him within a broader religious and cultural context shaped by late Meiji and Taishō spiritual movements, including i.e. Protestant revivalism, Taoist medicine, and Japanese Buddhist reform. Yokoi, with his Christian pastoral background, engagement with the *Holiness Movement*, and possible retreat into Buddhist or syncretic practice after 1919, embodies a confluence of spiritual streams that may have crystallized into what Usui would later teach. Usui's subsequent public dissemination of Reiki from 1922 onward can thus be interpreted not as an isolated act of innovation, but as the continuation, reinterpretation, or systematization of an earlier spiritual legacy.

This hypothesis—while necessarily speculative in some respects—aligns with newly verified archival materials and provides a coherent narrative to explain discrepancies in existing accounts. It invites further historical and textual inquiry, particularly into the Christian networks, Zen centers, and spiritual reform circles of the early 20th century. Also, to verify and substantiate the life and work of Usui, more information is needed from official archives such as the National Diet Library (NDL). As new evidence continues to

emerge, this approach encourages a historiography of Reiki that is both critical and integrative, honoring its complexity and cross-cultural origins.

Ultimately, whether Usui and Yokoi worked in tandem, or whether their identities merged in oral transmission, the reframing proposed here calls for a more nuanced understanding of Reiki's foundation—not as the vision of a single founder, but as the fruit of a spiritual dialogue between East and West, embodied in the lives of two men shaped by both.

Is Rev. Tokio Yokoi the monk in Takata’s story?

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1. ABSTRACT

Many Reiki practitioners know the story told by Hawayo Takata about Usui’s retreat on Mt. Kurama (when hearing Koriyama as Kurama) and his meeting with a “Zen abbot”. This article looks more closely at that part of the story and asks who this teacher might really have been. In Japanese, the word often translated as “abbot” (住職 *jūshoku*) can also mean “teacher” (師 *shi*), which opens new possibilities. One suggestion is that the story may echo the life of Rev. Tokio Yokoi, a Christian minister and teacher who was active at the same time as Usui. Rather than weakening Takata’s story, this connection shows how Reiki’s beginnings grew out of several traditions at once: Zen images, Christian influences, and older Japanese mountain practices. Understanding these layers helps us appreciate Reiki’s roots as both spiritual and universal.

2. INTRODUCTION

Reiki, a Complementary and Alternative Medicine modality, best known by its practice of laying on of hands, is marked by the interplay of Japanese origins and global transmission.

Commonly, it is suggested that there is one single founder, Mikao Usui (1865–1926), who is said to have developed Reiki in 1922, without any explanation of what or who inspired him prior to that date. For scholars in the fields of i.e. religious studies and anthropology, this has always been an implausible story with many gaps and illogical elements. In academia, it is commonly accepted that religions and spiritualities are always the product of convergence and encounters between schools of thought, individuals, *Zeitgeist*, geopolitical influences, and so on.

In 2023, it is theorized that a second person was explicitly involved in the development of Reiki, Rev. Tokio Yokoi (1857–1927), challenging the single-source presumption (Latham 2023, Jonker 2024). In the new alternative narrative, Yokoi is seen as the ‘originator’ prior to 1922, and Usui as Reiki’s ‘public face’ after 1922. Yokoi and Usui lived in close proximity to each other making it historically plausible that they knew each other and even may have been good friends (Jonker 2024, 2025). But at present date, there is no concrete evidence in the form of documents that they actually knew each other.

It was Hawayo Takata (1900–1980) who carried the practice beyond Japan and established it in the West. Born in Hawaii to Japanese immigrant parents, Takata traveled to Japan in the mid-1930s, where she encountered Reiki through Chujiro Hayashi, one of Mikao Usui’s direct students. After undergoing treatment and training, she returned to Hawaii and began practicing and teaching Reiki, eventually initiating twenty-two or more

Reiki Masters. Through her oral teachings, public demonstrations, and the training of a new generation of practitioners, Takata transformed Reiki from a little-known Japanese healing art into a global practice.

Because she was the first to present Reiki to Western audiences, Takata must also have been the person who translated and interpreted its original Japanese terminology into English. In this way, she not only transmitted Reiki practice but also shaped how it would be understood and remembered outside Japan. Yet her shaping inevitably leaves room to question whether the most accurate interpretation of a Taishō-era Japanese spiritual practice was preserved in its transformation into a Western healing practice. This tension opens a bridge to the following discussion, where linguistic nuance and historical context become crucial for reassessing how Reiki's story has been told.

This article presents the hypothesis suggesting that Yokoi transferred knowledge to Usui in the period 1919–1922, and that this can be heard in a veiled way in the Takata story. It searches the possibility that a relationship between Yokoi and Usui can be recognized in the Takata story, more precisely, in the part where Usui visits a Zen monastery and meets a monk there. To this end, we also look at the choices Takata had to make when translating Japanese *kanji* into English. Unfortunately, to my best knowledge there is no archival material showing the Takata narrative in Japanese dated in the 1940s or -50s when she gave classes to the Hawaiian Japanese population. This absence makes it even more important to reconsider Takata's English retellings and how they shaped Reiki's remembered origins.

To explore this possibility, this article proceeds in a series of steps. Section 3 *Remembering and reframing* revisits Takata's retelling of Reiki's beginnings, focusing on how her narrative shaped later memory. Section 4 *Abbot? No abbot!* examines the contested figure of the "abbot", showing how this detail entered the tradition. Section 5 *Japanese English linguistic Challenges* looks more closely at the Japanese terms involved, highlighting translation issues that broaden the range of possible meanings. Section 6 *What does the Memorial Stone say?* turns to the Usui Memorial Stone, often treated as an authoritative source, to assess how its wording and silences affect our understanding. Finally, Section 7 *Fragments of Takata's narrative* reviews fragments of Takata's story in detail, reinterpreting them considering the preceding discussion. This structure makes clear how linguistic nuance, textual evidence, and biographical context converge in the question of whether the "abbot" in Takata's story might refer to Rev. Tokio Yokoi.

3. REMEMBERING AND REFRAMING: TAKATA'S RETELLING OF REIKI'S ORIGINS

Since Takata consistently refers to a single founder, this article considers the possibility that her narrative occasionally merges the lives of Usui and Yokoi, presenting them as if they were one person. The analysis in this treatise draws on an audio recording in which Takata recounts the story of Usui in her own words. While the recording dates from the late 1970s, the story itself reflects accounts she first received in the 1930s. Over the intervening decades, some details may have shifted, been reinterpreted, or remembered differently. It is also plausible that Takata consciously reframed elements of the narrative to resonate with an American audience of the 1950s till her death in 1980, emphasizing themes that would be meaningful and accessible within that cultural context, by which I do not imply that she made things up deliberately. Recognizing this process with compassion allows us to appreciate both the preservation and the adaptation of Reiki's foundational story.

First, a reflection is needed on one of the most discussed words of her narrative: "abbot".

4. ABBOT? NO ABBOT!

Hawayo Takata states explicitly that Mikao Usui entered a Zen context before undertaking his retreat on Mt. Kurama. As late as in 2025, a book published in 1928 is retraced by the hand of Okuna Shigejirō: *Tenrai no koe*, that holds a chapter on Reiki Therapy, *Reiki ryōhō* 靈氣療法. This publication states that Usui consulted a Zen master but does not mention a monastery.

In her 1979 oral recording, transcribed in Elizabeth Latham’s *Samurai Reiki Master*, Takata recounts that Usui, after fruitless searches in Christianity and other teachings, visited a Zen monastery and ask for the highest monk, asking permission to study scripture. Importantly, Takata does not use the words “abbot” (Latham 2023). Later practitioner retellings introduced the term “abbot”, and it is these versions that have shaped the familiar image of Usui being guided by a Zen abbot. Nevertheless, ‘abbot’ is reflected on ‘just in case’ Takata did use the word.

It is noteworthy that to date, this Zen center or monastery remains unidentified by scholars and practitioners in the field. This lacuna does not provide substantial support for the Takata account in this particular instance. Instead, it offers a degree of flexibility that could allow for an alternative explanation, namely, an alternate setting.

Another indication that the term “abbot” was a later addition to the Takata narrative comes from her own unpublished 1975 manuscript. In this early version of her book project, Takata recounts Usui’s spiritual search in detail, describing his turn to Christianity, his study of Buddhist sutras and Sanskrit, and his fasting and meditation on Mt. Kurama. Yet nowhere in this manuscript does she mention a Zen abbot or monastery (Takata 1975, unpublished draft holding a polished version of the transcription of the audio tape). The absence of such terms in her earliest written account indicates that the “abbot” motif was not part of Takata’s original narrative framework. Rather, it seems to have entered the Reiki tradition in subsequent decades, likely through the retellings of her students or later popular authors. This supports the conclusion that the figure of the “abbot” was a retrospective elaboration, shaped by translation choices and Western expectations of Buddhist authority, rather than a detail originating with Takata herself.

Now that the term abbot has come up, we can take a closer look at the language used in the story. In particular, the original Japanese words may also be translated as *teacher* or *master*, which opens new ways of understanding what Takata may have meant.

5. JAPANESE ENGLISH LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES

Japanese terminology opens another layer of interpretation. The English “abbot” would most naturally translate 住職 (*jūshoku*), the head priest of a Buddhist temple. Yet Japanese versions of the Usui story rarely use this word. Instead, they more often employ terms such as 師 (*shi*, teacher), 禪の師 (*zen no shi*, Zen teacher), or 禪師 (*zenji*, Zen master). These expressions emphasize a teacher–student relationship rather than an official monastic office. This makes it less certain that the figure Takata rendered as the “highest monk” was a temple abbot; more likely, he was remembered as a respected teacher or spiritual guide. In this light, “abbot” seems not a precise translation of the Japanese vocabulary but a Westernized choice that shaped how Reiki’s story came to be told.

As linguist Kayo Kondo points out, *shi* in particular has a wider semantic range and may refer to respected spiritual teachers even outside formal Zen lineage (Kondo 2025). Thus, Takata’s English “abbot” or “highest monk” may not be a literal rendering of *jūshoku* but rather a broad translation of *shi*. Under this interpretation, the “abbot” of Takata’s story could have been any recognized senior teacher, not necessarily a Zen priest.

Extending these linguistic insights, the figure remembered as the Zen abbot or monk may not have been a temple priest at all, but rather Rev. Tokio Yokoi himself.

Moreover, Yokoi suffered a stroke after returning from the 1919 *Paris Peace Conference*, where he was a member of the Japanese delegation. He was bedridden from then until the end of his life. Latham notes that after his stroke Yokoi often received visitors and students at home, continuing his theological reflections and private teaching. Yokoi's obituary confirms that he continued to receive students at his home until his death in 1927. Thus, his residence could easily have functioned as the “center” (宗教センター *shūkyō sentā* or 教会 *kyōkai*), later remembered in Takata's story as a “temple” (寺 *tera*) or “monastery”. Within such a setting, Yokoi's role as a respected teacher would naturally have been expressed with the term 師 (*shi*), a designation that Takata or her translators may later have rendered into English as “abbot”. This possibility aligns with Yokoi's stature: an ordained Congregationalist minister, president of Dōshisha University, and a public intellectual engaged in theological debates on sanctification and healing in the Holiness Movement (Jonker 2024). His reputation as a spiritual guide made him precisely the kind of figure who could have been remembered in Takata's narrative—though under Buddhist monastic imagery rather than his actual Christian identity.

In conclusion, if the term 住職 (*jūshoku*) is understood more broadly as 師 (*shi*, teacher), this opens the possibility of considering figures outside the Zen monastic hierarchy, including contemporaries such as Rev. Tokio Yokoi, whose role will be discussed further below.

6. WHAT DOES THE MEMORIAL STONE SAY?

The Usui Memorial Stone¹, erected in 1927, further complicates the picture. It states that Usui “climbed Mt. Kurama and practiced fasting and *shugyō* (修行) for twenty-one days, whereupon he attained Reiki”.

The word *shugyō* is crucial. While transcriptions differ slightly—苦修 (*kushū*), 苦行 (*kugyō*), or simply 修行 (*shugyō*)—all convey “ascetic training”. In Japanese religious culture, however, *shugyō* is more than generic austerity: it is the standard term for Zen training. In Rinzai and Sōtō contexts, *shugyō* refers to the full range of monastic practice—encompassing *zazen* meditation, chanting, sutra copying, work (*samu*), ritual observance, and temple life more generally (paraphrasing Borup 2008). Novice monks are even called *shugyōsō* (修行僧, monks engaged in training) (Heine 2008).

Thus, when contemporaries or later interpreters read that Usui had undertaken *shugyō*, it was natural to connect his practice to Zen.

This helps explain why Takata framed Usui's pre-enlightenment period in Zen terms: the very language of the Memorial Stone evokes Zen training. Yet *shugyō* is not exclusive to Zen. It is also a central term in Tendai and Shugendō, traditions closely tied to Mt. Kurama. Shugendō practitioners likewise described mountain austerities as *shugyō*. The Memorial Stone's wording thus sits at a semantic crossroads: it is broad enough to include Tendai and Shugendō practices, but in early 20th-century Kyoto, where Zen was prominent, it also resonated as a Zen idiom.

Here the hypothesis reopens: if the stone says *shugyō* and Takata's version later became “Zen monastery under an abbot”, perhaps the two were linked not by historical necessity but by linguistic interpretation. The use of *shugyō* could have pushed Takata (or her translators) toward a Zen reading, even though the underlying figure guiding Usui might not have been a Zen priest at all, which gives space to introduce Yokoi in the narrative.

¹ At the time of writing, the credibility and authoritativeness of the Memorial Stone are under pressure for various reasons which call for reservation in reciting the Stone's text (Jonker 2025, Klatt 2025).

In this light, Takata’s “abbot” may conceal a more complex reality. She may have heard of Usui’s *shugyō* and, interpreting this through her Western audience’s categories, translated the guiding *shi* as “abbot”. If that *shi* was actually Yokoi—a Christian intellectual steeped in Holiness healing theology—the Christian details in Takata’s narrative (Dōshisha, Bible study, ordination) suddenly align. The Zen language of *shugyō* and monastery could thus mask, rather than reveal, the true identity of Usui’s senior teacher as well as the physical place of their meetings: Yokoi’s house rather than a monastery.

This shift from linguistic nuance to material evidence is crucial, because the Usui Memorial Stone offers the earliest written account of Usui’s practice and has long shaped how his retreat has been understood—yet, as recent scholarship shows, its authority is contested, since the inscription omits key Christian elements of Usui’s biography and reframes him in line with the Taishō zeitgeist (Jonker 2025).

7. FRAGMENTS OF TAKATA’S NARRATIVE

With all these new insights and preconditions at hand, some fragments of the transcription of Takata’s telling pass in review and can be reinterpreted. For this, the unpolished version is used as to be found in Latham’s 2023 *Samurai Reiki Master*.

The next day, Dr. Usui started to apply for visa, and he chose America and when that was all done, he took the boat, and he came and travelled by train, and he entered the university of Chicago. He studied philosophy, but number one, he wanted to study Christianity and also the Bible. And when he went to the studies in America, he found that the Bible and the Christian school that he went to were identical, the teachings were the same and he did not find in the Christian Bible, even in America, where Christ had left a formula for the healing. So, being in this university where they had philosophies of the world, ...

Chicago and philosophies may refer to Yokoi. He represented Japan during the 1893 *Chicago World Parliament of Religions* where indeed ‘all’ religions of the world were represented (Jonker 2024). Noteworthy, Yokoi spoke about Japanese Buddhism which shows he was a leading expert in this in Japan at that time. This makes it plausible that Takata’s references

... he went into other philosophies. He studied Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and of course religion. When he came into Buddhism, he found a passage where it said that Buddha healed by laying on the hands as well as the blind, tuberculosis, and also leprosy. When he found this out, he said, ‘I should further my studies in Buddhism and to find out whether Buddha has left any kind of a formula for the healing art.’

This may refer to Yokoi. Earlier publications (Latham 2023, Jonker 2024) mention that after the 1893 congress, Yokoi went to Yale University to enter the School of Divinity where indeed he studied these religions. After that, in the 1890s, he founded a Gakkai, a study group for Comparative Religions, the first of its kind in Japan. Also, in 1903, he visited India and in 1904, he lectured about the religions of India including Buddhism. Here again, Takata’s words may be read as blending Usui’s search with Yokoi’s documented academic journey.

He landed in Kyoto, where he lived before, and he went to all the great monasteries, (...) ... he started with the most biggest (sic.) temple, the shin

The mention of “*shin*” in Takata’s story most plausibly points to Myōshin-ji 妙心寺, the largest Rinzai Zen complex in Kyoto. Taken at face value, this would situate Usui’s encounter within a monastic setting, reinforcing the image of a “Zen abbot” (住職 *jūshoku*). Yet this does not exclude the possibility that the historical meeting took place in a different

context as mentioned before, at Yokoi's home. When Takata later recounted the story in English, reframing Yokoi's household as a great temple like 妙心寺 would have made the setting more recognizable and authoritative for her audience. In this way, the narrative reference to "shin" need not contradict the Yokoi hypothesis but rather illustrates how a domestic teaching space may have been retrospectively mapped onto the prestige of Kyoto's most famous Zen institution. Such retrospective mapping highlights how Takata's narrative may mask Yokoi's presence under Buddhist imagery.

... and when he arrived there he met a monk, and he said, 'does the Buddhist Bible or the Sutras, do the Sutras say that Buddha healed, is it written down in the Sutras that Buddha had healed leprosy, tuberculosis, and the blind, by laying on of hands?' And the monk answered, he said, 'yes, it is written in the Sutras.'

Yokoi most certainly was able to give an answer on those questions; here are two options.

(1) He could have informed Usui about Bhaisajya-guru Buddha (Medicine-master Buddha, Yaoshifo, Yakushi Nyorai). Quoting Irons (2008), this Buddha is a symbol of the healing aspect of the enlightened being. Like Amithaba he resides in a Pure Land. Baisajya Buddha's image is often found together with that of the historical Buddha and Amitabha in a triad, in which he sits to the left of Sakyamuni Buddha. He often holds a fruit, symbol of healing in his right hand. The Bhaisajya Buddha Sutra, which exists today only in Tibetan and Chinese versions, relates how Bhaisajya, then a famous teacher (guru), makes 12 vows, including guiding all beings to the Mahayana path and healing all illnesses. This figure is therefore of interest because he is worshipped as a Buddha but remembered equally for his bodhisattva like vows which he strives to accomplish before becoming a Buddha. Such an answer holds healing, sutra, and Pure land, all concepts related to the history of Reiki.

(2) Likewise, Yokoi could have informed Usui about the *Jesus Sutras* (Saeki 1937, Palmer 2001, Bays 2012, Latham 2023; Jonker 2024). Paraphrasing and summarizing these authors, the *Jesus Sutras* (景教經典, *Jingjiao Documents*) are ancient Christian writings brought to China by the Church of the East during the Tang dynasty, following earlier theological conflicts such as the Council of Nicaea (325 a.d.)². These texts are remarkable for their use of Chinese cosmological language to express Christian theology: the Holy Spirit is rendered as 靈氣 *lingqi*, meaning in this case "numinous breath" or "sacred vitality". This linguistic choice established a conceptual bridge between Christian pneumatology and Chinese ideas of cosmic spirit, centuries before Reiki. Later copies of these Sutras circulated in East Asia and were preserved in Japan, in places connected to Tokio Yokoi's ministry. The *Jesus Sutras* emphasize that purity of mind and heart must precede physical healing (Palmer 2001), a teaching that closely parallels the Holiness Movement's view that inner sanctification is the key to divine healing. By linking the Holy Spirit to *lingqi*, these early texts reveal that the association between spiritual transformation, numinous breath, and healing has deep historical roots in the Sinosphere. Yokoi, as a learned Christian minister familiar with both Western theology and Asian traditions, could easily have drawn on these ideas when guiding Usui, thereby reinforcing a conceptual link between ancient Christian *lingqi* theology and modern Japanese understandings of 靈氣 (*reiki*).

Significantly, one of the *Jingjiao* manuscripts (known as *Kojima B*) was housed at Dōshisha University Library in Kyoto. Dōshisha was the institution where Tokio Yokoi

² The First Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 a.d. by the Roman emperor Constantine. It produced the Nicene Creed, which gave authoritative expression to the doctrine of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as the foundation of orthodox Christianity. For Japanese theologians like Tokio Yokoi, this conciliar definition represented a Greek philosophical overlay on the Biblical message, and they sought instead to recover a more direct, practical Christianity free from metaphysical abstraction (Jonker 2024).

served as president and exerted lasting influence, placing *Jingjiao* material that uses *lingqi* (靈氣) for the Holy Spirit in Yokoi's immediate intellectual environment. This connection strengthens the plausibility that Yokoi, as a Christian intellectual versed in both Western and East Asian religious traditions, was aware of the *Jesus Sutras* and their conceptual bridging of Christian pneumatology and Chinese cosmology.

He said, 'have you mastered the art, can you do it?' And the monk said, 'well, in Buddhism, physicality is very important, but we consider the church, or ministry, to minister to the people so they have better minds. We want to straighten their minds first, so they'll become more spiritual and then show more gratitude and learn all, everything of life, and this is a temple or a church, and we monks do not have time for the physical in reaching the spiritual growth; spiritual healing is first.'

The answer of the monk (Yokoi) fits in what we know now about Yokoi and concepts of the Holiness Movement. Paraphrasing an earlier publication (Jonker 2024), the Holiness Movement, which arose from the search for a recovery of apostolic Christianity, emphasized sanctification, the experience of the Holy Spirit, and divine healing (*iyashi* 神癒). Japanese Christians influenced by this movement stressed that inner purity and the transformation of the heart had to precede physical healing, reflecting a theological order of sanctification first, healing second. Tokio Yokoi, who shared this emphasis, sought ways to indigenize the experience of "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" and its healing effects in the Japanese context. This priority on purity of mind and spirit before the restoration of the body shaped both the Holiness understanding of healing and later resonated in practices like Reiki.

Finally, he learned it in a Zen temple. and when he approached the temple, he rang the bell, and a little page boy came out. And he said, 'I would like to speak to the highest monk of this grand temple'. He said, 'please come in and who are you?' And he said, 'I am Mikao Usui. and I would like to study Buddhism, and therefore, I would like to meet the monk.'

As mentioned above, Yokoi was an expert on Buddhism and most certainly was in no need to study that. Usui on the other hand, seemingly had reached a point where he thought that he could find the answers of his quest in Buddhism. Takata's narrative continues:

Does the Zen believe in healing?' He said, 'yes, we do. it is written in the Sutras that the Buddhists that Buddha did it, and so in Buddhism we have the healing.' 'Well, can you heal the physical self?' He said, 'not yet'. And so, he said, 'what do you mean by not yet?' He said, 'oh, we monks are very very busy, giving discourses, lectures and preaching so that the mind can be attuned for the spiritual level. And we want to better the mind before we touch the physical.' 'And then how are you going to get the physical training?' He said, 'that will come, we have not given up although we do not have it yet. and therefore the [?] prayer in our chanting of the Sutras are very necessary in our faith, is stronger than ever and we have not lost it, and someday, during our various meditations, that we shall receive that great light and then we shall know. then we know we are ready, but do not get discouraged, we are striving for it, but we know we are not there. But before our meditation ended and before I go into transition, I am sure it will all be enlightened and will be able to do.'

An interesting part of the answer is "before I go into transition". At that moment in time, Yokoi has had a stroke and might be well aware of the fact death was lurking and may have wondered if he would solve his quest for healing before his own death.

And he said, 'thank you very much.' He said, 'may I come in and stay here and study all the secrets that you have? And, I would like to hear your lectures on Buddhism ...

In this passage, Usui recognizes a teacher in the man he speaks with and asks him to teach all this secrets he has and knowledge of Buddhism. Clearly qualifications Yokoi had. The idea of coming in and staying can also be interpreted as asking permission to visit Yokoi more often in a context of teaching.

... because I was a Christian minister and I have faith in the Christian Bible and I've looked all over and yet I could not find any formula of healing though I believe that Christ did it, and I still believe it.'

In this passage, we may hear a part of Usui's life that took place in the years prior to 1919, that are yet uncovered. Usui's 1904 CV, discovered in 2025, shows he worked for Christian Missionary Schools for several years. He worked in Taiwan until 1911 and somewhere in the period 1911–1919, Usui must have become interested in healing and may well have looked in Christian sources. However, the statement that he was a minister is either, according to me, an echo of the life of Yokoi projected in that of Usui which makes Usui look more prominent, more respectful, more senior, or an indication that Usui also was a Minister, which I doubt.

Therefore, when he went into studying Sanskrit, and when he later studied very hard to master it, he found a formula. just as plain as day. (...) And so, he said, 'very well, I've found it. Now, I have to try to interpret this because it was written 2,500 years ago because I do not know if this will work or not, but I have to go through the test and going through this test.'

Usui must have entered a path of seeking and this may reflect that. Perhaps the monk, Yokoi, guided him to read the right manuscripts. The formula Usui speaks about, may have been given to him by Yokoi as an outcome of the study group on 'direct transmission' Yokoi participated in (Jonker 2024). This 'formula' may echo what is now called initiation or *reiju* considered as the gateway to perform healing.

He said, 'I cannot guarantee myself whether I will live through it, or not. but if I don't try the test,' he said, 'everything will be lost. We'll go back three years.' He talked it over with the monk, and the monk said, 'yes, you are a very courageous man. Where are you going to test this, right in this temple?' He said, 'no. I would like to go up into the mountains', and this was Kyoto also. ...

Yokoi may have understood that Usui needed a similar mystic experience of receiving bright light from the spiritual world like what he had experienced on Mt. Hanaoka when he was a boy of 18/19. This would be a necessary connection with *rei* to perform *reiju*.

At this point in the story, Okuna states that the monk would have said, "*If you die, the world will change*" (死せば、世からんと *shiseba, yo karanto*). This expression resonates with the Zen phrase 大死一番 (*daishi ichiban*), the "one great death", which refers not to literal death but to the radical surrender of the self – a symbolic ego-death regarded in Zen as the necessary breakthrough for awakening.

Paraphrasing and summarizing Irons (2008), the concept of "great death" (大死 *daishi*) occupies a central place in Zen practice as the decisive moment of transformation. Zen teachers often explain that enlightenment requires undergoing this symbolic death of the ego and its attachments. The phrase 大死一番 (*daishi ichiban*, literally "the one great death") points to the complete letting go of the self, an inner collapse of delusion that opens the way to direct realization. In this light, the accounts of both Takata and Okuna converge, each evoking the Zen idea that awakening comes only through the experience of such a "great death".

... and he went up to mount Koriyama and he said, 'I will test myself for twenty-one days. and if I do not come back on the night of the twenty-first day, on the twenty-second day

morning, send out a searching party into the forest to find my body. I will be dead.’ And so, with that farewell, he left, and he said, ‘I shall go through this meditation without food, only water.

Usui’s decision to climb Mt. Kurama for a twenty-one-day retreat is best understood in light of Japanese ascetic traditions. I iterate, the Usui Memorial Stone itself describes his training as 修行 (*shugyō*), a term that in early twentieth-century Kyoto resonated strongly with Zen discipline yet also encompassed Tendai and Shugendō practices. Shugendō (修験道), the “way of mountain ascetics”, combined Shintō, esoteric Buddhism, and Taoist elements, and its austerities—fasting (断食 *danjiki*), seclusion in sacred mountains, and prayer rituals such as 加持祈祷 (*kaji kitō*)—were aimed at attaining revelation and healing powers (Jonker 2016, Beeler & Jonker 2020). Narratives of Usui’s retreat echo these indigenous forms, especially in his willingness to risk death through fasting, a practice reminiscent of 断食入定 (*dajiki nyūjō*, fasting unto death). Thus, while Takata presents Usui’s retreat as an individual test, it closely parallels long-standing Japanese ascetic patterns where physical austerity served as the gateway to spiritual empowerment. This sets the stage for Usui’s climactic vision, which Takata describes in striking detail.

Finally, the morning of the twenty-first came, (...) And then he saw a flicker of light only large as a candlelight, in the dark. and then he said, ‘oh, now this phenomenon is very strange’, but he said, ‘it is happening, and I am not going to even shut my eyes, or I shall open my eyes as wide as I can, and to witness what happens to the light.’ And the light begins to move very fast towards him. Then he said, ‘oh, the light! Now I have a chance to shut the light, or dodge. What shall I do?’ Then he said, ‘even if the light strikes me, and if I fall, or if I drop back, or I might burn’ he said, ‘this is the best’, he said, ‘I am not going to run away, I’m going to face it’. And when he faced it, he began to brace himself more, and to say, ‘come! If this is the [?] hit me, I am ready’. And with that, he relaxed and with eyes wide-open, he saw the light strike in the centre of his forehead. [?] ‘I made a contact’, he said. He fell backward because the force was so great. Then he said, ‘I died, because I have no sense, no feeling, and my eyes were open, but I couldn’t see’, and then he said, ‘I don’t know how long, how many minutes I was down, but he said, ‘when I awoke’ he said, ‘that light was gone but I could see it was beginning to have [?] and far away, I could hear the roosters crowing. and far away I could see that there were roosters and that I know that they [?] would be dawn pretty soon.’ Then he happened to look a little on the right side and then he saw from the right side of his face millions and millions of bubbles all came out, bubbling up, bubbling up, bubbling up, bubbling up, millions and millions and millions of bubbles. and these bubbles all had colours. and they were the colours of the rainbow. And he said they danced in front of him and then went to the left [?] this time. He said, ‘the colour of another rainbow,’ he said, ‘the blue, and then went through the right, to the left’ and then he said, ‘the lavender came in’ and then he said, ‘some rose came in, and the yellow carne out’ and he said he was counting those colours, and it had seven colours, all seven. and so, Dr. Usui said, ‘Waa! This is a phenomenon. I was blessed today.’ Then last of all, he saw the great white light coming from the right, and then like a screen they just stood right in front of him, like a screen. And when he drew his eyes to the screen, he said, what he had studied in the Sanskrit, what he saw and studied in the Sanskrit, he said, one by one flew out, and then in golden letters, he said they, just radiated out in front of him as if to say, ‘remember! remember!’ And so, he said he didn’t read them with his eyes, but he just studied and studied, and he said, ‘yes!’. Then this one came into the left, and another came out and all that he had studied and learned out of the Sanskrit moved in front of him as if to say, ‘this is it, this is it. Remember, remember.’ And so, he just moved his eyes. He said he felt no pain, no hardship, and he said he felt no hunger, no pain. He said, ‘I began to feel my body was good’ and so all these phenomena had passed on, he said, ‘I must close my eyes and for the last meditation give me a vision’. And he could see all the glowing letters in

front of him. So, he said, ‘now, I can open my eyes and throw away the last stone’ and he said, ‘I’m going to stand up’ and he stood up.

Accounts of Shugendō (修験道) practice often emphasize visionary phenomena as a fruit of mountain austerities: practitioners report encounters with *kami* 神, luminous presences, or revelatory visions that confirm the efficacy of their practice. Usui’s description of seeing a flickering light that grew until it struck his forehead resonates with these traditions, as visions of light are a common marker of spiritual attainment in mountain asceticism. Yet the rich detail of his narrative introduces a distinctive element: the vision unfolds into “millions of colored bubbles” dancing like rainbows, followed by glowing Sanskrit letters radiating before his eyes. Such elaborate imagery exceeds what is typically documented in Shugendō sources, where visions tend to involve more straightforward manifestations of deities, spirits, or cosmic light. This suggests either that Usui’s experience was an unusually vivid mystical episode or that later retellings amplified its symbolic dimension to align with esoteric Buddhist motifs and the textual authority of Sanskrit learning.

In his 1928 narrative, Okuna reports that following his twenty-one-day retreat on Mt. Kurama, Usui experienced a moment of 靈感 (*reikan*, “spiritual inspiration” or “sensitivity”). While the term does not seem to appear as a technical category in classical Buddhist doctrine, it carries strong resonance in the intellectual climate of Meiji and Taishō Japan. The words *reisei* (靈性 “spirituality”, “spiritual nature”) and *reikan* (靈感 “spiritual sensitivity”, “inspiration”, sometimes also “psychic sense”) became part of a modern discourse that sought to articulate inner, non-empirical forms of experience as legitimate spiritual knowledge in the face of scientific rationalism and secularization. By employing *reikan* to describe Usui’s breakthrough, Okuna framed the event not merely as a private vision but as an instance of culturally recognized spiritual sensitivity, placing Reiki within the same discursive space as other early twentieth-century *seishin ryōhō* (psychospiritual therapies). This suggests that Reiki was understood, at least by Okuna’s contemporaries, in terms that bridged traditional Buddhist imagery with the emerging language of modern Japanese spirituality.

In Taishō-era Japan, it was common for founders of new religious movements and spiritual practices to omit the names of their formative teachers from their official narratives. Leaders such as Deguchi Nao (Ōmoto), Nakayama Miki (Tenrikyō), and Mokichi Okada (Sekai Kyūseikyō) all emphasized a decisive moment of personal revelation—whether spirit possession, divine vision, or mystical experience—rather than human lineage. Even when their intellectual or spiritual influences are historically traceable, their public narratives strategically foregrounded divine origin to strengthen their charismatic authority and distinguish their movements from established traditions. In addition, the nationalist climate and increasing suspicion toward Christianity made explicit acknowledgment of Christian mentors risky. Placing one’s teaching in a culturally “indigenous” framework was safer than referencing Christian or foreign sources. It is therefore historically plausible that Usui did not disclose Yokoi’s role to his students, including Hayashi. This silence aligns with a broader narrative strategy of Taishō new religions rather than contradicting Yokoi’s influence (Hardacre 1989, Shimazono 1992).

In describing Usui’s transformation, Okuna states that he became “a person who has harmonized the spirit of the great universe (大宇宙の靈 *daiuchū no rei*) with his own spirit (自己の靈 *jiko no rei*)”. These expressions are not found in standard Buddhist doctrinal vocabulary, nor are they recorded in Irons’s *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (2008). Instead, they echo the idiom of 靈性論 (*reiseiron*, theories of spirituality) that emerged in Meiji and Taishō Japan. Scholars such as Miyajima Masako have shown how terms like “Great Spirit of the Universe” (宇宙大靈) were used to articulate a cosmic–individual polarity in which religious experience meant aligning the microcosm of the self with the macrocosm of

universal spirit. Similar phrasing circulated in new religious movements—Seichō-no-Ie’s “Great Life of the Universe” (宇宙大生命), and even Soka Gakkai’s contrast of “small universe” and “great universe”. Within this broader spiritualist and 精神療法 (*seishin ryōhō*, psychospiritual therapy) context, Okuna’s description positioned Reiki not as an esoteric Buddhist secret but as part of a modern discourse of harmonization between self and cosmos, aligning it with contemporary ideas of spiritual healing and universal energy. Now, back to the narrative:

(...) the first thing Dr. Usui said, ‘how is our dear monk?’ ‘Oh, he’s suffering from arthritis, backache, (...)

Given the age of Yokoi, arthritis would not be uncommon. Being bedridden often leads to backache so, this also may make sense.

And so, he said, ‘yes, and while I talk to you, I would like to put my hands on top of the silk covers,’ where he had the silk futon covers on him. And then he told him all about what had happened, and from the time he sat for meditation and on the twenty-first morning, and what has happened throughout the day. And then it was late at night already when he said, ‘very good, very good, we shall hear more about it, and let me think tonight’ the monk said, ‘and by the way, my pain is all gone. I can sleep now, I can move the stove alone, my body feels wonderful!

This can be a typical Reiki story through time and space.

I [the monk after he receives a treatment of Usui] feel that I am very, very full of energy’ and so he said, ‘this is what you call Reiki’ he said, ‘yes Reiki. We’ll talk more about it tomorrow morning after our breakfast.’

Takata’s wording do not make clear who says to who ‘what you call Reiki’. My interpretation is that Usui says it to Yokoi because Yokoi may have told Usui already about the *lingqi* that Confucius experienced during his moment of direct awakening (Jonker 2024) and explains to Usui that his experience on Mt Kurama equals just that hence “what you call Reiki”.

And so, Dr. Usui had a good night’s sleep, and so the monks next morning after breakfast, first thing Dr. Usui said, ‘what shall I do to experiment with this?’ And so, they talked over, and over and other monks came in, and they decided that the best place for him to experiment was to try and go into one of the very big slums in Kyoto.

Here, Usui and Yokoi depart, for now, where Usui makes his first steps spreading Reiki. But, as reflected on earlier (Jonker 2024), Yokoi must have helped Usui later, like introducing him to high-ranked officers of the Imperial Navy, made possible given the much higher social status of Yokoi.

8. CONCLUSION

This article has explored the ambiguity in Hawayo Takata’s narrative of Usui Mikao’s path to Reiki, particularly the episode of a meeting with a “Zen abbot”. Careful attention to Takata’s own words, her unpublished writings, and the Japanese Memorial Stone for Usui reveals that the figure of the “abbot” is less straightforward than later retellings suggest. Linguistic nuance shows that terms such as 住職 (*jūshoku*) and 師 (*shi*) could easily have been rendered in English as “abbot”, even if the intended meaning was more general, such as “teacher” or “spiritual guide”.

By placing this in dialogue with the biography of Rev. Tokio Yokoi, a new hypothesis emerges: the figure retrospectively remembered as the Zen monk or as the “abbot” in later versions of Takata’s story may in fact have been Yokoi himself. Yokoi, a Congregationalist

minister and the president of Doshisha University, welcomed students to his home from 1919 until his death in 1927, following his stroke. His residence could well have functioned as the “center” (宗教センター *shūkyō sentā* or 教会 *kyōkai*) that Takata later remembered in Buddhist terms. The Christian elements in Takata’s narrative—references to ordination, the Bible, and Dōshisha—align more closely with Yokoi’s life than with Usui’s, suggesting that Takata may have merged or reframed the lives of the two men in her oral teaching. Yokoi’s return to a more explicitly Christian orientation in his final years may also have contributed to the subsequent downplaying of Christian elements in public narratives of Reiki, making Buddhist framings more convenient and culturally acceptable in 1920s Japan.

At the same time, the Memorial Stone’s use of 修行 (*shugyō*) and the prominence of Zen in early twentieth-century Kyoto help explain why Takata would have situated Usui’s preparation within a Zen framework. Her retelling thus reflects both cultural translation and narrative adaptation. For Western audiences, casting the story in Zen idioms made Reiki intelligible and authoritative, while for Japanese listeners, the term *shugyō* naturally evoked Zen and Shugendō ascetic traditions associated with Mt. Kurama.

Taken together, these strands suggest that Reiki’s early history is best understood not as the work of a single founder but as the product of convergence—of Usui’s quest, Takata’s reframing, and Yokoi’s theological vision. The “monk” may therefore be read as a narrative mask, under which the intertwined influences of Christianity, Zen, and Japanese ascetic practice continue to shape how Reiki’s origins are remembered.

Why, then, was Yokoi’s role forgotten? The answer lies in two coinciding aspects of the historical climate.

First, scholars of Japanese new religions have long observed that the founders of many movements—particularly those emerging in the Taishō to early Shōwa period—are depicted as receiving “direct supernatural inspiration”, often undergoing a “call” or initiation and being represented as semi-divine or charismatic figures (Earhart 1969; Dorman 2012; Baffelli 2023). Reiki and Usui appear to follow this pattern. Usui likely acted in the same Taishō-era *Zeitgeist*, refraining from naming Yokoi to Hayashi or others both to universalize his revelation and to avoid drawing attention to sensitive Christian connections.

Second, in the 1920s, Christianity was under suspicion in Japan, while Buddhist and Shintō language offered a safer public framework. On top of this, Yokoi’s return to a more explicitly Christian orientation in his final years made the situation even more delicate. At the time of their deaths, it became necessary to remove overt Christian elements from Reiki’s story.

Despite these two aspects, traces remained—in Hawayo Takata’s oral narrative, which speaks of a “Christian minister” and “principal of Dōshisha”, and in the Usui Memorial Stone, whose silences are as telling as its words. Yokoi’s influence persisted within Takata’s account, where biographical and theological details closely mirror his life.

Finally, earlier interpretations have tended to trace the conceptual roots of Reiki 靈氣 to the Confucian–Daoist cosmological notion of *lingqi* 靈氣—the numinous breath that, in Confucian thought, was received by sages such as Confucius as they aligned themselves with Heaven’s Way (天道). While this lineage is significant, the Tang-dynasty *Jesus Sutras* offer an equally compelling source: these early Chinese Christian texts used *lingqi* to render the Holy Spirit and emphasized inner purification as the precondition for healing, thereby linking pneumatology, spiritual transformation, and therapeutic practice. For a Christian intellectual like Yokoi, this Sino-Christian vocabulary would have provided a meaningful theological bridge. The recent recognition that 靈氣 (*reiki*) resonates with this

early Christian use of 靈氣 (*lingqi*)—where it denotes the Holy Spirit—opens an important new line of research. This linguistic and theological convergence broadens the genealogy of Reiki, situating its emergence within a transreligious East Asian history that interweaves numinous breath, inner purity, and healing. It is plausible that Yokoi, who possessed the relevant theological and cosmological knowledge, taught about this within the suggested teacher–student relationship and transmitted such insights to Mikao Usui. A full exploration of this topic falls outside the scope of this article.

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A Reconstruction of Early-day Reiki in Phases; formation, articulation, canonisation
Dr. Jojan L. Jonker
version February 2026

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ABSTRACT

In 2025, two newspaper items were brought to my attention demonstrating that *reiki ryōhō* (靈氣療法) was already publicly advertised and practiced prior to the conventional 1922 origin point of *Usui Reiki Ryōhō*. This does not invalidate Usui’s role in public articulation and later institutional memory, but it does require a reconstruction model capable of accounting for (1) pre-1922 public usage of the term *reiki ryōhō*, (2) the near-total absence of contemporaneous press traces naming Usui or the *Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai* prior to 1927, and (3) the later emergence of fixed ethical and curricular forms.

To address these tensions, this article employs a three-phase historical model: (1) formative transmission and practice (c. 1919–1922/23), (2) extended formative–articulative mediation (c. 1922–1927), and (3) provisional canonization and memorial consolidation (1927). The main text is intentionally condensed and demonstrates the model through five high-yield examples; for two of these, detailed source material and close readings are retained in the appendices.

In presenting these examples, the article treats historical events not as isolated data points but as responses within a broader field of interaction. Particular attention is therefore given to geopolitical developments that reshaped the political and religious landscape of the period and, in turn, affected the lives, choices, and trajectories of individual actors.

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY PHASES ARE NECESSARY

Reiki, a Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) modality, best known by its practice of laying on of hands, is marked by the interplay of Japanese origins and global transmission.

Modern Reiki discourse has often treated 1922 as a singular founding moment and Mikao Usui (1865–1926) as a sole originator. From the standpoint of religious studies and historical anthropology, however, coherent and transmissible spiritual-therapeutic practices rarely arise *ex nihilo* (‘out of nothing’). They typically emerge through gradual formation, guided transmission, and later stabilization of memory, terminology, and authority. This is particularly true for practices situated within the dense psycho-spiritual landscape of late Meiji and Taishō Japan, where healing, moral cultivation, and spiritual discipline circulated across religious and non-religious domains.

The year 1919 is, in this respect, difficult to treat as merely incidental. It is precisely at this historical juncture that *reiki ryōhō* becomes visible in the newspaper record, while Japan simultaneously entered a period of intensified ethical and cultural reorientation in the aftermath of the Paris Peace Conference. At the same time, 1919 also coincides with Tokio Yokoi’s stroke and with the earliest plausible window for the beginning of Usui’s reported period of disciplined training under a “Zen teacher”—a figure that, within the present reconstruction, remains most coherently interpreted as Yokoi (Jonker 2025b). None of these temporal convergences constitutes direct evidence of a teacher–student relationship. However, taken together they strengthen the historical plausibility that the formative emergence of Reiki occurred within a narrow, highly charged moment in which personal biography, public therapeutic discourse, and national ideological transition in a geopolitical landscape intersected. Within the phased model proposed here, 1919 therefore functions not as a founding date, but as a plausible threshold of visibility within a broader formative process that culminated only later in articulation and canonization.

Recent documentary additions sharpen this methodological point. The newspaper record (introduced hereafter) demonstrates public use of the term and practice of *reiki ryōhō* prior to 1922, while the post-1927 memorial layer provides the first firm public anchor linking Usui, Reiki, and an institutional founding date (The Usui Memorial Stone). Between these two poles lies a striking silence: the press does not name Usui, does not report a founding, and does not document an organization called the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai in the early 1920s. This pattern cannot be explained adequately by a single “founding” model. It is better accounted for by a phased model that distinguishes formation from articulation and canonization.

2. THE THREE-PHASE MODEL: FORMATION → ARTICULATION → CANONIZATION

For the purposes of historical reconstruction, the early history of Reiki is approached through three analytically distinct but partially overlapping phases.

Phase–1: Formative transmission and practice (c. 1919–1922/23).

In this layer, Reiki is best understood as an emerging practice field rather than a fixed system. Transmission likely occurred through informal instruction, moral cultivation, and experiential discipline. Terminology, institutional framing, and public visibility were minimal or absent. The formative phase is consistent with a milieu in which spiritual-therapeutic knowledge is circulated through small circles and private teaching rather than through public organizations.

Phase–2: Extended formative–articulative mediation (c. 1922–1927).

In this period, Reiki functions as a transmissible hands-on practice while its ethical and curricular dimensions remain fluid. Moral teaching is present but not yet stabilized into a fixed canonical list. Key mediators (including later central transmitters) may selectively stabilize practice and pedagogy without producing a fully bureaucratic institutional structure.

Phase–3: Provisional canonization and memorial consolidation (1927).

In 1927, the Memorial Stone erected for Usui provides the earliest secure public anchor linking Usui, Reiki, and the founding date of an organization, while also presenting the ethical precepts in fixed, numbered form. This marks a threshold at which earlier fluid teaching becomes retrospectively stabilized and condensed into durable institutional memory.

While the Memorial Stone marks the earliest datable point of public canonization, Böhm’s documentation of Gakkai booklets and directories suggests that the organization’s practical publication infrastructure—periodic reprints, branch lists, and standardized manuals—becomes clearly visible only years after 1922.

3. FIVE DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE PHASED MODEL

The phased model is not merely theoretical; it can be demonstrated through a small set of high-yield examples that collectively account for the main tensions in the record.

3.1. EXAMPLE 1 (PHASE–1): PRE-1922 PUBLIC ATTESTATIONS OF *REIKI RYŌHŌ*

The first demonstration concerns the existence of *reiki ryōhō* as a publicly named practice prior to 1922. The 1919–1921 newspaper record shows that *reiki ryōhō* circulated as a therapeutic service and could be advertised as a recognizable method. These sources do not mention Usui or Yokoi, do not describe a founding event, and do not identify a Gakkai; instead, they attest that *reiki ryōhō* existed as a practice category within the wider Taishō therapeutic environment. The implication is methodological rather than polemical: the conventional 1922 origin point cannot be treated as the first emergence of the term or the practice-field itself. It is more plausibly understood as a later consolidation point within an already developing milieu.

學會
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 其効果
 (日本心象學
 會編) 同會長川上又次氏の心靈感
 應療法を説明し其治療實例を示して
 る(四六判七〇頁三十錢日本心象
 學會)

Note! Because the evidentiary function of these sources is to demonstrate pre-1922 public usage of the term *reiki ryōhō*, full translation is not required here. The original texts are written in prewar Japanese and employ a classical register; further specialist analysis therefore remains welcome. The preliminary summarised English interpretations provided below are my own and are not intended as literal translations.

読売新聞 大正 8 年(1919 年) 12 月 17 日朝刊 7 頁 新刊図書

The first image is an advertisement for the book *Reiki Ryōhō to sono kōka* (*Reiki Therapy and Its Effects*), edited by the Nihon Shinshō Gakkai. It informs readers that the book explains the therapeutic method of Kawakami Mataji, the director of the institution, and presents examples of his treatments.

読売新聞 大正 10 年(1921 年) 05 月 07 日朝刊 1 頁 広告 靈氣療法講義 日本心象学会

The second article (on the next page) presents *reiki ryōhō* as a newly developed therapy, described as the result of many years of research by Kawakami, as outlined in his book (also referenced in the accompanying image). The Nihon Shinshō Gakkai offered not only direct treatments but also distant treatments (*enkaku ryōhō*). Those wishing to learn the method were required to attend a ten-day course of lectures; for individuals unable to participate in person, lecture notes were made available for purchase, issued monthly over a six-month period.

The language used to describe *reiki ryōhō* reflects a broader early-twentieth-century therapeutic rhetoric, emphasizing drug-free treatment and wide applicability. No claims regarding lineage, influence, or attribution are implied by this observation.

靈氣療法

講義

我

▲靈氣療法の詳細は本會発行の「靈氣療法」と其効果にあり、希望者には本廣告掲載の新聞愛読者に限り無代贈呈す▲

▲講義期間十日●從來他の精神的療法の研究に満足せざる者、靈妙なる治療術を修得せんとする者は速かに來つて本會々長の講義に聽け

本療法は川上本會々長が多年の研究と實驗とに依つて得得せる牛體の根本作用と基調とせる獨創の新療法なり●藥物器械を用ひず極めて短時日に奏効す醫療及び諸種の療法も効なかりし難病が數回の施術にて治癒せる實例少からず●本療法は病氣の種類を問はず何病にも奏効顯著なり

直接療法を受け難き者に施す●方法にて其効果に於て直接療法と異なる事なし遠隔療法は本會々長獨得の妙術にて如何なる遠隔の地にある者も之を受くるを得

直接講習を受け難き者の爲に講義録を發行す●毎月一冊宛六ヶ月修了第一號來る六月一日發行入會の最好機申込五月卅一日迄規定は申込次第送呈す(申込には新聞名記入のこと)

(東京市下谷區上野櫻木町五拾八番地) 日本心象學會

(電車坂本二丁目下車寛永寺坂上)

3.2. EXAMPLE 2 (PHASE-2 → PHASE-3): FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRECEPTS (ETHICAL FLUIDITY → CANONICAL CONDENSATION)

A second demonstration concerns Reiki ethics. Bizan Suzuki's *Kenzen Dōshi* can be read as articulating five core domains of moral self-cultivation—anger, fear, honesty, diligence in duty or work, and kindness—formulated as compact fields of personal development within the wider *seishin ryōhō* milieu. Usui's later *gokai* retains this ethical architecture but introduces selective substitutions that signal a shift in emphasis: “fear” (*osorezu*) is reframed as “worry” (*shinpai suna*), and “honesty” (*shōjiki ni*) is replaced by “gratitude” (*kansha shite*). These modifications preserve the overall disciplinary logic while suggesting that Reiki ethics stabilized through adaptation of circulating moral vocabulary into a daily practice of affective regulation and ethical formation (Jonker 2016).

This, the ethical content associated with Reiki—emotional regulation, gratitude, diligence, and moral refinement—does not require a single moment of invention. Instead, the evidence aligns with a sequence: ethical instruction circulated in pedagogical and discursive form during Phase-2 and only later became fixed in canonical aphoristic form during Phase-3.

Hirano's reconstruction of Taishō-era *seishin ryōhō* (精神療法) supports this reading by locating *reiki ryōhō* within a wider psycho-spiritual therapeutic field in which

ethical cultivation circulated as practical pedagogy rather than as fixed enumerated doctrine. She further notes that Usui instructed followers to recite the *gokai* (五戒), and that a closely similar ethical poem already appears in Suzuki Bizan's *Kenzen no Genri*, which makes later canonical condensation historically intelligible rather than exceptional.

By contrast, the 1927 Memorial Stone presents the precepts as a fixed, numbered set of five statements. This is best interpreted as a post-formative act of condensation: teachings that circulated in fluid pedagogical forms were summarized into a stable ethical canon suitable for memorialization, legitimacy, and continuity. In this model, ethics precede canon; canonical listing emerges at the point of memorial consolidation.

Okuna Shigejirō's 1928 work functions as an important control text for this dynamic. He refers to an ethical framework (五戒) but does not reproduce a stable, enumerated list with fixed wording; rather, the ethical logic is unfolded discursively through explanation of *kokoro* and moral cultivation. This indicates that the ethical dimension was present but not yet stabilized into the later canonical form. Okuna Shigejirō's treatment is thus fully consistent with this mode of transmission described above.

The postwar stabilization of this ethical template is also visible in the Usui Gakkai's 1974 instructional booklet, which reproduces the "Five Principles" in a standardized English form and expands them into a structured program of daily moral discipline. It states: "Just for today, Do not get angry, Do not worry, Be filled with gratitude, Devote yourself to your work, Be kind to people."

3.3. EXAMPLE 3 (PHASE-2 → POSTWAR RECALIBRATION): MEIJI POEMS AS A CURRICULAR LAYER AND ITS LATER RECONFIGURATION

A third demonstration concerns the Meiji Emperor poems (*gyosei*) used alongside Reiki teaching, and the question of how early pedagogical use later became stabilized into curated printed selections. The Memorial Stone confirms the pedagogical use of imperial admonitions together with ethical discipline, and Okuna (1928) corroborates that such poems operated as moral resources within early Reiki-related discourse. However, the evidence does not securely establish that Usui personally compiled a fixed canonical selection, nor does it document a stable corpus in the early 1920s.

Later publication layers show that the poem selection changed after the Second World War and again in later decades. This indicates that the poem layer functioned as a curricular and institutional resource capable of reconfiguration under changing political and cultural conditions. In phased terms, the poem layer is best treated as part of institutional stabilization and curricular management rather than as a single founder-period canon. (For full analysis, see Appendix: Meiji Poems as a Canonization / Curricular Layer.)

3.4. EXAMPLE 4 (PHASE-2 MEDIATION): HAYASHI AS MEDIATOR AND THE LOGIC OF SELECTIVE TRANSMISSION

A fourth demonstration concerns Chujiro Hayashi (1880-1940) as a mediator of Reiki's transmissible form. Hayashi's historical significance lies not in founding Reiki but in systematization, pedagogy, and transmission during the extended formative-articulative phase. His later choices—withdrawal from the Gakkai milieu, emphasis on disciplined therapeutic practice, and selective omission of institutionally framed curricular layers (such as the Meiji poems) in the material transmitted to Hawayo Takata—are historically

intelligible within a Phase-2 mediation model. Böhm’s documentation of later standardized manuals and treatment outlines further supports the view that what became “Reiki method” was progressively stabilized through post-Usui publication and pedagogical packaging rather than fixed once-and-for-all at the outset.

This does not prove direct formative links to earlier mentors, but it clarifies how Reiki could move from a fluid formative environment into a stabilized practice form capable of transnational transmission. Hayashi’s case therefore demonstrates mediation and selective continuity: the practice is preserved, while institutionally sensitive or ideologically charged layers may be bracketed or omitted. (For a fuller reconstruction, see Appendix: Hayashi as Mediator of the Yokoi–Usui Formative Legacy.)

3.5. EXAMPLE 5 (THE “SILENCE GAP”): THE ABSENCE OF PRE-1927 PRESS TRACES AS STRUCTURED EVIDENCE

A fifth demonstration is the documentary “silence gap” itself. Prior to 1927, the press record does not name Usui as the originator of Reiki, does not report the founding of an Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai, and does not cover Usui’s death or an institutional succession. This absence is historically significant, but it should not be misread as evidence of nonexistence. Instead, it is structurally consistent with a formative phase characterized by private instruction, informal mediation, and limited public visibility.

In other words, the silence gap aligns with Phase–1 and Phase–2 conditions. The documentary density increases only when canonization and memorial consolidation become socially necessary. Despite the cracks in its authoritativeness (Klatt 2025, Jonker 2025b), the 1927 Memorial Stone thus functions as the first datable public anchor not because Reiki suddenly begins there, but because memory, legitimacy, and continuity require stabilization at that threshold. This reframes the problem: the archive is not “missing” what should have been public; rather, the practice likely operated in a mode that did not generate public press traces until it crossed into canonization. In this respect, Böhm’s evidence is compatible with the silence gap: the earliest clearly dated Gakkai internal printing and directory material clusters around 1926–1930, which is consistent with the idea that institutional tooling and standardized publication followed only after the memorial consolidation threshold.

CONCLUSION: FORMATION THROUGH MEDIATION, AND 1927 AS CANONIZATION THRESHOLD

The findings of this study suggest that when taken together, the five demonstrations support a coherent reconstruction¹ of early Reiki that avoids *ex nihilo* assumptions while remaining transparent about evidentiary limits. Reiki emerges most plausibly through a formative transmission phase (c. 1919–1922/23) and an extended formative–articulative mediation phase (c. 1922–1927), before reaching a threshold of provisional canonization and memorial consolidation in 1927. This model explains why *reiki ryōhō* can appear

¹ Contemporary online statements by self-identified members of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai (i.e. post in Facebook group ‘Reiki Practitioners, Masters and Teachers’ by 若竹守 Mamoru Wakatake, January 29, 2026) provide insight into present-day institutional identity and transmission ideology but should not be read as direct evidence for the formative Taishō-period history of Reiki. The features emphasized in such accounts—closed membership, lineage control, non-commercialization, and illness-based entry—are best understood as post-canonization strategies shaped by later memorial consolidation and postwar recalibration, rather than as documented conditions of the early formative phase examined here.

publicly prior to 1922, why ethical teaching can be present without a fixed canonical list, why curricular layers (such as Meiji poems) can be integrated and later reconfigured, and why a striking silence persists in the press record until the memorial layer provides a first public anchor.

The phased reconstruction also strengthens the historical plausibility of the Yokoi–Usui teacher–student hypothesis (Jonker 2025b). If Reiki is approached not as a sudden invention in 1922 but as a transmissible practice that emerged through formation, mediation, and later canonization, then the question shifts from “who founded Reiki in a single moment?” to “through whom could a coherent moral-therapeutic discipline have been formed and transmitted prior to its later public stabilization?” The pre-1922 attestations of *reiki ryōhō*, the structured “silence gap” prior to 1927, and the post-1927 condensation of ethics and curriculum together imply that an earlier formative milieu must have existed in which instruction could occur informally and selectively. Within that logic, a formative teacher becomes historically probable even without documentary naming, and Yokoi remains the most plausible candidate given the convergence between his late ethical–spiritual concerns and the kind of disciplined moral cultivation later embedded in Reiki’s early pedagogy. This does not constitute direct proof of a Yokoi–Usui relationship, but it shows that the three-phase model provides the conceptual and historical space in which such a relationship becomes not speculative excess, but a parsimonious explanation of how Reiki could acquire coherence prior to institutional canonization.

Methodologically, the early history of Reiki is best described as *formation through mediation*. Coherent practice precedes bureaucracy; ethics precedes canonical listing; and institutional memory stabilizes only after formative conditions have passed. The phased model therefore does not negate Usui’s central role in public articulation, nor does it require documentary overclaims regarding specific teacher–student relations. It does, however, provide a historically economical framework that accounts for both the evidence and the structured silences that characterize Reiki’s earliest history.

APPENDIX: MEIJI POEMS AS A CANONIZATION / CURRICULAR LAYER

In 2025, a new book about Reiki and its history saw daylight; Olaf Böhm 2025, *Reiki. A Journey to Oneness with the Universe*. This appendix comments among others on the content of chapter 9, the Meiji poems.

A close reading of Böhm’s chapter 9, combined with the 1927 Saihōji Memorial Stone text and the 1928 publication of Okuna, strengthens the argument that early Reiki teaching incorporated culturally authoritative imperial material in ways that later became politically and institutionally sensitive—especially in the post-WWII period. At the same time, this comparison clarifies an important methodological distinction: the Memorial Stone supports the pedagogical use of Meiji poems as moral admonitions, but it does not securely establish that Usui personally compiled a fixed and standardized selection. This makes retrospective stabilization and founder-attribution by the Gakkai the more plausible historical scenario.

Nation-state transformation

Earlier work (Jonker 2016) already explained that the use of Meiji Emperor poems within early Reiki-related pedagogy must be situated against the broader transformation of Japan from a feudal polity into a modern nation-state during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Following the forced opening of Japan by

Western powers—symbolized most famously by Commodore Perry’s arrival in 1853—the Meiji state undertook rapid political, military, and cultural modernization to avert colonization and assert national sovereignty. This process entailed the dismantling of the Samurai order, the creation of a conscript-based army and navy, and the construction of a unifying moral ideology capable of disciplining citizens within a newly centralized state. Moral education (*shūshin / seishin kyōiku*) became a key instrument in this process, embedding loyalty, self-sacrifice, emotional discipline, and national unity within everyday ethical formation. Imperial texts—most notably the Emperor’s rescripts and poems—functioned as authoritative moral speech acts rather than merely literary expressions. When Meiji poems were incorporated into Reiki teaching, they therefore carried a culturally charged pedagogical function: they supplied an already-legitimate moral-educational layer through which individual self-cultivation could be aligned with nationally sanctioned virtues. The presence of nationalistic and, in some cases, battlefield-capable rhetoric within early poem selections should thus be read not as an anomaly, but as reflective of a broader Meiji–Taishō moral regime in which spiritual discipline, ethical formation, and national cohesion were structurally intertwined.

Imperial-national register and battlefield-capable rhetoric

Böhm’s presentation of the earliest poem selection demonstrates that describing the first set as merely “patriotic” is an understatement. Several poems operate within an explicitly imperial-national register rather than a timeless ethical one. Poem no. 13 frames correct national sentiment as a single obligatory orientation that remains the same whether one is on the battlefield or not, while poem no. 16 explicitly legitimises bringing down enemies for the homeland (even while urging compassion). In addition, a number of the opening poems (e.g., nos. 1–5) sacralise Japan through divine inheritance and heaven–earth cosmology, reinforcing collective moral unity under an imperial frame.

*Alignment with *kōgeki seishin* as a contemporary ideological milieu*

Read against the broader early-twentieth-century context, this first poem layer aligns closely with the ideological atmosphere later formalized in the military program of *kōgeki seishin* (攻撃精神). In the Japanese state’s discourse of “spiritual education” (*seishin kyōiku*), fighting spirit functioned as a moral-psychological resource intended to overcome material limitation through disciplined inner resolve (Jonker 2016, Beeler and Jonker 2020). The presence of battlefield language and enemy-capable ethics in the earliest poem selection therefore does not merely indicate generic nationalism; it resonates with a historically specific register of combat-readiness and imperial moral unity that was cultivated as a social ideal in modern Japan.

Attribution problem: multiple textual layers rather than a single founder canon

However, Böhm’s chapter also raises a question of attribution. Böhm reproduces evidence of a “100 Meiji Gyosei” booklet published in February 1926², but notes that it does not bear Usui’s name, which strengthens the interpretation that poem circulation and later founder-attribution are mediated layers rather than direct founder-authored canon. While

² So, the earliest known *waka* booklet associated with Reiki practice is dated February 1926 and does not name Usui. Usui died approximately one month later, and no contemporaneous obituary, memorial service notice, or newspaper announcement is known. This suggests that, at the time of his death, Usui may not yet have been publicly canonized as a founder figure, even though his teaching informed practice. Explicit founder attribution appears only in posthumous sources from 1927 onward (e.g., the memorial stone and Okuna 1928), indicating a shift from formative transmission to retrospective stabilization.

he reports that “it has been said” that Usui selected a defined set of poems (often expressed as a fixed number), the booklet evidence he reproduces does not straightforwardly secure this as a biographical fact: Usui is not named within the booklet text itself, and the poem corpus appears as a mediated publication layer rather than a clearly signed founder document. In other words, Böhm’s material is valuable, precisely because it reveals the early existence of the poem layer, but it does not settle the question of who canonized it into a stable set. In addition, Böhm’s discussion implies multiple publication layers: a prewar booklet selection (Feb. 1926), a postwar edition shortly after WWII, a later published *Hikkei* edition (1971), and a later published stream from 1991 onward in which ordering differs and overlap is partial.

As earlier work already demonstrated (Jonker 2016), the post-1945 reconfiguration of the Meiji poem corpus must be understood against the profound rupture caused by Japan’s defeat in the Second World War and the subsequent Allied Occupation (1945–1952). The collapse of the imperial war ideology, the public renunciation of the Emperor’s divinity, and the dismantling of state-Shintō fundamentally altered the moral and symbolic landscape in which imperial texts had previously functioned. Under the new constitutional order, overt imperial-national rhetoric—especially material resonant with military sacrifice, battlefield ethics, or unconditional loyalty—became politically untenable and socially suspect. At the same time, many religious and spiritual movements faced the practical challenge of survival in a climate shaped by demilitarization, enforced pacifism, and heightened scrutiny of organizations perceived as ideologically compromised. In this context, the continued pedagogical use of Meiji Emperor poems required recalibration. Poem selections emphasizing universal ethical qualities such as sincerity, calmness, gratitude, and moral self-discipline could be retained and reinterpreted within a therapeutic or spiritual framework, while poems carrying explicit nationalistic or war-capable rhetoric were increasingly omitted or reordered. The post-1945 modification of the poem set should therefore be read not as doctrinal rupture or loss of tradition, but as an adaptive strategy of ethical preservation under radically transformed political conditions, allowing Reiki-related practice to detach itself from imperial symbolism while maintaining continuity of moral cultivation.

A further recalibration occurred in 1971 and should be read in relation to the broader *Zeitgeist* of that period in Japan. The appearance of the 1971 *Hikkei* is unlikely to be accidental. Rather, the reconfiguration of the Meiji-poem layer at this moment is best interpreted as a late-postwar act of institutional legitimacy management and pedagogical adaptation. By the early 1970s, the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai operated in a politically and culturally sensitive environment shaped by the crisis atmosphere surrounding the 1970 renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) and its associated protest culture, by renewed public debate over pacifism, militarization, and Japan’s “peace state” identity in the lead-up to the 1972 Okinawa reversion, and by the already-established postwar constitutional and educational framework that rendered overt imperial-national moral rhetoric increasingly difficult to sustain without modification. In addition, the growing public visibility of new religious and spiritual movements heightened reputational pressures to present teachings in forms that appeared socially acceptable, non-nationalist, and ethically universal. In this context, the 1971 *Hikkei* can be read as a selective curatorial intervention that foregrounded universally legible virtues while minimizing elements likely to be perceived as ideologically charged. In this context, a handbook-style *Hikkei* (必携) compilation dated 1971 plausibly reflects institutional standardization: re-ordering and curating poems to foreground universally legible virtues (sincerity, calmness, compassion)

while minimizing elements that could be read as ideologically charged. This reading aligns with Böhm's own presentation of multiple poem "versions" across time and supports the conclusion that Meiji-poem usage belongs primarily to later processes of stabilization and postwar reframing rather than to a fixed founder-period canon.

The Memorial Stone as control text: poems in practice, not proof of compilation

This is where the Memorial Stone becomes decisive as a control text. In the Memorial Stone translation, Meiji Emperor poems are presented as "admonitory" material used pedagogically alongside the Five Precepts: students should first understand the Emperor's admonitions, and morning and evening they should chant and keep the precepts in mind. The Memorial Stone thus confirms that imperial poetry functioned as a moral-disciplinary framework within the teaching environment. Yet crucially, the Memorial Stone does not explicitly state that Usui compiled a fixed selection, nor does it document a specific number of poems or a definitive founder-edited anthology. What it secures is the role of the poems in practice—not the authorship of a standardized corpus.

This pedagogical use of imperial poetry must also be situated within the wider imperial educational regime of modern Japan, in which authoritative texts were not merely "read" but performed as quasi-sacral speech acts. In an earlier study (Beeler and Jonker 2020), the *Imperial Rescript on Education* is described as a performative text that had to be recited daily, cultivating moral virtues while reinforcing piety toward the Emperor. The same source (Benedict 1969 in: Beeler and Jonker 2020), emphasizes that imperial rescripts were treated as "Holy Writ" (sacred scripture), read before hushed audiences with formal bows, and that the social consequences of misreading such texts could be severe—so severe that some appointed readers took their own lives after making a mistake. This context clarifies why the incorporation of Meiji poems in Reiki teaching could function as more than moral inspiration: it also operated as a culturally unquestionable authorization layer, embedded in a social climate in which imperial wording carried a sacrosanct status and was surrounded by a logic akin to *lèse-majesté*.

Okuna's book as control text

Okuna's 1928 account can be used as a second control text that independently corroborates this pedagogical layer. In his discussion of Usui's teaching, Okuna presents the ethical framework not only in terms of disciplined self-cultivation and character improvement but explicitly links it to the Five Precepts and to the moral authority of imperial instruction by referring to "Meiji Tennō's *Gyosei*" (明治天皇の御製). This confirms that Meiji imperial poems functioned within the teaching environment as a moral–didactic resource alongside the precepts, rather than as a purely later invention. At the same time, this imperial moral authority did not operate in only one register: it could be integrated into a therapeutic-ethical framework of psycho-spiritual cultivation (*seishin ryōhō*), while also remaining compatible with more explicitly militarized discourses of "spiritual education", such as *kōgeki seishin*, depending on selection and framing. Okuna's text itself remains firmly within the former register and does not articulate battlefield-capable rhetoric.

Finally, Okuna does not document a fixed authorised selection (a canon), a defined number of poems, or an explicit claim that Usui personally compiled a standardized corpus. His value therefore lies in confirming the integration and function of the poems in practice, while leaving open the later question of stabilization, ordering, and founder-attribution that emerges more strongly in subsequent publication layers.

And finally, Tomita (1933) confirms Meiji Emperor poems (*gyosei*) were already used as a practical method for mind-purification and concentration within early Reiki-related training, but this work also does not document who standardized or canonized a fixed poem set (Usui vs. Gakkai).

Conclusions regarding the Meiji poems

Taken together, these findings strengthen the postwar reorganization hypothesis in a more precise way. The issue is not only that early Reiki-related material could later be read as ideologically nationalistic; it is also that later actors had incentives to preserve the ethical core while managing its public meaning.

The Memorial Stone confirms the integration of imperial poems as moral admonitions, while Böhm's evidence shows that at least the earliest poem layer included rhetoric that was compatible with battlefield-capable moralization and therefore resonant with the wider ideological milieu later formalized as *kōgeki seishin*. This dynamic is best understood against the broader imperial educational regime in which authoritative texts were treated as quasi-sacral speech acts: the *Imperial Rescript on Education*, for example, functioned as a performative text to be recited, and the imperial rescripts can be regarded as “Holy Writ”, read before hushed audiences with formal bows, with the social consequences of misreading so severe that some appointed readers took their own lives after making a mistake (Benedict in: Beeler and Jonker 2020). In such a climate, incorporating Meiji poems into Reiki teaching could function not only as ethical guidance but also as an authorization layer protected by a logic akin to *lèse-majesté*. For that reason, the most plausible historical scenario is that the incorporation and stabilization of the poem layer as a recognizable curricular component was mediated institutionally by the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai, even if the underlying practice may have circulated informally during the post-1922 formative-consolidative period. In a postwar climate where organizations perceived as too closely aligned with imperial-national discourse were dismantled or pressured into neutrality, it becomes historically coherent that the Gakkai's later closed profile and its careful management of curricular presentation were not merely matters of secrecy or tradition, but adaptive strategies of institutional survival.

The evidence presented above supports not two separate “Reiki origins”, but two early curricular registers: an imperial-national poem layer compatible with *kōgeki seishin* moralization in some Gakkai-mediated selections, and a therapeutic-ethical poem layer functioning within *seishin ryōhō*-style cultivation in Tomita's pedagogical presentation.

APPENDIX: HAYASHI AS MEDIATOR OF THE YOKOI–USUI FORMATIVE LEGACY

The trajectory of Chujiro Hayashi's actions in the 1930s and early 1940s can be read as revealing a growing distance from the ideological currents of late-Taishō and early-Shōwa Japan, particularly the intensification of state-aligned nationalism. This interpretation does not depend on claims about Hayashi's inner convictions, but on the cumulative pattern formed by his institutional choices, transmission decisions, and historical timing.

Hayashi's withdrawal from the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai during the 1930s coincides with the period in which Reiki increasingly acquired formal structure, leadership titles, and symbolic alignment with elite social networks. By this stage, the Gakkai no longer functioned merely as a loosely organized therapeutic or spiritual network but had entered a phase of institutional consolidation (despite the lack of any notions in the press). Distancing oneself from such a structure at this historical moment plausibly reflects

discomfort with the directions in which institutional and ideological entanglements were moving, even if no explicit dissent was voiced.

This distancing is reinforced by Hayashi's mode of transmission. His decision to train Hawayo Takata, initially in Japan but completing it on Hawaii, effectively relocated the continuity of Reiki beyond the national framework that was becoming increasingly dominant at home. After this transmission in 1940, Hayashi disappears from subsequent lineage-forming narratives within Japan (except for Jikiden Reiki), while Takata becomes the sole effective vector through which Reiki survives internationally. The asymmetry is striking: continuity is preserved, but not within the emerging nationalist or institutional memory structures.

A further and highly revealing element concerns the Meiji emperor poems. As explained in Appendix: Meiji Poems as a Canonization / Curricular Layer, Böhm's research indicates that, in the early phase of Reiki's institutional history, a set of Meiji poems circulated that contained explicit martial and war-oriented rhetoric. After the Second World War, this set was replaced by another selection, (mostly) stripped of militaristic content and reframed as universal ethical guidance³. This replacement demonstrates that the poems were not static spiritual inheritances but historically contingent symbolic resources, capable of being reconfigured in response to political and ideological pressures.

Against this background, the absence of the Meiji poems in Takata's teaching takes on added significance. By the late 1930s, imperial poetry functioned as a condensed vehicle of loyalty, moral discipline, and national identity. Hayashi's failure to transmit these poems—whether by choice or omission—effectively prevented Reiki from being bound to imperial symbolism in its overseas transmission. In light of Böhm's findings, this omission appears less accidental and more structurally meaningful: it interrupts the chain through which Reiki might otherwise have carried wartime imperial rhetoric into its postwar global forms.

Finally, Hayashi's death (assumably following his drafting for active military service) in 1940 must be approached with restraint. No single motive can be inferred, and no psychological conclusions are warranted. Yet the timing cannot be ignored. It occurs after his withdrawal from the Gakkai, after the externalization of Reiki's transmission, and at the height of ideological mobilization just prior to Japan's alignment with Germany and Italy (September 27, 1940, *Tripartite Pact*). Within this sequence, his death marks a terminal rupture rather than a continuation within the nationalist order.

Taken together, these elements support a coherent historical reading: Hayashi's actions consistently seem to move away from institutional consolidation, imperial symbolism, and nationalist alignment. This does not establish opposition in an ideological sense, but it does justify interpreting his trajectory as one of progressive disengagement. The later postwar replacement of the Meiji poems confirms that Reiki's symbolic framework was subject to ideological recalibration—further underscoring that Hayashi's transmission choices shaped a version of Reiki that could survive precisely because it was no longer tethered to the rhetoric of empire.

When read through the lens of formative emergence and later institutional consolidation, Hayashi's role acquires a distinct structural significance. He occupies the hinge between a pre-institutional formative phase, in which Reiki took shape through lived practice and

³ It falls outside the scope of this study to compare the poems one by one as present in the existing versions of the Meiji poems.

personal transmission, and a post-formative phase, in which that practice was selectively stabilized, reframed, and relocated beyond Japan.

Hayashi is the only known figure to have trained a *shihan*—Hawayo Takata—who transmitted not merely techniques and ethical guidelines, but a sustained origin narrative. Crucially, this narrative does not correspond to a single historical biography. As established in earlier work (Jonker 2024, –2025a, –2025b), it conflates elements from the lives of both Mikao Usui and Tokio Yokoi, merging them into one remembered founder figure. This conflation should not be understood as error or invention, but as a characteristic feature of oral transmission operating across phases of historical transition through time and space.

Within the formative phase, Yokoi’s contribution is best understood as conceptual and pedagogical: a framework of moral cultivation, sanctification, and healing shaped within Christian and comparative-religious contexts, transmitted through personal teaching rather than institutional structures. Usui’s contribution, by contrast, belongs to the later formative and early post-formative phase, in which practice becomes publicly visible, ritualized, and transmissible beyond its original circle. Takata’s narrative preserves traces of both trajectories, precisely because it reflects a period in which Reiki had not yet been fully fixed into a single institutional memory.

Hayashi’s transmission choices operate at the threshold between formation and consolidation. His withdrawal from the Gakkai in the 1930s distances him from an institutional environment increasingly marked by hierarchy, elite patronage, and imperial symbolism. His non-transmission of the Meiji emperor poems—shown by Böhm to have originally included martial rhetoric—prevents Reiki’s overseas lineage from inheriting nationalist moral language. At the same time, the biographical narrative he transmits retains formative depth by compressing Yokoi’s and Usui’s lives into a single, portable story, capable of surviving outside Japan.

Seen in this way, the Takata narrative functions as a formative memory artifact rather than an institutional charter. It preserves what mattered before consolidation: the quest for healing, disciplined spiritual training, moral transformation, and transmissible empowerment. What it does not preserve—formal offices, organizational titles, imperial symbolism—belongs to the later institutional consolidation stratum, which remained largely confined to Japan and did not pass into the global lineage.

This alignment clarifies why Hayashi is structurally unique. He is not merely a technical transmitter, nor a late institutional leader, but the final mediator of the formative phase. Through him, Reiki crosses from an emergent, layered origin into a global future, carrying with it a composite narrative that reflects its actual historical formation more faithfully than any later, streamlined institutional account.

In this sense, Hayashi’s role confirms rather than complicates the stratified model: formation precedes institution; narrative precedes bureaucracy; and the Takata story preserves formation precisely because it stands outside consolidation.

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Network Utilization, Formative Transmission, and the Silence Gap: Canonization and the Institutional Emergence of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai

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ABSTRACT

This article develops further implications of the three-phase reconstruction model of early Reiki (formation, mediation, canonization) (Jonker 2026), focusing specifically on the emergence and early institutionalization of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai. The phased model has demonstrated that while Reiki functioned as a transmissible healing practice prior to 1922, the first secure public attribution of founder status and organizational identity appears only with the erection of the Usui Memorial Stone in 1927¹. This chronological pattern invites reconsideration of the relationship between Mikao Usui and the Gakkai.

Rather than treating the Gakkai as an institution founded by Usui in a single initiating act (as commonly assumed, in 1922), the present study examines the historically plausible possibility that the Gakkai emerged through the consolidation of an existing network that adopted, stabilized, and later canonized teachings associated with Usui. Particular attention is given to the Memorial Stone as a canonization-layer document, situating its founder attribution within the broader process of posthumous institutional stabilization characteristic of Phase–3 (canonization and memorial consolidation).

The findings suggest that the 1927 memorial inscription is best understood not as a *neutral record* of an earlier founding event, but as part of a *retrospective process* through which lineage, authority, and institutional continuity were formally articulated. Such canonization-layer documents typically do not merely preserve memory but also stabilize it, selectively standardizing biographical detail, emphasizing particular origin narratives, and integrating the founder into a coherent institutional framework suited to the needs of the emerging organization. This interpretation strengthens the explanatory coherence of the three-phase model and clarifies how Reiki could circulate as a coherent practice prior to its later stabilization within a named institutional framework.

¹ The date February 1927 is the date recorded on the memorial inscription. Given the monument’s size and the production process involved, the carving and physical placement may have occurred over a longer period. The date can therefore be understood as referring to the moment of inscription or dedication within the broader memorialization process.

1. INTRODUCTION

The three-phase reconstruction model of early Reiki (formation, mediation, canonization) has demonstrated that the earliest secure public attribution of founder status and organizational identity appears only with the erection of the Usui Memorial Stone in February 1927. Prior to that threshold, the documentary record contains public attestations of *reiki ryōhō* as a practice category, yet it does not name Mikao Usui as founder nor identify a formally constituted Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai.

This chronological pattern raises a historiographical question: how should the relationship between Usui and the Gakkai be understood within a phased model of emergence? If Reiki functioned as a transmissible practice prior to its public canonization, then the institutional articulation visible in 1927 may represent not the beginning of the practice itself, but the stabilization of memory, authority, and lineage at a post-formative stage.

This present article therefore examines the early history of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai as a case of canonization-layer consolidation. Rather than assuming a singular founding moment in 1922, it explores the possibility that the Gakkai crystallized through the adoption and stabilization of an already circulating moral-therapeutic discipline. In this reading, the Memorial Stone functions not as a neutral chronicle of origins, but as the first datable public articulation of institutional continuity.

2. FROM FOUNDER ATTRIBUTION TO CANONIZATION: REFRAMING THE GAKKAI-USUI RELATIONSHIP

The memorial inscription erected in 1927 constitutes the earliest secure public statement identifying Mikao Usui as founder of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai. Its authorship, timing, and narrative structure provide an opportunity to examine how founder attribution was formally articulated and stabilized at the moment when the continuity of the organization required durable symbolic anchoring. The question addressed in this chapter is therefore not whether Usui played a central role in the emergence of Reiki, but how and under what circumstances his role came to be publicly defined in institutional terms.

The proposal that the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai did not originate as a formally founded institution but emerged through the gradual consolidation of an already existing informal network has direct implications for the three-phase model of early Reiki. Importantly, this reframing does not displace the formative teacher–student hypothesis involving Tokio Yokoi and Mikao Usui; rather, it clarifies the structural conditions under which such a formative transmission could occur without leaving immediate documentary traces.

This proposal develops an alternative already noted in my earlier dissertation (Jonker 2016, §6.4.5.), where the possibility of naval involvement in the Gakkai's formation was discussed as a secondary hypothesis. The present article does not introduce a new claim but expands that earlier observation into a processual, network-based explanatory model.

Methodologically, this distinction is reinforced by the fact that the same work (Jonker 2016, §6.4.9.) has shown that there is some *emic* literature that suggests that Usui had already a dojo and was already a teacher at the time naval officers crossed his path (Jonker 2016, pp246-247 referring to Beckett 2009, pp14-18). Beckett² stated that in 1925,

² Beckett's account belongs to *emic* Reiki literature based on retrospective testimony. While widely cited within practitioner circles, the specific historical details have not been independently corroborated in archival sources.

a group of high ranked naval officers arrived at Usui's dojo to learn Usui's system. Furthermore, in elaborating about the relationship between Usui and the Imperial Navy, I unfolded a picture (Jonker 2016, p248) of Usui as someone offering a technique that gets 'abused' by the Navy to help officers of the Imperial Navy reach a state of *anshin ritsume* where peace of mind had priority over peace in the world, while at the same time the same technique is used by the Navy to obtain physical healing.

This distinction is further reinforced by the fact that Okuna Shigejirō's 1928 book discusses Reiki practice and ethical cultivation but does not mention a formally founded Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai, supporting the view that organizational naming belongs to a later canonization layer rather than to the formative or articulative phases.

And finally, Tomita Kaiji's 1933 account, while later edited with reference to the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai, treats Reiki primarily as a practiced and taught discipline without reference to a founding moment, thereby corroborating the silence gap resolution proposed by the three-phase model.

Within Phase 1 (c. 1919–1922), the emphasis lies on formative transmission rather than institutional visibility. If Usui acquired a coherent, ethically framed, and transmissible healing discipline during this period, the absence of public documentation is not atypical. Pedagogical relationships—especially those operating within elite, religious, or therapeutic circles—do not typically generate press traces, organizational charters, or named institutions. In this sense, the Yokoi–Usui hypothesis belongs squarely to Phase 1 and remains unaffected by later questions concerning organizational naming or leadership attribution.

The question of the Gakkai's origin becomes salient only in Phase 2 (c. 1922–1927), where practices begin to circulate more widely and require stabilization. A *network-first* model suggests that what later came to be called the “Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai” functioned initially as an informal social and pedagogical network, plausibly overlapping with naval and elite circles already invested in moral cultivation, *seishin shūyō*³. In such a context, Usui need not be understood as the institutional founder, but as a practitioner whose methods were taken up, adapted, and transmitted within an existing milieu concerned with discipline, composure, and ethical formation—including what would later be framed as *kōgeki seishin* 攻撃精神. This explains why early Reiki appears functional and transmissible before it appears named or canonized.

This reframing directly addresses the silence gap: the near absence of contemporaneous newspaper references to Usui, the Gakkai, or a founding event prior to 1927. The early usage of the term “reiki” should not be retroactively equated with a fixed institutional system; earlier scholarship has demonstrated that the word functioned in multiple semantic registers in early twentieth-century Japan. If Reiki circulated during Phases 1 and 2 primarily through interpersonal transmission within closed or semi-closed networks, silence in the public archive is no longer a problem to be explained away but an expected outcome. Public visibility becomes historically anchored only in Phase 3 (from 1927 onward), when memorialization, naming, and founder attribution emerge together. The

³ *Seishin shūyō* (精神修養): Literally “spiritual cultivation” or “mental discipline”. In the late Meiji and Taishō periods, the term referred to a widespread movement of moral and psychological self-cultivation aimed at strengthening character, self-control, and civic virtue. It drew eclectically on Neo-Confucian ethics, Zen discipline, bushidō ideals, and emerging modern psychologies, and functioned as a key conceptual framework within the broader culture of inner or psycho-spiritual training (*seishin bunka* 精神文化) in early twentieth-century Japan.

1927 Memorial Stone thus marks not the beginning of Reiki, but the threshold of canonization.

This model also clarifies the role of Chujiro Hayashi. Hayashi's later systematization and organizational leadership are better understood as acts of consolidation within Phase 2–3 rather than as succession from a clearly documented founder. His background as a naval officer aligns structurally with a network-based transmission model and helps explain how Reiki moved from informal circulation to stabilized pedagogy without requiring a singular founding moment.

What this reframing adds, finally, is a methodological correction. It shifts analysis away from *founder-centric narratives* toward *processual formation*, distinguishing clearly between (1) formative transmission, (2) network utilization and stabilization, and (3) posthumous canonization. By doing so, it preserves the explanatory power of the three-phase theory, resolves the silence gap without special pleading, and leaves the Yokoi–Usui teacher hypothesis intact and, in fact, more structurally plausible.

The re-appearance of Reiki in Japan during the 1980s did not represent the uninterrupted continuation of its formative Taishō-period practice, but its re-introduction through the Hayashi–Takata lineage, already shaped by post-1926 articulation and post-war global transmission. This confirms that different modern forms of Reiki preserve different historical layers of the tradition, and that neither contemporary institutional practice nor Western lineage transmission can be assumed to represent without mediation the formative Yokoi–Usui phase. The continued existence of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai within Japan likewise reflects institutional continuity belonging to the canonization and post-canonization layers, rather than providing direct documentary access to the formative phase itself.

All this raises the question why the Memorial Stone then depicts Usui as founder of the Gakkai.

3. WHY DOES THE MEMORIAL STONE MENTION USUI AS FOUNDER OF THE GAKKAI?

To answer this question within the framework of the three-phase reconstruction model, the Memorial Stone must be situated at the precise historical threshold between mediation and canonization. The chronological sequence is therefore critical. In March 1926, Usui died following a stroke, and his passing was not accompanied by public obituary notices, press reports, or formal institutional announcements—an absence consistent with the silence gap characteristic of the formative and mediative phases. In December 1926, the imperial transition from the Taishō to the Shōwa era marked a broader shift in Japan's political and moral environment. Only thereafter, in February 1927, does the first durable public act of institutional memorialization appear: the erection of the Usui Memorial Stone. Within the phased model, this sequence does not represent the beginning of Reiki or of the Gakkai, but the moment at which previously fluid teaching relationships and organizational structures were retrospectively stabilized through founder attribution, lineage articulation, and canonizing inscription.

3.1. THE YEAR 1927 – FROM TASHŌ TO SHŌWA-ERA JAPAN

From the perspective of the three-phase reconstruction model, the year 1927 represents a structurally intelligible moment for founder attribution and institutional canonization rather than an arbitrary commemorative act. Within the phased framework, the period c.

1919–1922 corresponds to formative transmission, characterized by interpersonal teaching and minimal institutional visibility, while the years c. 1922–1927 represent an extended mediative phase during which practices circulated but remained organizationally fluid. The transition from the Taishō era (大正時代) to the Shōwa era (昭和時代) on 25 December 1926, followed shortly after Usui’s death in March 1926, precisely created the conditions under which retrospective stabilization of authority and lineage became institutionally necessary.

It is therefore only in February 1927 that the first durable public act of memorialization appears in the historical record: the erection of the Usui Memorial Stone. Within the phased model, this moment marks the threshold of canonization, in which previously transmitted practices, ethical teachings, and pedagogical relationships were formally condensed into a stabilized founder narrative and institutional identity. The Memorial Stone thus coincides not with the emergence of Reiki as a practice, but with the point at which organizational continuity required retrospective consolidation. In this light, the inscription’s attribution of a 1922 founding date is best understood as part of this canonizing process, projecting institutional coherence backward onto an earlier formative period that had not yet produced fixed organizational structures or publicly documented founder claims.

3.2. THE 21-DAY RETREAT ON MT. KURAMA

The Memorial Stone’s reference to a 21-day retreat on Mt. Kurama must be situated within the canonization phase identified in the three-phase reconstruction model. The inscription constitutes the earliest known source to present this retreat as the decisive moment of Usui’s spiritual attainment and teaching authority. Notably, no reference to such a retreat appears in the surviving hand-written material attributed to Usui himself, nor in contemporaneous documentation from his lifetime currently available to researchers. This chronological asymmetry indicates that the Kurama narrative becomes publicly visible only at the point of memorial consolidation in 1927.

Recent research by Olaf Böhm (2025), which reproduces early Reiki-related *waka* booklets and examines multiple publication layers, further confirms that key narrative and curricular elements associated with Usui became textually stabilized only in sources appearing after his death in March 1926. Particularly relevant in this regard is Okuna Shigejirō’s *Tenrai no koe* (1928), which presents the Kurama retreat narrative within a historical context shaped by the transition of December 1926 from the relatively liberal Taishō period to the more authority-oriented early Shōwa era. Appearing shortly after both the erection of the February 1927 memorial inscription and this broader political and ideological consolidation, Okuna’s account is best understood as reflecting the canonization-phase stabilization of founder memory and institutional identity rather than constituting independent contemporaneous documentation of formative-phase events.

This interpretation builds upon earlier observations (Jonker 2016) that the retreat narrative derives primarily from *emic* tradition and memorial transmission rather than from contemporaneous documentation, and that its historiographical function is therefore better understood as explanatory of teaching authority than as direct evidence of formative acquisition.

Within the phased model, this pattern is historically intelligible. Canonization-layer documents commonly condense extended processes of training, transmission, and pedagogical formation into a single symbolic origin event capable of anchoring institutional identity and founder authority. In this context, the Kurama retreat functions not primarily as documentation of formative transmission itself, but as a retrospective

narrative stabilization that renders the founder's authority legible within a culturally recognizable framework.

Such retreat narratives were widely intelligible within the psycho-spiritual culture of late Meiji and Taishō Japan, where mountain withdrawal (山籠り, *yamagomori*) functioned as an established means of moral purification, spiritual discipline, and acquisition of religious authority across Buddhist, Shugendō, and independent spiritual training contexts. Its inclusion on the Memorial Stone therefore aligns structurally with the transition from formative transmission to institutional canonization, providing a coherent and culturally authoritative origin narrative at the moment when organizational continuity required durable symbolic anchoring.

The absence of the retreat narrative in currently extant lifetime documentation does not invalidate the memorial inscription, but it does clarify its historical function: it belongs to the canonization layer through which earlier formative transmission was retrospectively stabilized and condensed into institutional founder memory.

3.3. THE AUTHOR OF THE MEMORIAL STONE

A further critical element for understanding the canonization process concerns the authorship of the Memorial Stone itself. The inscription identifies Admiral Ushida Juzaburō (牛田従三郎), who succeeded Usui as president of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai, as the author of the text. This detail is historiographically significant, because it locates the formal articulation of the founder narrative within the leadership of the post-Usui institutional environment rather than within Usui's own lifetime.

Within the three-phase reconstruction model, this authorship aligns structurally with the transition into the canonization phase. Following the death of a central transmitting figure, successor leadership commonly assumes responsibility for preserving continuity, stabilizing lineage, and articulating institutional identity. The memorial inscription can therefore be understood not merely as a commemorative text, but as a formal act of organizational self-definition, in which previously transmitted practices and teaching relationships were retrospectively consolidated into a coherent founder narrative capable of supporting institutional continuity.

This interpretation does not require the assumption that the inscription preserves a complete or neutral historical record. Rather, it reflects a historically recognizable process in which successor leadership articulates founder memory in ways that preserve continuity, clarify lineage, and stabilize institutional identity. Such processes may involve the selective preservation, emphasis, or framing of particular biographical elements, while other aspects of earlier transmission remain unrecorded or recede from institutional memory. The attribution of founding agency to Usui in the memorial inscription thus becomes intelligible as part of the canonization threshold identified in 1927: a moment at which the preservation of continuity required durable symbolic anchoring in the person of a single designated founder, through whom the emerging organization articulated its lineage and public identity.

This process of retrospective stabilization corresponds to broader patterns observed in the development of modern Japanese spiritual movements. As shown in earlier research, Reiki emerged during a period in which numerous new spiritual groups appeared in Japan and subsequently developed structures that enabled their continuation beyond the lifetime of their founder. Comparable processes of posthumous institutional consolidation can be observed, for example, in movements such as Tenrikyō and Ōmoto, where successor leadership formalized founder identity and lineage through organizational narratives and commemorative practices in order to stabilize continuity beyond the founder's lifetime.

Organizational narratives likewise played an important role in translating previously fluid teaching relationships into durable institutional continuity, allowing transmitted practice to become anchored in stabilized lineage and institutional memory (Jonker 2016).

In this light, the authorship of the Usui Memorial Stone by Ushida reflects the transition from lived transmission to institutional memory. The inscription represents the moment at which founder attribution, lineage continuity, and organizational identity became formally articulated within a durable commemorative framework. It therefore functions simultaneously as memorial, lineage affirmation, and canonization document, marking the point at which Reiki's earlier formative transmission became stabilized within the emerging institutional structure of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai.

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

The present study set out to examine how the attribution of founding agency to Mikao Usui and the reported establishment of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai in 1922, as recorded on the 1927 Memorial Stone, can be understood in light of the broader documentary silence and the known historical development of Reiki practice. Rather than treating the memorial inscription as a neutral record of an earlier founding event, the analysis approached it as part of a historically situated process of institutional stabilization and memory consolidation.

The findings demonstrate that Reiki practice could circulate prior to formal institutional canonization through informal networks of social, professional, and pedagogical exchange. As shown in Chapter 3, such networks provided an environment in which therapeutic practice, ethical instruction, and experiential training could be transmitted without generating the forms of public documentation typically associated with formal organizational founding. This mediative mode of transmission clarifies the otherwise striking absence of contemporaneous press coverage, institutional announcements, or founder attribution during the early 1920s.

Chapter 4 further established that the Memorial Stone inscription of February 1927 represents the earliest durable public articulation linking Usui, Reiki, and a specific founding date. Its timing, authorship by successor leadership, and integration of symbolic origin elements—most notably the Kurama retreat narrative—indicate that the inscription belongs to a canonization layer in which founder identity, lineage continuity, and institutional legitimacy were retrospectively formalized. Within this context, the attribution of founding agency to Usui functions not as contemporaneous documentation of initial formation, but as a memorial stabilization of teaching authority and organizational continuity.

Taken together, these findings clarify how Reiki could emerge, circulate, and acquire coherence as a transmissible practice prior to its later formalization within a named institutional framework. They show that the apparent discontinuity between early practice visibility and later founder attribution does not represent a contradiction in the historical record but reflects the transition from formative transmission and mediative circulation to retrospective canonization and institutional consolidation.

Implications for the Three-Phase reconstruction model

The findings of the present study provide independent structural support for the three-phase reconstruction model of early Reiki history (Jonker 2026). That model proposes that Reiki did not emerge as a fully formed institutional system at a single founding moment, but developed through a sequence of formative transmission, extended mediative

articulation, and later canonization. The evidence examined here—including the post-1926 textual stabilization documented in early Reiki publication layers—aligns closely with each of these phases and clarifies the mechanisms through which the transition from formative practice to institutional memory occurred.

The analysis of network utilization presented in Chapter 3 demonstrates how Reiki could circulate as a coherent therapeutic and pedagogical discipline prior to formal institutional stabilization. The absence of contemporaneous press coverage, public founding announcements, or explicit founder attribution during the early 1920s is consistent with a mediative phase in which transmission occurred primarily through interpersonal instruction, informal associations, and socially embedded practice environments. Rather than indicating nonexistence, the silence gap reflects the structural conditions under which formative transmission took place.

Chapter 4 further confirms that the Memorial Stone inscription of 1927 represents a canonization-layer document, marking the point at which founder attribution, lineage continuity, and institutional identity were formally stabilized. The timing of the inscription, its authorship by successor leadership, and its integration of symbolic origin elements demonstrate that this moment corresponds to the canonization threshold identified in the three-phase model. The attribution of founding agency to Usui in 1922 therefore becomes historically intelligible not as the beginning of Reiki practice itself, but as part of the later retrospective stabilization of an already circulating discipline.

These findings reinforce the central methodological implication of the phased reconstruction: institutional founder narratives often emerge at the point of memorial consolidation rather than at the moment of initial formation. The three-phase model thus provides a coherent explanatory framework capable of integrating formative transmission, mediative circulation, and later canonization into a single historically consistent account. In doing so, it resolves the apparent tension between early practice visibility and later founder attribution by recognizing them as belonging to different phases of the same developmental process.

Final Conclusions

The reconstruction presented in this study demonstrates that the early history of Reiki is most coherently understood as a process of *gradual formation, mediated transmission, and later institutional canonization* rather than as the product of a single identifiable founding moment. The 1927 Memorial Stone inscription represents the first durable public articulation of founder attribution and organizational identity, marking the point at which previously transmitted practice was retrospectively stabilized within a formal lineage framework. This moment of memorial consolidation did not initiate Reiki as a practice but provided it with a structured institutional memory capable of supporting continuity beyond the lifetime of its principal transmitter.

Recognizing the Memorial Stone as a canonization-layer document allows the apparent discontinuities in the historical record to be resolved without requiring either the rejection of founder attribution or the assumption of *ex nihilo* invention. Instead, founder narratives stabilize institutional continuity during memorial consolidation. In this light, the early development of Reiki reflects a historically recognizable pattern in which formative practice precedes institutional definition, and institutional definition in turn stabilizes and preserves that practice through retrospective narrative consolidation. This perspective does not diminish the historical significance of Mikao Usui's role in the articulation and transmission of Reiki. Rather, it situates that role within the dynamic process through which practice, memory, and institution became aligned. By distinguishing between formative emergence and later canonization, the present study contributes to a more historically precise understanding of Reiki's early development and

provides a methodological framework for interpreting the relationship between lived practice and institutional founder memory in the study of modern spiritual traditions.

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APPENDIX: TRANSLATION MEMORIAL STONE

*Editorial Note on the Memorial Stone Translation*⁴

The memorial inscription translated below should be read within its historical function as a commemorative and institutional text composed in February 1927 by Admiral Ushida Juzaburō, Usui’s successor as president of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai. Its opening emphasis on Usui’s moral character and spiritual cultivation reflects the conventions of memorial literature, which seek to honor and stabilize the authority of the deceased rather than to provide a neutral administrative record. Particular narrative elements—most notably the account of the 21-day retreat on Mt. Kurama and the attribution of a specific founding period for his teaching—appear here (to the best of my knowledge) for the first time in the extant public record and are not documented in surviving materials attributable to Usui himself during his lifetime. Their inclusion aligns with a broader process of

⁴ https://www.aetw.org/reiki_usui_memorial.html

retrospective consolidation, in which extended processes of training, teaching, and transmission were condensed into a coherent origin narrative capable of anchoring lineage and institutional continuity. The inscription's emphasis on Usui's role as teacher of numerous students further reinforces this function by establishing a direct line of transmission between the founder and successor generations. The authorship of the text by Ushida confirms that this founder narrative was formally articulated by successor leadership after Usui's death, situating the monument within the canonization phase of Reiki's early institutional history. In this sense, the Memorial Stone represents the earliest durable public act stabilizing founder attribution, lineage continuity, and organizational identity, and is therefore best understood not simply as a record of earlier events but as a document of memorial consolidation produced at a decisive moment in the formation of the Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai's institutional self-understanding.

Reiho Choso Usui Sensei Kudoku No Hi

Memorial of the Benevolence of Usui Sensei,
founder of Reiho (Spiritual Method)
English Version, Copyright © 2003 James Deacon
Translation (especially for AETW.org) by Jiro Kozuki

That which one attains within, as a result of disciplined study and training, is called Virtue, and that which can be offered to others by teaching, and methods of salvation is called Distinguished Service. Only the person of high merit and great virtue can be called a great founding teacher. Sages, philosophers, and brilliant men of old and the founders of new teachings and new religions were all like that. Usui Sensei can be counted among them. Usui Sensei developed the method that would improve mind and body by using the universal power. Having heard of his reputation, countless people from all over gathered and asked him to teach them the great way of the Spiritual Method, and to heal them.

His common name was Mikao and his other name was Gyoho (Kyoho). He was born in the village of Taniai in the Yamagata district of Gifu prefecture. His ancestor's name is Tsunetane Chiba. His father's name was Taneuji, and was commonly called Uzaemon. His mother's family name was Kawai.

Sensei was born in the first year of the Keio period, called Keio Gunnen (1865), on August 15th. He was a talented and hard working student; his ability was far superior to his fellows. When he had grown up, he travelled to Europe, America and China to study. He wanted to be successful in life, but couldn't achieve it. He worked hard but often he was unlucky and in need. However he didn't give up and he disciplined himself to study more and more.

One day he went to Kurama Yama to undergo rigorous spiritual discipline. On the beginning of the 21st day, suddenly he felt a large Reiki over his head. He attained an enlightenment and at that moment he comprehended the Spiritual Method. When he first used it on himself, it produced beneficial results immediately. After that, he tried it on his family. Since it was effective, he decided it was much better to share it with the public than to keep this knowledge solely for his own family. He opened a training centre in Harajuku, Aoyama, Tokyo to teach and practice the Spiritual Method in April of the 11th year of the Taisho period (1922).

Many people came from far and wide and asked for the guidance and therapy, and even lined up outside of the building.

In September of the twelfth year of the Taisho period (1923), there was a devastating earthquake. Everywhere there were groans of pain from the injured. Usui Sensei felt pity for the people, and took the Spiritual Method into the devastated city and used its healing powers on the survivors, curing and saving innumerable people. This is just a broad outline of his relief activities during such an emergency.

Later on, his training centre became too small. In February of the 14th year of Taisho (1925 A.D.) he moved to a new training centre in Nakano, outside Tokyo. Due to his increased fame he was often invited to many places. Sensei, accepting the invitations, went to Kure and then to Hiroshima and Saga, and reached Fukuyama. It was during his stay in Fukuyama that unexpectedly he became ill and died, aged 62*. It was March 9 of the 15th year of Taisho (1926 A.D.)

[*NOTE: According to the dates given, Usui Sensei would have actually been 60 at the time of his death. However, apparently there is an ancient Japanese tradition that a child is considered to be 'one' at birth, and is seen as being a year older at each new year, rather than the birthday that falls in that year?? An alternative explanation for the discrepancy could have something to do with the fact that, at the time of Usui-sensei's birth, Japan used a different calendrical system. The change over to the 'western' system in 1873 may have led to mistakes in the recording of exact dates of events in the immediately preceding years??]

His wife was named Sadako, from the Suzuki family. A boy and a girl were born. The boy's name was Fuji who carried on the Usui family after his father's death. Sensei was mild, gentle and modest by nature and he never behaved ostentatiously. He was physically big and strong. He always had a contented smile. However, in the face of adversity, he sought a solution with determination and patience. He had many talents and liked to read, and his knowledge of history, medicine, psychology, divination, incantation, physiognomy and Buddhist scriptures was great.

On reflection, the Spiritual Method not only cures diseases, but also balances the spirit and makes the body healthy using innate healing abilities, and so, helps achieve happiness.

So, when it comes to teaching, first let the student understand the Meiji Emperor's admonitions; and let them chant the Five Precepts mornings and evenings, and keep them in mind:

Firstly: Don't get angry today, Secondly: Don't worry today, Thirdly: Be grateful today, Fourthly: Work diligently today, Fifthly: Be kind to others today.

These are truly great teachings for cultivation and discipline in keeping with those great teachings of the ancient sages and the wisemen. Sensei named these teachings 'the Secret Method of Inviting Blessings' and 'the Spiritual Medicine to cure many diseases'. Notice the outstanding features of the teachings. Furthermore, when it comes to teaching, it should be as simple as possible and not difficult to understand. It is important to start from a place close to you. Another noted feature is that while sitting in silent meditation with your hands held in prayer and reciting the Five Precepts, a pure and healthy mind will be cultivated. Its true value is in daily practice. This is the reason why the Spiritual Method became so popular.

Recently the state of the world has altered and peoples' thoughts have changed a great deal. Hopefully, the spread of this Spiritual Method will be of great help to people who have a confused mind or who do not have morality. Surely it is not only of benefit in curing chronic diseases and lingering complaints?

The number of students of Sensei's teaching is already over 2,000. Among them, senior students who remained in Tokyo are maintaining Sensei's training centre, and others in different provinces also are trying to spread the Spiritual Method as much as possible. Although Sensei died, the Spiritual Method will continue to spread far and wide. Ah, what a great thing Sensei has done, to have shared this Spiritual Method with the people out there after having been enlightened within!

Lately, many students came together and decided to erect this memorial in the graveyard at Saihoji Temple in the Toyotama district to honour his benevolence, and to spread the Spiritual Method to the people in the future. I was asked to write these words. As I deeply appreciate his work and am pleased with the very friendly teacher-disciple relationships among fellow students, I could not refuse the request, and I wrote this summary in the hope that people will be reminded to look up to him with reverence.

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