

A Gentle Outline of Reiki's History

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Reiki, a Complementary and Alternative Medicine modality best known for its practice of laying on of hands, is characterized by the interplay between its Japanese origins and its global transmission. Between 2022 and 2025, a stream of new information emerged that significantly challenges prevailing views of Reiki's early history. This article draws on verified facts as well as carefully substantiated hypotheses to fill historical gaps and reconstruct that history¹.



Many of us Reiki practitioners learned that Reiki was founded by Mikao Usui in 1922, after his retreat on Mt. Kurama. That story is true in one sense—but like all living traditions, Reiki has deeper roots that have taken time to be seen clearly. One hundred years later, new light is shining on a possible relationship between two men: Rev. Tokio Yokoi 横井時雄 (1857–1927) and Mikao Usui 臼井甕男 (1865–1926).



Yokoi was a theologian, philosopher, and Christian minister who devoted his life to questions of healing in the Bible, sanctification, and spiritual awakening. He studied abroad, became president of Dōshisha University, and was known in Japan and abroad as a respected teacher, even after a stroke left him mostly confined to his home.

Yokoi had theorized that the receiving of Pentecost in Jesus' time was similar to the awakening of Confucius, expressed in Chinese as *lingqi* (older missionary literature sometimes write *ling-ch'i* or *lingchi*) 靈氣, a crucial point of departure for a spiritual healing practice. His writings show how Christian and East Asian vocabularies of spirit could converge. In doing so, he was not creating this link from nothing but reviving an older intercultural vocabulary: in the Tang-dynasty *Jesus Sutras* 景教經典, early Chinese Christians had already used *lingqi* 靈氣 to translate the Holy Spirit, joining biblical pneumatology with Chinese notions of numinous breath. In one of his publications, Yokoi used *seirei* 聖靈 (Holy Spirit) but acknowledged its resonance with *reiki* 靈氣 in Chinese–Japanese traditions. Through this parallel, he suggested that the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit could be expressed in East Asian terms—an infusion of sacred vitality into the human heart and body, where *seirei* 聖靈 and *reiki* 靈氣 point to the same experiential reality.

Usui, by contrast, was not a theologian but a sincere seeker in his own right. He worked in Christian Missionary schools, studied abroad, and explored Buddhism, Confucianism, and esoteric traditions.

It is worth considering that Usui and Yokoi may have known each other. This has not yet been proven, but the clues are strong enough to let us picture how their story might have unfolded. This remains a historically plausible hypothesis, supported by linguistic and contextual evidence.

¹ For detailed historical and theological background, see: www.jojan.nl/publications, where related articles such as *Is Rev. Tokio Yokoi the monk in Takata's story?* provide full references and analyses.

Around 1919–1922, during a time of searching and upheaval, Usui came under Yokoi’s guidance in what was later remembered as a Zen context. In this period, the two men became not only teacher (師 *shi*) c.q. Zen teacher 禪師 and student but also close friends, deeply respecting each other’s paths. Yokoi offered the visionary philosophical and spiritual foundation, explaining that Usui—like Jesus and Confucius—needed to realize his own moment of unity with the divine. He articulated a comparative bridge: the classical Chinese expression *lingqi* 靈氣—read in Japanese as *reiki* 靈氣, meaning numinous vitality or sacred breath—served as Yokoi’s key concept for linking Confucian awakening with the Christian experience of Pentecost. Through Yokoi’s teaching, Usui could interpret his own quest and experiences within this framework, seeing resonances with the New Testament descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, without suggesting that Christian sources themselves use the term *reiki* 靈氣.

Yokoi encouraged Usui to undertake *shugyō* 修行 (ascetic training through meditation and fasting) on Mt. Kurama. After twenty-one days, Usui experienced a moment of *reikan* 靈感 (spiritual inspiration or sensitivity). On his descent from the mountain, he discovered that he could heal through laying on of hands. When Usui shared this awakening with Yokoi, he recognized Usui as one who had 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*). Usui healed Yokoi’s arthritis, and in response Yokoi affirmed that he had found the sacred art of *reiki*. At this time, Yokoi also taught Usui how to perform the ritual of direct transmission, *reiju* 靈授 (spiritual bestowing), essential for initiating new practitioners. Soon after, Usui began to spread Reiki, adding Five Reiki Precepts *Gokai* 五戒, and 125 poems of the Meiji Emperor *Meiji Tennō Gyosei* 明治天皇御製. In this way he gave the practice its name—*Usui Reiki Ryoho* 臼井靈氣療法—and carried the gift forward through practice, initiation, and teaching. Reiki is often also labelled as a *seishin ryōhō* 精神療法 (psychospiritual therapy). One of his most important students and trained Master is Chujiro Hayashi who in his turn trained Hawayo Takata.

Why was Yokoi’s role forgotten? In Taishō-era Japan, it was common for founders of new spiritual movements to omit their teachers’ names. Moreover, in the 1920s, Christianity was under suspicion, and Buddhist language offered a safer public frame. Combined with Yokoi’s return to a more Christian stance at the end of his life, Christian traces were deliberately removed from Reiki’s story. Yet hints remained in Takata’s account of a “Christian minister” and “principal of Dōshisha” and in the silences of the Usui Memorial Stone².

For decades, practitioners repeated an incomplete version of Reiki’s origins. Now, a century later, a plausible connection between Yokoi and Usui is being rediscovered. It does not diminish Usui’s role—it enriches it. Reiki’s story is not about one man alone, but about a relationship: a wise mentor and a devoted friend, together giving birth to a healing practice that continues to flow through our hands and hearts today.

Recognizing Yokoi at last is an act of gratitude. Reiki has always been universal—crossing religions, cultures, and time. By welcoming both Yokoi and Usui into its history, we honor the fullness of Reiki’s roots and carry forward its spirit of healing and unity.

² In addition, at the time of writing, the credibility and authoritativeness of the Memorial Stone are under pressure for various reasons which calls for reservation.