

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

Abstract .....	1
1. Introduction: Why Phases are necessary .....	2
2. The three-phase model: formation → articulation → canonization .....	2
3. Five demonstrations of the phased model .....	3
3.1. Example 1 (Phase–1): pre-1922 public attestations of <i>reiki ryōhō</i> .....	3
3.2. Example 2 (Phase–2 → Phase–3): from principles to precepts (ethical fluidity → canonical condensation) .....	5
3.3. Example 3 (Phase–2 → postwar recalibration): Meiji poems as a curricular layer and its later reconfiguration .....	6
3.4. Example 4 (Phase–2 mediation): Hayashi as mediator and the logic of selective transmission .....	6
3.5. Example 5 (the “silence gap”): the absence of pre-1927 press traces as structured evidence .....	7
Conclusion: formation through mediation, and 1927 as canonization threshold.....	7
Appendix: Meiji Poems as a Canonization / Curricular Layer .....	8
Appendix: Hayashi as Mediator of the Yokoi–Usui Formative Legacy .....	12
Suggested Literature .....	15

#### 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  
 靈氣療法  
 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

●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

●本療法は病氣の種類を問はず何病にも奏効顯著なり

●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 reconstruction<sup>1</sup> 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

---

<sup>1</sup> 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 1926<sup>2</sup>, 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

---

<sup>2</sup> 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 guidance<sup>3</sup>. 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

---

<sup>3</sup> 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.

## SUGGESTED LITERATURE

- Beeler, Dori-Michelle, Jonker, Jojan L. 2020. *Reiki Practice and Surrender*.
- Benelli, Colleen & Robyn. 2025 August 25. *The Reiki Lifestyle Podcast*. “Reiki, History, and the Spirit of Oneness with Olaf Böhm.”
- Benedict, Ruth. 1969. [First edition 1946]. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*.
- Böhm, Olaf. 2025. *A Journey to Oneness with the Universe*.
- Hirano, Naoko. 2013. *An Inquiry into the Relationship between Taireidō and Usui Mikao's Reiki Ryōhō - in the context of Seishin Ryōhō (Psycho-Spiritual Therapies)*, congress paper, Kyoto: Waseda University.
- . 2016. “The Birth of Reiki and Psycho-spiritual Therapy in 1920’s–1930’s Japan: The Influence of American Metaphysical Religion.” In: *Japanese Religions* 40, no. 1-2.
- Jonker, Jojan L. 2016. *Reiki. The Transmigration of a Japanese Spiritual Healing Practice*.
- . 2024. *Tokio Yokoi. From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki*.
- . 2025a. *Reframing Tokio Yokoi and Mikao Usui*.
- . 2025b. *Is Rev. Tokio Yokoi the monk in Takata’s story?*
- Klatt, Oliver. 2025. *Gedenksteininschrift bröckelt*. In: *ReikiMagazin* September 2025.
- Kondo, Kayo. 2025. Personal correspondence with dr. Kayo Kondo, Durham University.
- Latham, Elizabeth. 2023. *Samurai Reiki Master: The Story of Usui Mikao and Reiki*.
- Mataji, Kawakami. 1919. *Reiki Ryōhō to sono kōka* (Reiki healing and its effects).
- Miyajima, Masako 宮嶋正子. 2022. “近代日本における靈性論 [Theories of Spirituality in Modern Japan]”.
- Okuna Shigejirō. 1928. *Tenrai no koe*.
- Shimazono, Susumu. 1992. *Shinshūkyō to kyūshūkyō 新宗教と旧宗教 [New Religions and Old Religions]*.
- Takata, Hawayo. 1975. *Book Takata* (unpublished manuscript).
- Tomita, Kaji. 1933. *Reiki and the Benevolent Art of Healing. Tomita-Style Hands-On Therapy (Reiki to jinjutsu: Tomita-ryū teate ryōhō)* Translated 2025 by Dylan Luers Toda.
- Toyokazu Kazuwa. Chairman Usui Reiki Therapy Association Headquarters. 1974. *Usui Reiki Ryōhō*.