

Tokio Yokoi

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From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki

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(ed. Dori-Michelle Beeler PhD)

COLOPHON

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COVER DESIGN

Dori-Michelle Beeler.

Publisher: mijnbestseller.nl

ISBN: 9789403752037

PREFACE

The origin for this book is found in the Reiki 1 course I attended in 1994. Part of the course was the genesis of Reiki with Mikao Usui as the main character. He is said among others to have been an ordained minister, and head and teacher at Dōshisha University, Kyoto. However, further details about his life were unknown. I found this curious at the time. Usui is said to have died in 1926, which at that time was less than 70 years ago. So, we are not talking about someone from distant antiquity but about someone from the generation of my great-grandparents. Three decades later, Elizabeth Latham reveals in her monumental work *The Samurai Reiki Master* (2023) why so little could be said about Usui back in 1994; we were talking about the wrong person because it was supposed to be about Tokio Yokoi. So, was the name wrong or was the story wrong? In this book I explore this question further, supporting, and enriching Latham's work coming to the same conclusion: the name was wrong, and the story correct, and in Tokio Yokoi's life many details can be found. For me, this completes a circle; I can leave behind the curious and unsatisfactory feeling of 1994.

A big thank you goes first to my beloved partner and colleague Reikimaster Berthy Cambier. She has supported me during all the years of research and was always willing to listen to my stories, hypotheses, frustrations, and spar about them endlessly.

A big thank you goes to my Dutch friend and colleague Reikimaster Fokke Brink who has supported me over the years and always provided me with feedback and comments that helped improve the resulting quality.

And finally, a big thank you to my dear friend, colleague scholar and colleague Reikimaster Dori-Michelle Beeler, who did the final editing and created the cover for this book.

Enjoy reading!

Tejan Jonker

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A COMMON INTRODUCTION ON 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.

Hayashi knew Usui personally and a decade later, he shared information about Usui's life and work with Takata. Note that Hayashi's testimonies on Usui are an eye-witness' account.

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 USA for study, that he was an ordained 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, that he studied in Chicago, 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 and the founding of Reiki.

In December 1991, the Australian Reikimaster William Rand received a letter¹ from Dōshisha regarding his question whether the name Mikao Usui could be found in their archives. The answer was, no. In 1992, this news spread through the Reiki community and was widely accepted. Around that time, Chicago University also stated that the name Mikao Usui could not be found in their archives. The narrative as told by Takata got toned down as being a legend, a ‘story’ rather than ‘history’. This legend survived however, made credible by the argument that it would hold spiritual lessons for new students.

Since then, researchers almost solely focused on the actor under the name Mikao Usui born in Taniai, retraced a memorial stone mentioning his name as founder of Reiki, retraced handbooks allegedly written by Mikao Usui, and dismissed Takata’s story because her plot did not match with the biography of the actor Mikao Usui.

Some scholars started to create a biography for Taniai’s Mikao Usui that would explain, if not justify, the founding of Usui Reiki Ryōhō, largely based on Buddhist indications including that Usui would have stayed in a Zen monastery for a few years preceding 1922, that he attained enlightenment on Mt. Kurama being a Tendai Buddhist landmark, and that the memorial stone plus a grave marker stone of the Usui family were located on a Pure Land Buddhist temple cemetery: Saihoji, Tokyo. However, little to no details could be revealed about Usui’s life, let alone that it could in any possible way explain he had acquired the necessary knowledge to develop Reiki. Generated biographies of Usui were copied and pasted into books and on websites. In many cases, it is not possible to retrace where such details of Usui’s biography originate but seem to be accepted as truth based on the number of times mentioned, or rather copied and pasted.

Attempting to explain Takata’s story about a Christian minister, some scholars suggested that Takata de-culturalized Reiki out of the Japanese context rooted in Buddhist, Shintō, and Confucianism of the Meiji and Tashō era, and re-culturalized it in the Western culture rooted in a Judeo-Christian context at the

¹ In a personal conversation, Fokke Brink showed me a copy of that letter.

time of a blooming New Age (Stein 2016). It was suggested that Takata had added Christian elements to the Usui narrative to make it more acceptable for a Western audience. Among scholars, this was a sort of *status quo* until 2023.

In hindsight, it can be asserted that in the 1980s, scholars, both professional and nonprofessional alike, embarked on an exploration of Reiki's historical roots. During this period, the Usui narrative, as recounted by Takata served as the primary starting point. At that juncture, Takata's narrative, imbued with Christian undertones, centered around the figure of Mikao Usui, acting as the protagonist. Consequently, a pivotal juncture emerged, prompting scholars to contemplate the direction of their inquiry: whether to delve into the narrative itself or to focus on the central figure. The scholarly trajectory centered around the figure of Usui has been extensively documented in numerous Reiki publications, spanning both popular literature and academic discourse. Conversely, the avenue of inquiry revolving around the Usui narrative and its implications for understanding the founder remained unexplored until the groundbreaking 2023 publication by Latham, which will be introduced subsequently.

1.2 2023 | NEW INFORMATION ON THE HISTORY OF REIKI

Not all Reikimasters accepted the dismissal of Takata and continued believing she had told the truth to her best knowledge. One of them was the Australian Reikimaster Elizabeth M. Latham. Latham is (to my knowledge) the only investigator who took the other path, searching for the actor that would fit in the plot as told by Takata. In 1993, Latham had a mystical dream showing her an unfamiliar Japanese face saying, "I am the man you are looking for. I am Usui". In Japan, visiting Dōshisha University, she found the face in her dream in the archives. However, his name was not Mikao Usui but Tokio Yokoi 横井時雄 (1857–1927). In the years following, she further concluded that either the name Usui or Mikao Usui must have been a pseudonym for the real actor: Tokio Yokoi. This was published in 2023 in *The Samurai Reiki Master*. Her findings invite the

reader to shift one's perspective on the founding and spiritual roots of Reiki.

Summarized, the findings of Latham's investigations suggest that Usui Reiki Ryōhō comes out of the specific way Japanese have processed and assimilated Christianity in Japan's *Zeitgeist* of the Meiji and Tashō era, and that Reiki can be labelled as a Japanese expression of indigenous Christianity. One of the public figures that were engaged in this process and helped shape the outcome, is Tokio Yokoi 横井時雄 (1857–1927), in literature a.k.a. Tokiwo Yokoi, as Ref. J.T. (John Tokio) Yokoi, as Matao Ise, and as Pastor Ise or Isé. Yokoi was particularly inspired by Biblical stories narrating the healing miracles performed by Jesus Christ, and the Baptism² with the Holy Spirit and as performed on Jesus by John the Baptist. These two topics formed the basis for a quest for and development of a healing practice based on these Biblical stories. Interpreting Latham's findings, Yokoi presented an expression of such a divine healing system to the world as Reiki, using the pseudonym Usui or Mikao Usui, hence the name Usui Reiki Ryōhō.

If it can be verified and made plausible that Tokio Yokoi is the founder of Reiki, then the question arises whether later in time, the narrative got enriched with a certain Mikao Usui, and that certain life events of Yokoi got projected onto Usui. Since Tokio Yokoi was not yet 'discovered', this Usui from Taniai was credited as the founder of Reiki. This was possible because very few facts about Mikao Usui's biography could be retrieved let alone verified or falsified, even now while writing this publication. This left and continues to leave space for presumptions that create an acceptable origin story based on this Usui from Taniai. So, this publication answers several long-lasting questions and raises new questions such as who-is-who. Also, the results of this study indicate that in the current narratives of several Reiki styles, one can find traces of both Usui and Yokoi.

² In literature, one can find the terms 'Baptism by', 'Baptism with', 'Baptism of', and 'baptism in' the Holy Spirit.

Following Latham's hypothesis comes with certain consequences regarding the commonly accepted narrative. First, it would mean that Takata told the truth as she remembered it. Furthermore, that Reiki is associated with indigenous Christianity; that Reiki started with the realization of 'Baptism with the Holy Spirit', indigenously represented in Japanese as *reiju*; and that Yokoi made it so indigenous that in Japan the notion of baptism and the relation to the Biblical story of Jesus faded into the background.

Latham found out that the details of Usui as told by Takata, fit in the life and work of Tokio Yokoi; not just one or two details but virtually all. For me, Yokoi (left) and Usui (right) have some similar facial features. The picture of Yokoi is a verified one, taken around 1919. The picture of Usui is never really verified however accepted world-wide as original; it is the assumed portrait of the founder of Usui Reiki Ryōhō.



Tokio Yokoi (l) and Mikao Usui (r)

³As Reikimaster, you must ask yourself the question whether you believe what Takata told in her story, or not. If you do want to believe her, then accepting Tokio Yokoi as actor in her story is unavoidable. If you do not want to believe her for whatever reason, then you can hold on to the person, Mikao Usui from Taniai, of whom little to nothing is known when it comes to developing a healing system.

1.3 TRACES OF CHRISTIANITY IN REIKI

For some decades, both scholars and practitioners are interested in what inspired Usui to formulate his healing practice. Potential and recognizable sources of inspiration within Japanese spiritual and religious culture were among others Buddhism, Shintō, Confucianism and Christianity (Jonker 2016). Influences from abroad came from for example the New Thought movement and its *mind cure* (*ibid.*). National and political influences from the Meiji Era such as the Emperor System (the belief that the Emperor is a god), State Shintō, and Japanese growing nationalism also may have influenced Usui (*ibid.*).

Scholar Hirano Naoko (2016) describes in detail how Usui Reiki Ryōhō could come into existence thanks to the dialogue between East and West, in particular how the development of Usui Reiki Ryōhō is influenced by the US's New Thought movement and its *mind cure*. She labelled Usui Reiki Ryōhō as fitting in *seishin ryōhō* where *seishin* is the Japanese term for what in Western psychology is addressed as psyche, and *ryōhō* as therapy.

Both Jonker (2016) and Hirano (2016) revealed a context that holds both Western and Japanese influences in which Usui Reiki Ryōhō could come into existence. However, a direct link to the life and work of Mikao Usui was never found.

FINGERPRINTS OF CHRISTIANITY

The Reiki narrative(s) hold several traces of Christianity. To name a few, the memoirs of Tomabechi Gizō (1880–1959), one of the twenty *shihan* (Master-level) students trained by Usui

³ The results of this publications address scholars as well as Reikimasters. In case I address the latter, it will be presented in a layout as in this piece of text.

Mikao, tells the reader that his character was formed by among others “(...) my interest in listening to the sermons of Christian and Buddhist preachers (...)” (Stein 2019, p7). The memoir continues, “I attended church but was never baptized.” (*ibid.*), which is common for Japanese interested in Christianity (as will be addressed later).

Following the line of transmission from Usui to Hayashi, signs of Hayashi being a Methodist Christian, were not considered. An example can be found in my co-authored publication with Dori-Michelle Beeler (Beeler and Jonker, 2020, p32):

According to unverified *emic* sources, Hayashi had become a Methodist Christian (Ellyard 2004: 12, *ReikiGuild*). While this may help explain why he was concerned for humanity, it still raises questions. For example, an argument against this relationship with the Methodist Church is that his act of honorable suicide would have been a violation of the Methodist Church’s principles. Furthermore, if he had been a Methodist Christian, then we believe that this would have influenced the way in which Takata – as his student – would have taught and promoted Reiki practice in the West.

However, references to healing by the Methodist Church refers to healing as can be found in one of their statements ⁴ : “Understanding healing of all kinds is an important element of our lived faith”. Also, at that time in Japan, many people were Christian without being baptized. Reason is that baptism inherently includes a recognition of God / Jesus being the highest authority in life. But for Japanese, this conflicts with the notion that the Emperor is the highest authority. Interestingly, both in Christianity and in the landscape of Japanese religion, water plays a role in many rituals (Ojiri 2022, p191):

Both Christian and Japanese culture believe in and experience the power of water for purification, healing, and transformation.

⁴ See: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/seasons-and-themes/themes/faith-and-creativity/seeking-healing/>

These shared typologies can provide a helpful path for a Japanese understanding of the baptismal rite. As noted, undergoing baptism is one of the biggest challenges in Japan. It is commonly understood to be an act of great courage because it involves initiation into a minority religion and the consequent need to say “goodbye” to some of the “non-Christian” elements of the Japanese culture and people.

With the new insights presented in this publication based on Latham’s findings and enriched with results of my own subsequent research, it becomes more evident that Hayashi indeed did train Takata in a Christian context. Takata’s story on Usui, read Tokio Yokoi, is an example of that.

About the life and work of Takata, a sort of consensus was reached primarily based on Justin Stein’s work, summarized in my earlier co-authored publication with Dori Beeler (Beeler and Jonker 2020, p33) as follows:

Stein (2017) studied the life and work of Takata and the changes she made in the system of Reiki. His results indicate that she commodified Reiki in several steps and in different ways. One example is that to the narrative of Usui she added the idea that he would have been a teacher at a Christian school in Japan. In this way she tried to ‘bridge’ East and West and thus made Reiki more accessible and acceptable for white Christian Westerners. On another occasion, she either changed or at least started to emphasize in the narrative with saying that Reiki has ancient roots in Buddhism. This was an attempt to make it look more Oriental at a time that it was very fashionable to be interested in that. Stein calls this a circularity development that took place in the North Pacific between East Asia and the US (*ibid.*).

Already in my doctoral thesis (Jonker 2016), I mentioned that Takata recommended that her trained Reikimasters become ordained Reverends (Jonker, 2016, pp384-385):

Somewhere in the 1980s, some Masters became Reverend in the Universal Brotherhood Movement⁵; the word Reiki indeed

⁵ The origin footnote sounds: Website <http://universalbrotherhood.org/members/member-directory/>