

Usui Reiki Ryōhō, Reiki, and the Discursive Space of Spiritual Healing in Twentieth-Century Japan

臼井靈氣療法とレイキ：

20世紀日本に於けるスピリチュアル・ヒーリングについて言説空間

臼井靈氣療法というスピリチュアル・ヒーリングの実践は1920年代東京で誕生した。しかしながら、この発祥地である日本で知られるようになったのは、レイキがグローバル現象となった1990年代である。本論文は、初期の「臼井靈氣療法」実践者と現代の「レイキ」実践者による特定の記述についての比較を行う。その記述とは、靈氣療法と宗教の差別化を試みるものであり、本研究では、このような言語的实践を「宗教」と「近代」を研究する上でのより大きな問題と結び付けて分析することを目的とする。

まず第一に、大正時代とオウム心理教事件後の日本において、臼井靈氣療法家たちがどのように自らの治療法を医療と宗教の中間領域に位置する実践であるとする定義を試みたのかということの説明する。ここで特に注目するのは、それぞれの時代において信仰療法を用いる新宗教をめぐってのモラルパニックがあった中で、臼井靈氣療法という非正統的な医療がどのように台頭したのかということである。

次に、後者の時代において、レイキが宗教でありながらも宗教でない「第三空間」（バーバ1994）的な実践であることを表すために「スピリチュアルティ」という概念がどのように取り入れられたのかということについて分析する。戦後の西洋における「スピリチュアルであって宗教ではない」という認識のように、現代日本に於ける「精神世界」という概念と「スピリチュアルブーム」はレイキの実践者達が近代の世俗性を犠牲した行為に関わることを可能にしている。大正時代の靈氣療法者たちが宗教的言語と医療的言語の狭間で悪戦苦闘していたのとは異なり、現代日本のレイキ実践者は「スピリチュアルティ」という言葉によって、自らの行動が社会的に正当なものであるとみなすことができるのである。

最後に、「スピリチュアルティ」の台頭が20世紀初期の精神療法と20世紀後半のスピリチュアルヒーリングセラピーとの間に無宗教の概念化をめぐっての決定的な断絶となっていることを指摘する。

1. Introduction

On March 9, 1926, a 62-year-old man named Usui Mikao died in western Honshu while traveling to teach a set of healing practices that he called Usui Reiki Ryōhō 臼井靈氣療法. In his teaching career, which spanned the final four years of his life, he had attracted about two thousand students, according to generous estimates.¹ Today, about ninety years later, millions worldwide have undergone the initiations authorizing them to practice the diverse adapted forms of Usui's practices collectively called Reiki. Reiki's following outside of Japan is among the largest of any spiritual practice of Japanese origin. If one overlooks the popularity of Japanese martial arts, Reiki's transnational success is perhaps only rivaled by those of Sōka Gakkai International and *zazen*. Although it is hard to measure these numbers, I would venture that, on any given day, probably more people worldwide practice Reiki than chant the name of the *Lotus Sutra* or sit on a *zafu*. Reiki followed a very different model than these lay Buddhist movements, which were conscious expansions initiated by Japanese religious professionals. With no central governing organization, Reiki actually became a transnational success before it was widely practiced in its land of origin.

What happened in the six decades between Usui's death in 1926 and Reiki's return to Japan in 1986 that facilitated the eventual success of this healing practice in Japan? What salient changes happened to Reiki during its roundtrip transit across the Pacific? What aspects of Japan's religious landscape changed over the course of the twentieth century to create favorable conditions for Reiki's return? This paper argues that one crucial factor was the transformation of "the discursive space of spiritual healing."

In Taishō and early Shōwa, Usui Reiki Ryōhō was one of thousands of therapies called *seishin ryōhō* 精神療法² or *reijutsu* 靈術. Like the earlier movements of spiritualism and hypnotism, these therapies incorporated the vocabularies of both science and religion, but also claimed that their healing powers exceeded the scope of either biomedicine or religious ritual. The practitioners and clients of these therapies occupied what Bhabha (1994) called a "third space": a sphere in which cultures meet and people form hybrid identities and challenge authorities.

When Reiki レイキ "returned" to Japan in the mid 1980s after a half-century of transformation in the U.S., this "third space" of spiritual healing had been recently revived and was called *seishin sekai* 精神世界 or *nyū eiji* ニューエイジ. This space resembled the earlier one in that its architects appealed to the authority of science and religion while also claiming to surpass the perceived limits of these institutions. Practitioners from both periods claimed religious precedents for their practices while identifying their practices as "non-religion" (*mushūkyō* 無宗教); they claimed that present science was too materialist to accept their practices, which would be recognized as scientific in the near future.

However, a close reading of the chief extant texts of Usui Reiki Ryōhō in the earlier period (c. 1925-1933) and Reiki in the later period (1986-1998) demonstrates significant differences between these settings. *Seishin ryōhōka* and *reijutsuka*, like leaders of some of some contemporary *shinshūkyō* ("new religions"), were in the precarious position of offering healing without the protection of medical licensure or state recognition as a religious organization. The rise of the category of "alternative medicine" (*daitai iryō* 代替医療) during the latter period

¹ This number is cited on his memorial stele (Okada 1927).

² Although in contemporary Japan this term refers to the English category "psychotherapy," in the early twentieth century (particularly the 1920s and 1930s), it referred to a broad collection of practices that incorporated what might be called "psychological" and "spiritual" therapies. See Imura (1984, 2014) and Yoshinaga (2015).

helped to carve a space for legal, non-medical therapies outside of sanctioned religious organizations. Concurrent with these discursive and legal shifts was a rise of institutional networks that also made possible Reiki's spread in Japan over the last quarter century, and I will touch on these briefly on these as well. But the main focus of this paper is to examine differences in how Japanese Reiki practitioners in these two time periods positioned Reiki Ryōhō in relation to the categories of religion, science, and medicine—that is, changes to the discursive space of spiritual healing—and how these changes allowed Japanese practitioners in the last decades of the twentieth century to legitimate Reiki to a degree that was unavailable in the 1920s and 1930s.

2. The Discursive Space of Taishō-era Usui Reiki Ryōhō

Despite the activity of thousands of *seishin ryōhō* and *reijutsu*, early twentieth century Japan was a potentially perilous place to promote new forms of spiritual healing. The Meiji state in its first years embraced Western medicine, reversing prior bans, establishing the Bureau of Medical Affairs under Nagayo Sensai 長与専齋 (1838-1902), and instituting robust exchange programs with German medical universities (Kim 2014). Concurrently, state edicts banned such healing practices as mediated spirit possession (*kamigakari* 神懸かり), forms of healing prayer (*kin'en kitō* 禁厭祈祷) and empowerment rituals (*kaji kitō* 加持祈祷). Josephson argues that the early regulation of healing ritual, beginning with the Ministry of Doctrine's Article 22 in 1874, had more to do with the suppression of “noninstitutional popular religion” and “charismatic leaders” than with the enforcement of Western medicine (2012: 181; 2013: 131). However, over time, the accusations leveled against spiritual healing practices shifted from concern for the nation's piety to the issue of public health. By the anti-cult movement of the Meiji 20s that targeted Renmonkyō and Tenrikyō, public discourse had become inflected with neo-Confucian moral disdain for unorthodox medicine as endangering the health of the Japanese nation. Soon thereafter, the Meiji government sponsored ethics textbooks that taught children to avoid superstitions like *kaji kitō* or the efficacy of holy water (Josephson 2013: 130-131).

Thus, Usui and his contemporary *reijutsuka* in late Meiji and Taishō lived in an environment potentially hostile to nonmedical healing arts. The Medical Practitioners Law (*Ishihō*) declared that only graduates of government-regulated medical universities and colleges could practice medicine. Even Chinese medicine (*kanpō*) could not be legally practiced without this official Western medical training. In this vacuum caused by the abolition of so-called “folk therapies” (*minkan ryōhō*), figures with innovative spiritual healing practices like Tanaka Morihei 田中守平 (1884-1929) attracted many thousands of followers, and must have also drawn the attention of authorities. Indeed, some of Usui's contemporaries were arrested under the *Ishihō*, including Okada Mokichi 岡田茂吉 (1882-1955). Okada would gain fame for founding Sekai Kyūseikyō, which became one of the larger of the postwar new religions, but he was arrested twice in early Shōwa (1936 and 1940) for promoting his “medicine of tomorrow” (*ashita no ijutsu*), which he described in terms very similar to Usui Reiki Ryōhō (Matsuoka 2007: 30). Moreover, the period in which Usui began teaching his Reiki Ryōhō (around 1922 or Taishō 10) was concurrent with the period in which Ōmoto phasing out its *chinkon kishin* 鎮魂帰神 ritual—which also bears some similarity to aspects of Usui Reiki Ryōhō—because of police intervention.³ Clearly, despite widespread publications about and advertisements for *seishin ryōhō*, promoting nonmedical therapies was a risky enterprise.

³ Staemmler (2009: 237-238) outlines a number of incidents beginning in 1919 in which Ōmoto's leader, Deguchi Onisaburō, bowed to police investigations by limiting the practice of *chinkon kishin*, leading up to its outright abolition in 1923.

However, there seems to have been some official tolerance of *seishin ryōhō* and *reijutsu* at this time. This is elucidated by an exchange in a February 1922 House of Representatives hearing in which Matsushita Teiji 松下禎二 (1875-1932), a member of the House of Representatives who studied medicine in Germany and taught microbiology and public health at Kyoto Imperial University, questioned Ushio Shigenosuke 潮恵之輔 (1881-1955), director of the Home Ministry's Bureau of Public Health. Matsushita asked how the government would be able to manage cholera if they did not restrict medical treatment to licensed doctors, as groups such as Taireidō and Ōmoto, as well as practitioners of *seishin ryōhō* and psychotherapies (*shinri ryōhō*), could deceive those ignorant of public health. Ushio answered that the government had to be very careful on this matter, as the effects of such therapies on public health had yet to be determined. "For example," he says, "ten years ago, it was said that hypnotism was a technique of the *tengu* (a type of demon), but now research on this technique accumulates and it is used to treat mental illness. It is difficult to solve all human knowledge with only medicine."⁴ Thus, it seems that, while the letter of the law prohibited non-medical therapies as being the practice of medicine without a license, the government tended to allow them to the extent that they were not violating other state concerns, as in the "Ōmoto incident."⁵

Despite this tolerance for these unorthodox therapies of ambiguous legality, the early texts of Usui Reiki Ryōhō demonstrate a clear tension between an impetus to establish Usui's charisma and the efficacy of his self-cultivation and healing techniques and an anxiety to distinguish Usui and his following from contemporary new religions. This tension is preserved in the story of Reiki's origins told on the stone monument erected in 1927 by the Shinshin Kaizen Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai 心身改善臼井靈氣療法学会 (henceforth "the Usui-kai") beside Usui's family tomb at Saihōji 西方寺, a Jōdo-shū temple in present-day Umezato, Suganami Ward, Tokyo. The substantial text inscribed on this stone (roughly 1500 characters) followed conventions established by the biographies of *yamabushi* and the founders of new religions. Usui Mikao, it says, underwent a period of poverty in which he devoted himself to spiritual study and discipline. He climbed Mount Kurama 鞍馬山 outside Kyoto, to perform twenty-one days of austerities and fasting, which caused him to "suddenly feel a great *reiki* touch his head and he received the whole method of *reiki ryōhō*."⁶ From that time, Usui was able to heal himself and others. He wanted to teach this healing method to others, so he moved to Tokyo and opened a *dōjō* in Harajuku in April 1922. His following grew, especially the following September, when he received attention for his efforts to treat the casualties of the Great Kanto Earthquake, and in February 1925, he moved his *dōjō* to a larger space just outside the city limits. In addition to his work at his *dōjō*, Usui also traveled around Japan teaching his methods, and seems to have been on one of these trips when he died the following spring (Okada 1927).

The story carved on this stone documents the internal tension between religion and non-religion among the early leadership of the Usui-kai who commissioned the memorial. The author, a professor at Tokyo Imperial University named Okada Masayuki 岡田正之 (1864-1927),

⁴ 「未だ大なる弊害を認めぬけれども、それ等の取締方法を講ずるの必要があるであろうと云うことに帰するように考えました、併ながら如何に取締るかと云うことは、是は方法程度等で、余程慎重の考慮をしなければならぬ、例えば催眠術の如きものでありましても、十数年前までは、如何にも天狗の技であると云われて居ったのでありますが、今日は之についても学問上の研究を積んで、是は皆精神病学者が之を応用すると云うことになって居ります」。

⁵ In 1921, under charges of *lèse majesté* and violations of the Newspaper Law, the Taishō state imprisoned Ōmoto leaders, destroyed their temples, and prohibited pilgrimage to their religious headquarters. (Offner and van Straelen 1963: 69).

⁶ 「倏チ一大靈氣ノ頭上ニ感シ豁然トシテ靈氣療法ヲ得タリ」

used religious vocabulary to describe Usui's virtues, practices, and teachings, ultimately comparing Usui to "the sages, philosophers, geniuses, and great men of ancient times" as well as to the founders of religious sects.⁷ In Weberian terms, Okada's text seeks to legitimize Usui Reiki Ryōhō through appeals to both traditional and charismatic authority. However, Okada also resists explicitly referring to Usui Reiki Ryōhō as a religious practice or Usui's center as a religious institution. Rather, he consistently describes Usui's teachings as *reihō*. It has been suggested that *reihō* in this context is a contraction of *reiki ryōhō*,⁸ but it is a word in its own right that is vaguely religious and was used in this period to refer to philosophical or self-cultivation practices. Okada calls Usui's space a *dōjō*, another ambiguous term as it could refer to judo training facilities as well as Buddhist temples. Also, by alluding to both Buddhist and neo-Confucian ideas and practices, the memorial's author avoids placing Usui and his practice in any particular religious tradition. For example, he recounts that Usui was "well-versed in history, biographies, medicine, Buddhist and Christian scripture, the study of psychology, the way of the Daoist wizards, 'banishing incantation,' divination, and physiognomy."⁹ Such rhetoric invokes both traditional religious and modern scientific authority to describe a teacher whose practice makes use of religious elements without being religious itself.

A similar ambivalence to religiosity is evident in the only writing attributed to Usui. The "handbook" given to new Usui-kai members (Usui Ryōhō Hikkei 臼井靈氣必携) has a section titled "Public Explanation of Instruction" (Kōkai Denju Setsumeikai 公開伝授説明) that ostensibly preserves the words of the man himself in a question-and-answer format. In this section, Usui says that his *reiki ryōhō* is nothing like faith healing (*shinkō ryōhō*), hypnotism, or other therapies, but that it is a "spiritual secret" (*reihō* 靈秘) that took him many years of ascetic training to discover and it can relieve both body and spirit.¹⁰ To that end, he says that his *reiki ryōhō* is not just a spiritual therapy (*shinrei ryōhō* 神靈療法), but also a physical one (*shintai ryōhō*). It is not based on either faith or psychology, but rather on *ki* and light radiating from the practitioner's body. Even though medical science is presently unable to explain his spiritual method, it will one day. When Usui is asked about the legality of his practice, he refers to the statement made by Ushio, the Home Ministry's Director of Public Health, in the National Diet in 1922. As Usui tells it, Ushio argued that "applying electricity or touch to all diseases is not a medical act," and thus was not subject to the medical practitioners' law or the regulations governing acupuncture and moxibustion.¹¹

Regardless of whether these words were actually penned by the founder, they provide insight into the concerns of early instructors of Usui Reiki Ryōhō. The author claims that his *reihō* is dissimilar from the methods of religious healers, as it results from physical forces that one day would be verified scientifically. However, its present non-medical status allows practitioners to treat without state licensure. Clearly the author is trying to carve out a space for his healing practice somewhere between religion and medicine. The characters in the

⁷ 「古来ノ賢哲俊偉ノ士カ学統ヲ垂レ宗旨ヲ創メシ者ハ皆然ラサルナシ」

⁸ For example, Richard Rivard comments on his co-translation (with Emiko Arai) of Usui's memorial stone, "Reiho (short for 'Reiki Ryoho')." "Translation of Usui Memorial," *The Reiki Threshold*, http://www.threshold.ca/reiki/usui_memorial_translation.html last accessed May 7, 2015.

⁹ 「素トヨリ才芸多ク読書ヲ好ミ史伝ニ渉リ医書及ヒ仏耶ノ經典ニ出入シ心理ノ学神仙ノ方禁呪占筮相人ノ術ニ至ルマテ通セサルナシ」

¹⁰ 「私が多年辛錬苦修終に靈秘を感得したる、靈と肉とを救うべき法術であります。

¹¹ 「萬病に対し電気なら電気をかける、さわるならさわると云ふが如きは医の行為にあらずと答えて居られます。故に我が臼井靈氣療法は医師法にも鍼灸取締規制にも触れて居りません。」

compounds *reiki ryōhō* itself connote as much, as the first compound refers to a spiritual force and the second denotes “therapy.”

This ambivalence toward religion can also be seen in the only sizable media coverage of Usui Reiki Ryōhō at the time: a March 1928 article in the newspaper *Sunday Mainichi* by the playwright Matsui Shōō 松居松翁 (1870-1933). Matsui had briefly mentioned his practice of Usui Reiki Ryōhō in an earlier article, a letter to the editor had requested that he say more on the subject, and so he wrote this exposition on the subject despite the Usui-kai’s general prohibition of the sort of mass advertisement that was common among their contemporary *seishin ryōhō* and *reijutsu*.¹² Matsui opens his article with a religious metaphor, comparing his writing to that of Christian and Buddhist missionaries. He justifies his breaking the secrecy of the Usui-kai by claiming that, so long as one spreads “true beliefs” (*shinri shinkō*) that make people happy, one must make the truth known out of an obligation to humanity. Indeed, if Usui Reiki Ryōhō were properly advertised, he writes, first Japan and then the entire world would be a paradise (*gokuraku*) free of disease.

After this religious rhetoric, however, Matsui makes efforts to distance Usui Reiki Ryōhō from religion. He writes, that, although people consider it to be a spiritual technique based on the characters “Reiki,” he believes that it is a physical technique.¹³ People compare Reiki Ryōhō to the healing miracles of Christ and the Buddha, but the author, a successful healer of over one hundred people, doesn’t possess the great character of a religious man. He calls himself ordinary, even coarse, and states that spiritual ambitions are unnecessary for the practice of Reiki Ryōhō. This is because it is not a supernatural phenomenon at all, but is a quite normal, physiological therapy that can be explained practically in terms of physical forces.¹⁴

In short, practitioners of Usui Reiki Ryōhō in the 1920s had ambivalent relationships with organized religion in their discursive practices. On the one hand, the authors of all three texts we have from this period make use of religious vocabulary to frame their healing practices, but on the other, each author also makes efforts to distinguish these practices from those of conventional religion. In the poetic language of Usui’s memorial, Okada outlines Usui’s connection to Buddhist and neo-Confucian practices as well as to modern medicine and psychology, and makes frequent use of the phrase *reihō*, which has ambiguous connotations. In the *Hikkei* section attributed to Usui, the author says that his method is spiritual, but also physical, and is careful to distinguish it from either faith healing or placebo effect, predicting that science will soon verify the biophysical mechanisms by which it works. The article written by Matsui perhaps goes the furthest in both directions, comparing his text to that of a missionary preaching of a paradisiacal age to come, but then arguing that Usui Reiki Ryōhō is neither spiritual nor supernatural.

3. The Discursive Space of Reiki レイキ in “New Age Japan”

¹² For example, Yoshinaga (2008: 35) notes that Taireidō recruited members through “showy advertisements” in major newspapers.

¹³ 「霊気療法は、その名の示す如く、少なくともスピリチュアルなものとして考えられているが、わたしが今までに百人以上を治療した経験からいえば、むしろ、わたしはフィジカルなものじゃないかと思っている。」

¹⁴ 「わたしはその後者に属する、卑俗凡庸な人間であるから、人間のフィジカルな治療をするのに、急に、スピリチュアルな野心を起こす必要はない。少なくとも今の所では、わたし自身のやっている療法だけは、決して超自然的なものではない。極めてノーマルなもの、極めて生理的なものだ」と解釈している。」

It seems that no publicly available publications explicitly about “Usui-style” Reiki Ryōhō appeared in Japan between Matsui’s 1928 article and the mid 1980s, when Mitsui Mieko returned from the United States and began promoting “Reiki Ryōhō.” As might befit an imported practice, she chose to write “Reiki” in *katakana* (レイキ療法). Mitsui had been an editor for a Tokyo publisher until she moved to New York in 1978, where she worked in journalism. As she tells it, she had always been sickly, but in the early 1980s, she suffered badly from a variety of diseases including arthritis and cirrhosis of the liver. She received her first Reiki treatment in 1983 and was amazed how good she felt, so she became a practitioner herself (Ray 1987: 220-222).

Mitsui’s instructor was Barbara Weber Ray, a student of Hawayo Takata (1900-1980), the Japanese American woman who brought Reiki out of Japan in the late 1930s. The same year that Mitsui discovered Reiki in New York, Ray authored *The Reiki Factor*, among the earliest English-language books written about Reiki. Under Ray, Mitsui became an instructor after only six months, although she never received the initiation necessary to initiate other instructors. Beginning in the fall of 1984, Mitsui returned to Japan several times to see what still existed of Reiki there, to teach Reiki courses, and to try and find more information about Usui. She found Usui’s memorial stone and a copy of the *Hikkei*, but no one who was teaching publicly. This was in line with what she had been told – that Reiki had died out in its land of origin.

While there actually were a few other individuals still practicing and teaching Usui Reiki Ryōhō and related healing techniques in Japan at the time, notably the secretive Usui-kai, Mitsui is a key figure in the revival of Japanese interest in Reiki due to her seminars and her Japanese translation of her teacher’s book (Ray 1987). In Mitsui’s brief translator’s afterword, she clarifies how Reiki appeared to her as a Japanese expat who grew up in the postwar period. Her first encounter with Reiki was at a health fair in New York that she was covering in fall 1982. When she came across a booth promoting Reiki, she said, the very word gave her “a suspicious feeling that repulsed [her],” and she chose to ignore the booth for her reporting, a decision she later regretted (Ray 1987: 220).¹⁵ Once she got involved with Reiki, she found “it has no connection with religion and you can use it without believing,” so “for someone who was baptized by postwar science education such as [herself], Reiki is a wonderfully scientific therapy” (Ray 1987: 221).¹⁶ This inspired her to become a Reiki instructor and bring the healing practice back to Japan. Her implication that a connection with religion would be distasteful and her description of her “baptism” by science education seems a conscious emphasis of Japan’s secularization. Yet, against many forms of secularization theory, Mitsui’s mindset demonstrates that belief in both the primacy of scientific knowledge and superhuman powers can be completely compatible.

Mitsui advertised her seminars in publications specializing in the “spiritual world” subculture such as *Ki Magazinu* and featured in a 1986 article in the short-lived *Towairaito Zōn*. The author of this article, Takai Shiomi 高井志生海, describes Reiki as “that therapy that takes in universal energy” (*uchū enerugī wo toriireru sono ryōhō*). This loan word *enerugī* is scarcely present in earlier literature on Usui Reiki Ryōhō, and is a direct re-translation from the common English translation of *reiki* as “universal life-force energy.” This language would be familiar to Takai’s audience, members of Japan’s contemporary “spiritual world” subculture, who would be exposed to the idea of *enerugī* as a general term including the “vital force” of living things as well as greater, cosmic powers. While Takai’s seeming familiarity with the term “*uchū enerugī*” suggests that it may have been used in “spiritual world” circles prior to Reiki’s re-importation,

¹⁵ 「その語感から受ける怪しい雰囲気反発して、私は体験も取材もせず無視したのです。」

¹⁶ 「宗教と関係なく、信じなくとも活用でき。。。戦前の科学教育の洗礼を受けた一人である私には、レイキはスマートで科学的療法に思われました。」

the only holdings in the National Diet Library prior to Mitsui's 1987 translation have to do with space science, not spiritual healing.

Through Mitsui, Takai was also able to interview a member of the secretive Usui-kai, Ogawa Fumio 小川二三夫 (c. 1903-1998), whose father Ogawa Kyōzo 小川馨造 (dates unknown) had been head of their Shizuoka branch. Ogawa told Takai that some of the Usui-kai members had left in order to found new religions based on their own doctrines. He may have been speaking of Eguchi Toshihiro, a student of Usui's who founded the Eguchi Tenohira Ryōji Kenkyūkai 江口手の平療治研究会 and taught his practices as part of the spiritual training regime at the utopian commune Ittōen 一燈園. However, a number of Reiki practitioners have alleged that Deguchi Onisaburō and Okada Mokichi studied with Usui,¹⁷ so Ogawa may be reproducing this narrative here. Finally, Takai herself speculates that, as Usui was teaching his healing practice in a time when there were so many new religions, he may have had a relationship, either directly or indirectly, with one or more of them.

Takai's article is notably less concerned about distinguishing Reiki from religion than any of the 1920s writings on Usui Reiki Ryōhō. Although Ogawa indicates that the Usui-kai continues to consider itself distinct from the new religions, in contrast, Takai is eager to speculate about connections between Usui's teachings and those of contemporaneous new religions. This may be due to the fact that Takai, not a Reiki practitioner herself, was unconcerned with distancing Reiki from organized religion. However, I believe the reason that Reiki's status as non-religion goes unstated in this article is that Takai knew that her audience was familiar with the discursive spaces of Japanese spirituality and would tacitly understand the existence of a "third space" in which transmudane techniques can be practiced unproblematically outside the sphere of religion.

Scholars disagree about when the *supirichuaru būmu* began in Japan, but Shimazono emphasizes 1978 was a crucial year, as it was the first time a large bookstore created what became a standard section for the "spiritual world" or *seishin sekai*, typically adjacent to, but separate from, the section for "religion" (Shimazono 2004: 275). As in the earlier New Age "movements" in the U.S. and the U.K., Japanese interest in the spiritual world was accompanied by the growth of the market for goods including publications and crystals, as well as services such as astrology, channeling, psychic readings, and alternative medicine. *Towairaito Zōn* was just one of a number of monthly magazines that, along with the titles on the *seishin sekai* bookshelves, helped establish the discursive spaces of spirituality; the magazines *My Birthday* (focused on divination) and *Mū* (on the occult and paranormal) were both founded in 1979 and each enjoyed circulations of over 350,000 as of the mid 1990s (Haga and Kisala 1995: 237).

1986, the year *Towairaito Zōn* published Takai's article on Reiki, saw a number of milestones for what Shimazono Susumu calls "new spirituality movements and culture" (*shin reisei undō to bunka*) in Japan. That year, Shirley MacLaine's *Out on a Limb*, one of the defining texts of the American New Age, was translated into Japanese; it would sell 200,000 copies by 1990 (Mullins 1992). 1986 also saw the founding of the "fourth-wave" or "new-new religions" Kofuku no Kagaku and Aum Shinrkyō, which both made use of "spiritual world" tropes including healing meditations and the fusion of science and religion. These religions' emphasis on spiritual

¹⁷ Beckett (2009: 11, 206 n. 14) traces this claim to Koyama Kimiko 小山君子 (1906-1999), a long-time president of the Usui-kai and a figure whom Ogawa would have likely known. Petter, who spoke with Koyama a number of times and has her memoirs, tempers these claims. He speculates that Usui was associated with Ōmoto and may have been "missionary" for that religion; he also claims that Koyama personally knew both Deguchi and Okada and that she told Petter that Okada's wife had been a student of Usui's. (Petter 2012: 169-170, 173).

healings ostensibly validated by science appeal to the same demographics as techniques such as Reiki, but their higher levels of organization allowed for more vigorous proselytization.

However, as in the 1920s, most Japanese who were interested in such topics were not interested in joining a new religion, which suffered from negative public image long before Aum Shinrikyō's religious violence in 1995. For these individuals, Reiki seminars offered alternative means to connect to a suprahuman force for self-cultivation and healing powers. Like yoga classes and non-sectarian meditation groups, Reiki's lack of organizational structures apart from instructional lineage affords members freedom from the stigma of membership in a new religion and allows instructors to act independently of central hierarchies. Undoubtedly it was this freedom that allowed the final two subjects of this paper, Mochizuki Toshitaka and Doi Hiroshi, to become leading figures in Japanese Reiki over the next decade.

In 1988, Mochizuki Toshitaka 望月俊孝 (b. 1953) was leading self-development seminars when a friend mentioned an "interesting technique" of Japanese origin that had become very popular overseas. Mochizuki was eager to learn new techniques to include in his seminars, and had spent years and lots of money learning and practicing various methods, but he recalls that Reiki sounded too good to be true and he did not follow up. A few years later, he came across an Australian woman named Lyn Perez, who taught Reiki through self-improvement seminars for One Network (ワン・ネットワーク), which might be described as a "spiritual boom corporation," and he enrolled in a class,¹⁸ which he says completely transformed his life (Mochizuki 1995: 48-49). He began running Reiki seminars in 1995 through his Yokohama-based company, Vortex (ヴォルテックス); their website claims that they have initiated nearly 40,000 Reiki practitioners in the last twenty years.¹⁹

Mochizuki has published several books on self-improvement, and a few specifically about Reiki. His first, 1995's *Iyashi no Te: Uchū Enerugī "Reiki" Katsuyō-hō (Healing Hands: the Practical Method to Use "Reiki" Universal Energy)*, was the first commercially available book written by a Japanese Reiki Master since the 1930s. While this edition has been through at least seventeen printings and continues to be sold, Mochizuki also released an updated edition of this book in 2001 called *Chō-kantan Iyashi no Te (Super-Easy Healing Hands)* that also included photos of Usui and his early students, as well as a manga version of Usui's biography. In addition to a couple of other Reiki books that he co-authored with a lead teacher from Vortex, Mochizuki has also reprinted some books from the 1930s by Usui's students and their students.²⁰ Yet unlike the teachers from the early period, Mochizuki seems to have hardly confronted the issue of whether Reiki is a religion.

His 1995 book opens with a reflection on the situation at the end of the twentieth century as an age of "anxiety" (*fuan* 不安). He particularly reflects on the Aum incident as the apotheosis of a number of crises including: natural disasters (specifically the Great Hanshin Earthquake), a falling yen, environmental problems, and "modern illnesses untreatable by Western medicine."²¹ He concludes that "God only knows" (*kami nomi zo shiru*) whether this will mark the end of humanity or the beginning of an "age of light" (*hikari no jidai*). However, he continues, Reiki is a technique that could play a part in bringing about an age of light in which there is healing on the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels, as well as on physical,

¹⁸ Although Mochizuki doesn't mention it in his book, Perez told me in a Skype interview (October 11, 2014) that he was working for One Network at that time and thus didn't have to pay for his training courses and initiations.

¹⁹ <http://www.reiki.ne.jp/>

²⁰ Asuke 2004; Mitsui 2003 [1930]; Tomita 1999 [1933].

²¹ 「西洋医学では対処しきれない現代病」

mental/emotional, and spiritual levels (Mochizuki 1995: 1-4). “Ultimately, it can even bring people to *satori*” (Mochizuki 1995: 5).²² Clearly, Mochizuki is comfortable framing Reiki in starkly religious vocabulary.

This continues in Mochizuki’s description of Usui’s attainment of Reiki on Kurama. By saying that Usui’s “spiritual quest” (*seishinteki tankyū*) brought him to “the sacred place of *mikkyō* and Shūgendō training” (*mikkyō narabi ni shūgendō shūgyō no seichi*), and ultimately “*satori*,” Mochizuki unambiguously evokes religious tropes. Some of this is the result of Mochizuki, like Mitsui before him, literally translating Orientalist elements of Usui’s story that were added during Reiki’s years in the U.S. For example, he says that Usui “found the key to expertly use and activate ‘universal life energy’ in a Sanskrit sutra,”²³ and Reiki’s origins were actually in ancient Tibet (Mochizuki 1995: 19, 27); although these details were added by Takata and her students in the Cold War period, they seem traces of Thesosophy-era Western mystification of Indo-Tibetan antiquity.

Despite Mochizuki’s ease with possible connections between Reiki and religious concepts, he describes his first encounter with Reiki with similar apprehension to Mitsui. He writes that when he first heard many wonderful stories about Reiki, he found them unbelievable. Moreover, he confesses the kanji for Reiki can give an “eerie feeling” (Mochizuki 1995: 31).²⁴ However, he explains away this eeriness by telling the reader that the character *rei* doesn’t only mean the spirit of a person who has died, but it can also mean “deity,” “something sacred or divine” or “something holy,” among other meanings (Mochizuki 1995: 32).²⁵ Mochizuki’s willingness to call Reiki “the Gospel for people with chronic disease” (*manseibyō no hito ni fukuin* 慢性病の人に福音) makes it clear that he is at home using religious language despite being in a space outside organized religion, and is unconcerned that either his audience or the authorities might misunderstand his intentions (Mochizuki 1995: 71).

Aside from Mochizuki, the other leading Reiki practitioner of the 1990s and 2000s is probably Doi Hiroshi 土居裕 (b. 1935). When he first learned of Reiki, Doi was a salaryman interested in the spiritual world. He had read Shirley McLaine and Sai Baba, but spiritual healing had become his primary attraction. Motivated by an ill friend, Doi learned dozens of healing techniques, and by the time he met Mitsui in 1993, he was working on combining elements from these techniques to develop his own practice. After receiving the first two levels of initiation from Mitsui, Doi had an intuition that Reiki united everything he had learned so far. He wanted to continue with his study but Mitsui wasn’t authorized to initiate other instructors and, at that time, it was difficult to find anyone who could do so.

By chance, Doi met an old woman at a Crystal Healing seminar who turned out to be a member of the Usui-kai; through her, he met and received training from Koyama Kimiko (1906-1999), the current president of the Usui-kai, herself. Doi then combined the “Western Reiki” he had learned from Mitsui, the Usui Reiki Ryōhō he learned from Koyama, and a third variety called Osho Neo Reiki that was developed by a German woman at Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh’s commune in Pune, India, and out of these three he created what he calls Gendai Reiki-hō or the Modern Reiki Method. His book, *Iyashi no Gendai Reikihō: Dentō Gihō to Seiyō-shiki Reiki no*

²² 「究極的には悟りにまで人を導くことが可能とされています。」

²³ 「彼はサンسكريットで書かれた教典の中に、[宇宙生命エネルギー]を活性化し、上手に活用する鍵を見つけました。」

²⁴ 「漢字で書きますと、人によっては何かおどろおどろしい雰囲気を感じてしまうかも知れません。」

²⁵ 「霊は死者の魂も指しますが、「神」や「こうごうしく、尊いもの」「神聖なもの」「すぐれてよいもの」「いつくしみ」などを指して呼んだものと思われます。」

Shinzui (The Modern Reiki Method of Healing: the Essence of the Traditional Technique and Western-style Reiki), was published in Japan in 1998.²⁶ As the only member of the Usui-kai who teaches publicly, Doi has become an internationally known figure in Reiki.

Like Takai and Mochizuki, Doi seems to take for granted that, although Reiki may have connections to various religions, it is not a religion itself. For example, he connects Reiki's origin to "the power of esoteric Buddhism" (*mikkyō no pawā*), and also draws connections between *mikkyō* and the Reiki symbols used by higher level practitioners (Doi 1998: 55-56, 174). However, he argues that the Reiki symbols, which are often fetishized and kept secret, are not themselves "divine" (*shinsei* 神聖) but are just means to connect to universal energies (174). Even more clearly is his idiosyncratic take on *satori* as Reiki's ultimate goal.²⁷ He clarifies that Reiki's *satori* differs from the religious concept as it refers to "complete relaxation" (175).²⁸ Despite his ambiguous repurposing of religious vocabulary, Doi never seems to feel a need to directly state that Reiki is not religion: he assumes his audience already knows this.

4. The Contemporary Scene and Conclusions

In contrast to these cases from the 1980s and 1990s, contemporary Japanese Reiki practitioners seem to need to explicitly delineate Reiki from the category of religion. This is not because of Reiki's marginality; its popularity is evident with even a casual look at the spiritual side of the "healing boom." At a January 2012 *supirichuaru māketto* event in Tokyo, roughly one-quarter (6 of 25) of the booths advertising *hiringu* services were for Reiki (author's fieldwork), and a March 2012 search for Reiki on google.co.jp yielded nearly five million hits.²⁹ As with the websites of other "spiritual therapists," most Reiki websites clearly state that they are not affiliated with any religious organization. Many use the phrase *mushūkyō* to describe Reiki or, in the case of Reiki bloggers, to describe themselves. As you can see from these screenshots [image on slide], this announcement is sometimes put in boldface, a differently colored font, or in a footnoted text box in order to make it clear that Reiki is not religion.

Why such a disconnect between the discourse of instructors from the 1990s like Mochizuki and Doi, who seem fairly secure in Reiki's non-religiousness, and that of contemporary, lesser-known Reiki practitioners? First, there may be a generation gap, especially in the case of Doi, born in 1935. In the post-Aum era, religion is widely seen as distasteful, even dangerous, especially by younger generations. This may account for the strong reactions of bloggers and smaller-scale instructors who are disproportionately younger and female. However, more established instructors may feel more confident that their audience understands that Reiki is not religion due to their prior familiarity with the discursive space of "spirituality," considered non-religious. As Gaitanidis argues, in post-Aum Japan, "*supirichuaru* expresses both a 'religiosity' and a 'counter-religious' sentiment, its second meaning bearing more value among spiritual therapists" (2012: 358). Also, by not clearly coming out against religion, Mochizuki and Doi may also avoid offending students who do associate with a particular religion or who sympathize with religion; while non-religiousness has been on the rise since the 1950s, so that

²⁶ It was translated into English in 2000 as part of Doi's involvement with a series of conferences called Usui Reiki Ryohō International that were held in Canada, Europe, and Japan between 1999 and 2003

²⁷ Indeed, the book's second subtitle is: "The method of applying *reiki* with the ultimate goal of approaching '*satori*'" (「悟り」に近づくための究極の霊気活用法)

²⁸ 「現代霊気法という悟りとは、宗教でめざすものとは異なり、究極のリラックスを得ることにあります。」

²⁹ It seems to have declined over the 2010s – a similar search in May 2015 only yielded 742,000 results.

only about one-quarter of Japanese told 1990s pollsters that they consider themselves religious, about three-quarters said that they believe that religious sentiments are important (Ama 1996).

The horror of the Aum incident may have indelibly marred the reputation of organized religion for a generation, but it could only cast a temporary pall over spiritual pursuits, particularly healing, that had already become part of mainstream youth culture. A 1995 report entitled *Iyashi to wakai (Healing and Reconciliation)*, researched before the *Aumu jiken* by four prominent Japanese scholars of religion, describes the prevalence of healing in popular magazines and bookstores, where Reiki shared space with dolphins, crystals, and relaxation music (Araya et. al. 1995). Much as Theosophical publications and lodges facilitated the lecture tours by spiritual teachers in earlier generations, these magazines and bookstores served as important infrastructure for organizing Reiki workshops in the 1980s and 1990s, before Internet use was widespread. This was the beginning of the process described by Hirano Naoko (2010), in which the healing techniques and discourses developed during the occult and spiritual booms of the 1970s and 80s, with their anticipation of a collective “spiritual world” or new age, were transformed by mass media and the Internet into the “healing boom” (*iyashi būmu*) in the 1990s and 2000s.

Some of the healing techniques of this era are indigenous while others are imported (Hirano 2010). Interestingly, Reiki in bubble and post-bubble Japan fulfills both categories. As an indigenous practice valued by non-Japanese and “re-imported” from overseas, Reiki can fuel both the exoticism and the “self-orientalism” that Prohl (2007: 369) considers integral to the popularity of New Age culture in Japan. As an import, indexed by its *katakana* orthography, Reiki and its accompanying words *enerugi hīringu*, can also signify Western “spirituality,” another *katakana* word that has become a popular replacement for older, domestic vocabulary like *seishin* or *shinrei*. *Shinrei*, which was widely used in the 1920s to describe psychic or spiritual phenomena, as in when Usui was quoted in the *Hikkei* as saying that Reiki could be called *shinrei ryōhō*, today has a much creepier connotation: *shinrei-mono* is a subgenre of Japanese horror film that includes the international hits *Ringu* (1998) and *Juon* (2000). This newer connotation of *rei* seems to go back decades, as Mitsui Mieko thought the word *reiki* felt “suspicious” when she first heard it in 1983 (Ray 1987: 220).

Regarding the popularity of foreign loan-words, Horie (2009) has argued that the words “spiritual” and “spirituality” have allowed contemporary Japanese to reposition their religiosity further from dangerous “religion” and creepy *shinrei* and closer to secularity. Thus, the “spiritual counselor” Ehara Hiroyuki and others can claim the loan-word *supirichuariti* characterizes the essence of Japanese religiosity (Prohl 2007: 371). Furthermore, as argued by Dorman and Reader (2007), Japanese mass media, post-Aum, have explicitly presented practices like pilgrimage, divination, and ancestor worship as non-religious elements of Japanese culture or tradition. Therefore, due to widespread negative connotations of religion, especially the belief that religion can be dangerous, a range of activities that scholars consider clearly religious, including spiritual healing, have been marked as non-religious, and thus safe for consumption, in contemporary Japan.

In summary, I have presented different groups of narratives of Reiki’s religiosity, and these groups are marked by distinctive discourses. In the writings by Usui Reiki Ryōhō practitioners between approximately 1925 and 1928, including those attributed to Usui himself, Usui Reiki Ryōhō was placed on an axis somewhere between the spiritual and the physical, with its self-cultivation aspect portrayed as more spiritual and its healing practice considered especially physical. Usui Reiki Ryōhō’s innovative religiosity was legitimated in similar ways as those of the new religions, including appeals to the authority of the founder through his performance of austerities, his healing powers, and his familiarity with various religious

traditions, as well as through claims regarding the physicality of its efficacious healing practice, which, though presently unorthodox, would soon be understood by medical science. Despite the use of religious modes of authority, these authors also made efforts to distance Reiki from religion, which is understandable as their group was not an officially-recognized religious organization and even those that were, such as Ōmoto, were under police pressure to reign in their healing activities (Staemmler 2009: 231-238).

Then there is the way Reiki is positioned by Mitsui, Takai, Mochizuki, and Doi. They do not shy from describing Reiki with religious vocabulary, but this vocabulary is appropriated to describe phenomena clearly outside the sphere of organized religion. On what might be termed the “bookstore axis” between religion and the spiritual world, Reiki is squarely in the on the spiritual world shelf, which created a public space outside of religion for transmundane practices.

Finally, there are the contemporary Japanese Reiki instructors and bloggers who consistently describe themselves and their practices as non-religious. For this post-Aum generation, this explicit denial of religiousness may be reflexive, and for many, their practice of Reiki may be more about personal healing rather than a communally-experienced *seishin sekai* or new age. However, I am inclined to believe that they, the heirs to the discursive spaces of spiritual healing constructed in the 80s and early 90s, now inhabit those spaces within which they can at once reassure themselves that they are non-religious and also connect with cosmic forces to heal themselves, their loved ones, and paying clients.

Works Cited

- Ama, Toshimaro . 1996. 『日本人はなぜ無宗教なのか?』 (*Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?*) Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- Araya, Shigehiko 新屋重彦, Tanabe, Shintarō 田邊信太郎, Shimazono Susumu 島菌進, and Yumiyama Tatsuya 弓山達也. 1995. 『癒しと和解—現代における CARE の諸相』 (*Healing and Reconciliation: Aspects of Care in Modernity*). Tokyo: Hābesutosha.
- Beckett, Don. 2009. *Reiki: The True Story—An Exploration of Usui Reiki*. Berkeley: Frog Books.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Doi Hiroshi 土居裕. 1998. 『癒しの現代霊気法—伝統技法と西洋式レイキの神髄』 (*The Modern Reiki Method of Healing: the Essence of the Traditional Technique and Western-style Reiki*). Tokyo: Genshū Shuppansha.
- Dorman, Ben, and Reader, Ian. 2007. “Editors’ Introduction: Projections and Representations of Religion in Japanese Media.” *Nova Religio* 10 (3): 5-12.
- Gaitanidis, Ioannis. 2012. “Spiritual Therapies in Japan.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 39 (2): 353-385.
- Haga, Manabu, and Kisala, Robert J. 1995. “Editors’ Introduction: The New Age in Japan.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22 (3-4): 235-247.
- Hirano Naoko 平野直子. 2010. 「「近代」というカテゴリにおける「普遍」と「個別」—手当て療法「レイキ」の80年史を事例として」 (“Eighty Years of ‘Reiki’ Therapy’s History as an Example of ‘Universal’ and ‘Individual’ in the Category of ‘Modernity’”). 早稲田大学大学院文学研究科紀要 56.
- . 2014. 「太霊道と臼井甕男の霊気療法の関係についての考察—精神療法家／霊術家の系譜のなかで—」 (“An Inquiry into the Relationship between Taireidō and Usui Mikao’s Reiki Ryōhō—in the context of *Seishin Ryōhō / Reijutsuka*”). Unpublished paper distributed at the joint meeting of the Theosophical Society Research Group and the Buddhism and Modernity Research Group, Ryūkoku University, Kyoto, February 1, 2014.
- Horie, Norichika. 2009. “Spirituality and the Spiritual in Japan: Translation and Transformation.” *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies* 5.
- Josephson, Jason. 2012. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2013. “An Empowered World: Buddhist Medicine and the Potency of Prayer in Japan.” In *Deus In Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between*. Edited by Jeremy Stolow. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Kim, Hoi-Eun. 2014. *Doctors of Empire: Medical and Cultural Encounters between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Matsui Shōō 松居松翁. 1928. 「隻手萬病を治する療法」 (“A Therapy that Heals Disease with One Hand”). *Sunday Mainichi*, March 4.
- Matsuoka, Hideaki 松岡英明. 2007. *Japanese Prayer Below the Equator: How Brazilians Believe in the Church of Messianity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Mochizuki Toshitaka 望月利隆. 1995. 『癒しの手—宇宙エネルギー「レイキ」活用法』. Tokyo: たま出版.
- Mullins, Mark R. 1992. “Japan’s New Age and Neo-New Religions: Sociological Interpretations.” In *Perspectives on the New Age*, edited by James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton. Albany: State University of New York Press: 232-246.
- Offner, Clark B. and van Straelen, Henry. 1963. *Modern Japanese Religions: with Special Emphasis upon their Doctrines of Healing*. Leiden: Brill.
- Okada Masayuki 岡田正之. 1927. 「霊法肇祖臼井先生功德之碑」 (“Memorial to the Merit and Virtue of Usui-sensei, Founder of the Spiritual Method”). Available at: <http://homepage3.nifty.com/faithfull/kudokuhi.htm> last accessed April 20, 2015.

- Petter, Frank Arjava. 2012. *This Is Reiki: Transformation of Body, Mind and Soul—From the Origins to the Practice*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.
- Prohl, Inken. 2007. "The Spiritual World: Aspects of New Age in Japan." In *Handbook of New Age*, edited by Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis, 359-374. Leiden: Brill.
- Ray, Barbara Weber, trans. Mitsui Mieko 三井三重子訳. 1987. 『レイキ療法—宇宙エネルギーの活用』 (*Reiki Therapy: The Practical Application of Universal Energy*). Tokyo: TAMA Publishing.
- Reiki Ryōhō Hikkei 『靈氣療法必携』 http://www.reiki.or.jp/j/4kiwameru_5.html, last accessed April 20, 2015.
- Shimazono Susumu 島藺進. 2004. *From Salvation to Spirituality: Popular Religious Movements in Modern Japan*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.
- Staemmler, Birgit. 2009. *Chinkon Kishin: Mediated Spirit Possession in Japanese New Religions*. Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- Takai Shiomi 高井志生海. 1986. 「レイキ治療のルーツを探る 臼井式靈氣療法とは？レイキは日本からアメリカに渡った」 ("Searching for the Roots of Reiki: What is Usui-Style Reiki Therapy? Reiki Went from Japan to America"). 『トワイライト・ゾーン』 (*Twilight Zone*). April 1986, 140-143.
- Tomita Kaiji 富田魁二. 1999 [1933]. 『靈氣と仁術—富田流手あて療法』 (*Reiki and Benevolent Healing: Tomita-style Healing Method*). Tokyo: BAB Japan Publishing.
- Yoshinaga, Shin'ichi 吉永進一. 2008. 「太霊と国家—太霊道における国家観の意味—」 ("Great Spirit and the State: The Meaning of the View of the State in Taireidō"). 『人体科学』 *Jintai Kagaku* 17:1.
- . 2015. "The Birth of Japanese Mind Cure Methods." In *Religion and Psychotherapy in Modern Japan*. Edited by Christopher Harding, Fumiaki Iwata, and Shin'ichi Yoshinaga. New York: Routledge.