

Reconsidering Reiki's Origins: A Response to Justin B. Stein Article on Reiki's Origins

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Part I: A Rebuttal to Stein's March 2025 Article

In his article "*Was Tokio Yokoi the True Founder of Reiki? An analysis*" (March 2025), Justin B. Stein offers a critique of two recent books that challenge the conventional attribute of Reiki's origin to Mikao Usui. The first is Elizabeth M. Latham's **The Samurai Reiki Master** (2023), an autobiographical research narrative rooted in her personal spiritual journey. The second is my scholarly monograph, **Tokio Yokoi: From Japanese Christianity to Universal Reiki** (2024). I will respond on his article from three perspectives: general tone, lack of knowledge on Christianity and Holiness Movement in Japan, and lack of knowledge on the topic of mysticism and mystical experiences.

General tone

Despite the clear difference in genre and methodology, Stein frequently collapses these works into one undifferentiated argument, applying the same critique to both without acknowledging their distinct purposes. For example, he writes:

“Unfortunately, a close examination of Latham and Jonker’s books reveals that most of their claims regarding Yokoi’s alleged connections to Reiki are based on very little historical evidence.” (Stein 2025, p2)

This sentence conflates Latham’s dream-based narrative and my documentary analysis as methodologically equivalent, thereby obscuring the fact that my book is structured around textual, theological, and institutional records. My work builds on Latham's hypothesis but assesses it against historiographical standards. By failing to distinguish between genres—memoir and monograph—Stein misrepresents the academic merit of my study. Another example of conflation appears here:

“Jonker [...] also leaves open the possibility that Usui was a pseudonym of Yokoi’s, or possibly Yokoi’s cousin.” (Stein 2025, p3)

This suggests speculative looseness when, in fact, I presented multiple hypotheses explicitly to delineate the limits of available evidence. My text states:

“Was the name wrong or the story wrong? [...] The name was wrong, and the story correct.” (Jonker 2024, p1)

By contrast, Latham affirms a univocal identity between Yokoi and Usui based on a mystical dream (Latham 2023, ch. 38.2). That Stein conflates these distinct

positions undercuts the integrity of his critique. Moreover, Stein dismisses the parallels between Yokoi's life and Takata's account with an unsubstantiated tone:

“One has to squint to even make this part fit.” (Stein 2025, p4)

This rhetorical strategy trivializes rather than disproves the argument. Takata stated that Usui was the head of a Christian school in Kyoto—Dōshisha, studied in the US, and meditated on Mt. Kurama. These elements are more faithfully echoed in Yokoi's biography than in that of the Taniai-born Usui. My book carefully traces each of these claims and compares them with primary sources.

In closing, despite Stein's stated commitment to factual critique, he resorts to pseudo-psychological remarks aimed at me personally—thereby abandoning the academic subject at hand. This is unprecedented; I have never come across such an attitude in academic literature, and I condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

Apparent lack of knowledge on Christianity and Holiness Movement in Japan

Stein asserts:

“There is simply no evidence that Yokoi practiced any form of healing.”
(Stein 2025, p7)

This disregards that I throughout my book examine Yokoi's theological formation during and after his time in the United States. I outline his likely exposure to Holiness institutions, known for emphasizing healing through faith, prayer, and moral purification. Furthermore, I elaborate on inner transformation due to personal circumstances as well as to the geopolitical situation, and sanctification—a core Holiness principle. These interpretations are supported by Holiness Movement scholarship. For example, Sonntag writes that in the Holiness tradition,

“(…) healing and sanctification were understood not merely as private spiritual experiences, but as testimonies of divine intervention within the social fabric of Christian community.” (Sonntag 2003 in: Mullins 2003, p227).

Critics may further claim that linking Yokoi to Reiki lacks documentary proof of healing practices. However, this view overlooks the broader cultural-theological milieu. As shown in Sonntag (2012) and Mullins (2003), Holiness theology explicitly promoted healing as part of spiritual life, and such ideas were embedded within Protestant schools like Dōshisha where Yokoi served. Moreover, healing was not always formally recorded but was practiced as part of charismatic ministry—a domain still under-researched in Japanese Christian historiography.

That Stein does not engage with this literature, or with the Protestant revivalist sources cited throughout my book (i.e. Mullins 2003), suggests that his critique lacks engagement with the full theological setting from which both Yokoi and Reiki could plausibly have emerged.

Mysticism and mystical experience

As a scholar with a background in mysticism and the author of a master's thesis on mystical experiences of Reiki masters—later published as a peer-reviewed article in *Studies in Spirituality*—I consider myself well-positioned to assess Latham's vision with both academic rigor and contextual sensitivity. Elizabeth Latham's 1994 vision—wherein she encountered the face of a man who spiritually identified himself as “Usui”—should thus be treated not as fabrication, but as a genuine mystical experience. Crucially, her vision revealed an unfamiliar face at that moment. It was only during a later visit to Dōshisha University that she recognized the same face in a historical photograph, subsequently identified as Tokio Yokoi and fitted in the Takata narrative. Given the state of historical knowledge at that time—pre-internet, with no accessible biography of Yokoi—this sequence of vision followed by archival confirmation significantly reduces the possibility of prior cognitive influence or fantasy, falsifying Stein's claim that Takata ‘must have picked it up’. Latham's experience, therefore, resonates with the mystical and revelatory dimensions often found in spiritual traditions—dimensions that are commonly foundational in the transmission of esoteric practices. To dismiss it out of hand is to misunderstand how such traditions evolve and how lineage claims often function. Takata's narrative, long criticized as mythological, now gains plausibility in light of both new documentary evidence (such as the 1904 CV and Okuna's 1928 book discussed hereafter) and retrospective mystical insight. Together, these sources do not prove—but strongly suggest—that we are dealing with a historically plausible convergence of biography packed in oral transmission, theology, and spiritual vision.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Stein's scholarly publications—his doctoral work, journal articles, and edited volumes—focus squarely on transnational spiritual healing practices like Reiki and Buddhist medicine. However, he has not published peer-reviewed research on Christianity in Japan or on mysticism as such. Since my argument about Yokoi hinges on historical Christian–Holiness contexts and mystical sensibilities, this represents a substantive gap in his disciplinary coverage and may help explain why central elements of my thesis were not fully engaged.

It should also be noted that Stein's article appeared in March 2025, before two key sources were made public: the 1904 *Curriculum Vitae* of Mikao Usui and Okuna's 1928 publication “*The Voice of a Flute*”. As such, Stein cannot be faulted for not incorporating their contents. However, had these sources been available to him, they would have significantly altered the evidentiary landscape he was addressing.

Part II: Strengthening the Argument with Newly Discovered Sources and Anticipating Future Critique

Since March 2025, two crucial sources have been released that reshape the debate on Reiki's origin and directly support the argument advanced in my article “*Reframing the Early History of Reiki: The Converging Paths of Mikao Usui and Tokio Yokoi*”. These are the 1904 *Curriculum Vitae* (CV) of Mikao Usui and Okuna's 1928 book in which he refers to Usui. While Stein could not have incorporated these sources in his critique, they now provide substantial corroboration for the biographical and theological linkages presented in my study.

The 1904 CV confirms that Usui worked for Christian missionary schools and studied abroad—points that had previously been dismissed as Takata's mythmaking. Their confirmation not only validates key portions of her oral testimony but also brings Usui's background closer to that of Yokoi, who was himself a Christian minister educated in the United States. Critics may argue that this simply confirms Usui's Christian experience, not a link to Yokoi, but the CV's silence on any healing work before 1922, paired with his connections to educational and theological networks, leaves open the hypothesis of Yokoi's foundational influence.

Similarly, the 1928 book by Okuna, though ostensibly centered on Usui, introduces motifs of sanctification, ascetic retreat, and spiritual empowerment consistent with Holiness and revivalist theology. These elements are not typically Buddhist or Shintō in nature but rather echo Christian themes of inner transformation and divine vocation. Dismissing these as coincidental underestimates the shared theological environment from which both Yokoi and Usui emerged.

Finally, some may reject the synthesis of Takata's oral narrative with academic analysis. But as argued in the article, historical inquiry often begins with oral tradition before finding documentary grounding. The convergence of Takata's themes with Usui's CV and Yokoi's biography now creates a triangulation of evidence that is stronger than any of its parts alone. This particular convergence should and does attract the attention of scholars.

Conclusion

Stein's subjective criticism of my work made it clear that more well-founded research is needed to demonstrate in academic discourse that both Yokoi and Usui seem to have played a role in the early development of Reiki. My publication "*Reframing the Early History of Reiki: The Converging Paths of Mikao Usui and Tokio Yokoi*" (June 8, 2025), contributes further to this, presenting Yokoi as the spiritual and theological originator of Reiki and Usui as its principal transmitter..

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