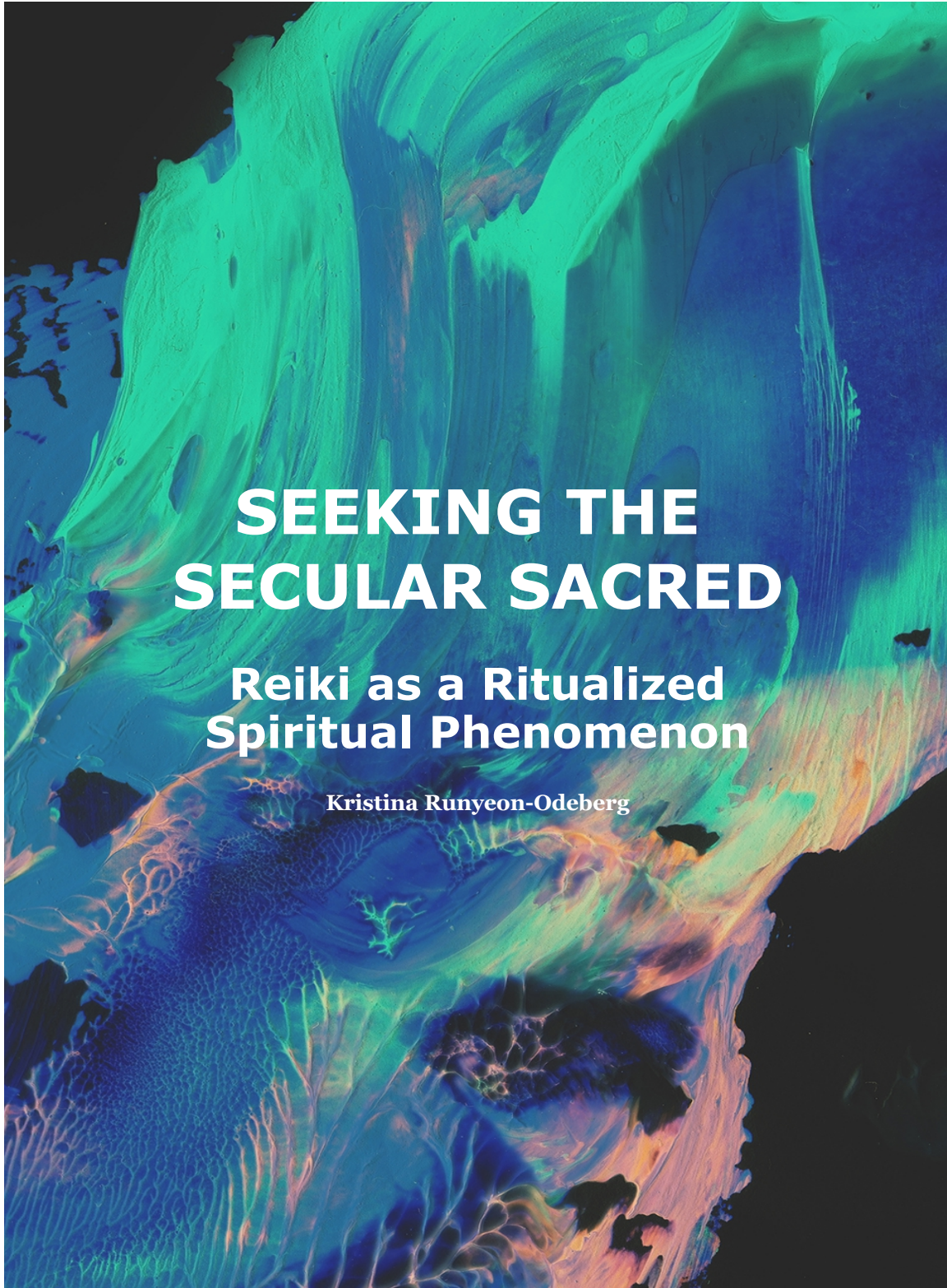




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Supervisor: Anna-Pya Sjödin

Examiner: Åsa Schumann

## Abstract

Reiki is a hands-on healing method classified as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) that helps the body relax and heal itself, according to its practitioners. Sessions involve practitioners channeling energy to the client to assist this process. The consensus within the Reiki community is that Mikao Usui discovered the method while he was on Mount Kurama in 1922. There is ample research on the efficacy of Reiki in healthcare, but very few researchers have investigated its characteristics related to religiosity and rituals.

Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to examine Reiki as a secular sacred phenomenon and how it can be understood as such. This thesis also discusses how rituals in Reiki can be understood using other research on rituals. There is also a comparative analysis of Reiki rituals, focusing on three of them and how they differ between four Reiki Masters where three have studied with the same Reiki Master Teacher. The rituals are *gassho*, a meditation ritual; *kenyoku-ho*, a cleansing ritual; and, finally, *reiji-ho*, a direction ritual.

The search for academic sources has been a major obstacle to overcome. Firstly, there is very little research on Reiki as a spiritual phenomenon or Reiki as a ritualistic phenomenon; most etic studies have focused on effects or possible benefits. Sources from within the Reiki community (emic sources) tend to make statements without clear evidence. Furthermore, some etic sources use emic sources to support their statements.

## Keywords

Reiki, emic, etic, rituals, spirituality, religiosity, secular sacred, syncretism

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## 1 Introduction

Reiki is described as a method of healing using “universal life force energy” through the laying on of hands (Brown 2013, 179). Others call it a transnational form of healing practice where initiates undergo a ceremony derived from Vajrayāna Buddhist empowerment rituals (Salguero 2015, 336). There are researchers who say that the origins of Reiki are contested and that the phenomenon could either have been around for around two and a half millennia, or began with Mikao Usui in 1922 (Brown 2013, 180).

Depending on the source consulted (these sources often come from the insider, or *emic*, perspective), Usui was a Buddhist monk who lived in a Zen monastery (*ibid.*), or a doctorate student in Chicago (Clarke 2006, 528), although one of the above does not rule out the other. The purpose of Reiki (that is, the practice or method) is to bring healing to the recipient as the healer channels Reiki energy (hereafter referred to as *reiki*) (*ibid.*).

Over the years, there have been many studies that have led to Reiki being offered as a widely used complementary medicinal method in hospitals and healthcare centers (e.g. Ringdahl 2009, 271). According to Ringdahl, the National Institute of Health classifies Reiki as biofield therapy (*ibid.*), and there are even doctors and nurses who practice it (*ibid.*, 272). However, there are very few purely scholarly research studies that have looked at Reiki and its possible relationship to the sacred, an area to which this thesis could contribute. This will be done using the theory of Knott on the *secular sacred*, a term coined by her indicating that the sacred can be coupled to both the religious and the secular (e.g. Knott 2017, 145). The research of Schilderman on defining religiosity provides material for comparison, especially as Schilderman favors the view of religiosity coupled to beliefs and rituals.

Reiki is not called a religious practice by its practitioners (e.g. Doi 2014, 94); on the contrary, they are very careful to call it combinable with any religion (e.g. Rand 2020, 11). However, Reiki can fall into the category of the *secular sacred*, a concept coined by Knott (e.g. 2017, 145) to refer to secular beliefs. Reiki can also be described as a ritual practice, as the ability to channel Reiki is acquired through an attunement, induction, or initiation ritual (Garrett 2001, 334). This ritual makes practitioners aware of the presence of *reiki* and gives them the ability to channel it (*ibid.*). Some Reiki rituals are associated with meditation, as explained in Section 8.2. This leads to the double purpose of this thesis.

## 1.1 Purpose

This thesis has two purposes. The first is to compare and discuss Reiki using the theory of Knott on the secular sacred along with Schilderman on the definition of religion. Then, the second is to outline select rituals in Reiki in order to compare their differences and try to determine how they may be theoretically understood.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The research questions are:

- How can Reiki be understood in relation to the secular sacred or religiosity?
- How may rituals differ between Reiki Masters?
- How may Reiki rituals be understood using other research on rituals, for example Buddhist/Shintō rituals?

## 1.3 Scope, Featured Rituals and Reiki Variants

For the purpose of investigating rituals and differences between Reiki Masters, the scope needs to be narrowed with regard to both the rituals and Reiki variants. Three particular rituals in Reiki have been chosen for comparison in this thesis:

- *gassho*, a meditation ritual over *Go-kai*, the Reiki ideals
- *reiji-ho*, a ritual performed to have the hands guided during a Reiki session
- *kenyoku-ho* (sometimes called *kenyoko-ho*), a dry bath for the purpose of purification of body and spirit (e.g. Doi 2014; 158, 159, 161).

The Reiki variants used for comparison are:

- Iyashino Gendai Reiki Ho (Doi 2014)
- Usui/Holy Fire Reiki (Rand 2015, 2020)
- Intuitive Reiki (Rowland 2006)
- Inner Reiki (Stiene 2017)

Rand, Rowland, and Stiene have all studied Reiki with Doi, among others, which makes for an interesting study of the similarities and differences between their versions of rituals. Please refer to Chapter for a more thorough explanation of central concepts used in this thesis.

## 2 Outline

Now that the purpose and research questions have been presented in Chapter 1, Chapter 3 will present some central concepts used in this thesis. Chapter 4 describes how the

material was chosen and the which method was used. The theory chapter, or Chapter 5, addresses the theories that have been used to consider Reiki. Chapter 6, which is dedicated to previous research, summarizes the research of interest to this thesis. Chapter 7 covers the background of Reiki, presenting the practice, what has been determined using the outsider, or the *etic*, perspective. Then, the story of Reiki from inside the community, meaning the *emic* perspective, is covered. and some of its many types. The three pillars of Reiki are presented in Chapter 8. After that, the chosen Reiki rituals are presented in Sections 8.2 to 8.4 as Doi and the three Reiki Masters he trained describe them. Chapter 9, *Discussion*, addresses how the concept of religion and the secular sacred is coupled to Reiki, and how the rituals may be understood using this theory. Finally, this thesis concludes with a summary of the results found in Chapter 10, and suggestions for further research are found in Chapter 11.

### 3 Central Concepts

In this chapter, the central concepts are found. Most are related to Reiki, but some are coupled to the theory.

**Chiryō:** Treatment; according to the translated original handbook of Dr. Mikao Usui, it was one of the three original pillars of Reiki (Usui & Arjava Petter 2003, 15–16). It is not included in the comparison of rituals for difference and scope reasons.

**Emic:** The *emic* perspective takes into the account the insider view of a concept. Engler & Whiteside (2022, 2) use the single word *religious* for this term, but as Engler & Whiteside write, and as will be discussed further on, the issue is slightly more complex, and the boundaries are not necessarily so clear-cut (ibid.). In this thesis, *emic* will refer to material coming from *within* the Reiki community.

**Etic:** The *etic* perspective, then, is the outsider view of a concept. Engler & Whiteside (2022, 2) use a single word for this term too, namely *scholarly*. In this thesis, *etic* refers to peer-reviewed articles or material otherwise classified as scholarly according to Chapter 4, *Material and Method*.

**Gassho:** A central position to Reiki (Schuhmacher & Woerner 1989, 116). Literally interpreted as “palms of the hands together”, *gassho* is a Zen term for the traditional greeting, request, expression of thanks, adoration, or supplication. It is used by many civilizations, particularly in the East (ibid.). *Gassho* is also described as a mental state that implies the unification of the diametrically opposed forces of the phenomenal universe.

This position is central to the first outlined Reiki ritual, the *gassho meditation* (e.g. Doi 2014, 158).

**Go-kai:** The five Reiki ideals, precepts or principles (called ideals in this thesis): “[Just for] today, (1) do not be angry, (2) do not worry, (3) be thankful, (4) do what you are meant to do, (5) be kind to others (e.g. Doi 2014, 33). See the *gassho* meditation above, which focuses on one or all of these in the versions compared in this thesis.

**Ken'yoku:** A method of purification to be used before and/or after a treatment, or whenever the practitioner feels the need to be purged of negative energy (e.g. Rand 2020, 61).

**Reiji-ho:** *Reiji* is interpreted as “indication of the spirit” by some (e.g. Rand 2020, 56–57) and “indication of the Reiki power” by others (e.g. Usui & Arjava Petter 2003, 17). The suffix *-ho* is interpreted as “methods” (ibid.). *Reiji-ho* is used to guide the practitioner’s hands during Reiki treatments (ibid., 17–18).

**Religiosity:** In this thesis, used to denote the act of being religious, not pious, as especially in the Eastern world, there may be mixing. See also *Secular sacred* and *Syncretism* below.

**Secular sacred:** A term coined by Knott to define that the sacred and the secular can, and do, coexist (2017, 145). She uses this term to explain that the sacred can be coupled to non-religious spaces as well as religious ones (ibid.). In other words, the *sacred* is not exclusive to religiosity.

**Syncretism:** the co-existence of two or more spiritual practices that develops when two or more of them exist side by side and consequentially interact (e.g. Lepekhova 2017, 55). A prominent example is the long-standing relationship between Shintō and Buddhism in Japan, and some scholars favor the term *co-existence* (ibid.). Others, however, consider syncretism to be the most correct equivalent of the Japanese term *shugō* (Satoshi 2003, 69). Both the Japanese word and its equivalent have carried negative connotations of impurity, leading to the use of the term *amalgamation* for some scholars instead (ibid.). In the Western world, syncretism has been subject to criticism and even warnings (Knott et al 2013b, 168). Other scholars find this concept unworthy of attention because it is simply part of how we understand the dynamics and contact of cultures and religions that syncretism deserves no special attention. Sered discusses this, although she argues that the mixing of religions is of special interest because the frequency of ritual mixing is in itself a reason to study why it occurs in the first place (2007, 223). She also opines that the

concept of *antisyncretism* would be worthy of study, because the concept of *no* mixing is a much rarer occurrence than *some* or *ample* mixing of rituals (ibid., 230).

#### 4 *Material and Method*

The primary material for this thesis comes from within the Reiki community, and its central primary sources are manuals by Reiki Master Hiroshi Doi (2014) and three Reiki Masters who studied with Doi. William Lee Rand, Amy Zaffarano Rowland, and Frans Stiene. Rand, Rowland, and Stiene have all had other teachers, but Doi is a common denominator. All four have citations on Google Scholar, and three of the four (Doi, Rand, and Stiene) are founders of international Reiki associations. Doi is considered an authority within the Reiki community. Rand is the founder of the International Center for Reiki Training. His Reiki training comes from both Doi and Phyllis Furumoto, one of the 22 Reiki Masters Takata initiated. Rand has founded the Center for Reiki Research and has co-authored research articles on the subject related to the efficiency of Reiki (e.g. Dyer et al 2019). Rowland has not founded any international organizations, but she has studied Reiki with Doi and Beth Gray, another student and master stemming from Takata. Finally, Stiene studied with Doi and a master taught by Hayashi. He co-founded the International House of Reiki (Stiene 2017, 188). Since all of the three chosen students of Doi have also studied with other masters, it may be interesting to see if or how they perform the rituals differently. The rest of the primary sources are books related to the story of Reiki, meaning that these books are written from, and convey, the insider or *emic* perspective. Alternately, they cover such areas as connections between Reiki and Buddhism where it has not been possible to find peer reviews or the books have been published outside of the academic sphere. The oldest book from this category is *Reiki: Hawayo Takata's Story*, published in 1990, but the lion's share of Reiki-related books dates from the 2010s and onward.

The research method used was comparative analysis of both the rituals and the theoretical material. The use of this research method required finding the relevant research literature, both for primary and secondary sources (Stausberg 2022, 25), a process which required extensive searching. Finding comparable material for the rituals required using the same rituals, as far as they were available. Meditation is a large part of Reiki, which made the *gassho* meditation over the *Go-kai* a natural choice. This meditation is one of the three pillars of Reiki, according to the original Reiki handbook of Dr. Usui (translated by Arjava Petter; 2003, 15–16). The other two are *reiji-ho*, interpreted as “direction of the

spirit” (ibid., 17–18), and *chiryō*, treatment (ibid., 18–19). Both *gassho* and *reiji-ho* were present with all chosen masters. However, *chiryō*, or the treatment procedure, can take an hour or more, usually includes *gassho* at the beginning, and involves a number of steps and positions (ibid., 28–68). All of these conditions were reasons for omitting it from the comparison: outlining the different approaches to *chiryō* could fill a whole thesis by itself. Thus, the cleansing ritual of *kenyoku-ho* was deemed a more viable choice, as it involves fewer steps.

The search for material included both emic and etic sources. If a source belonged to the etic category, it was subject to one of two verification methods: only peer-reviewed articles qualified as secondary sources. Reviews in research magazines or the book publisher were the conditions used for books. These verification methods needed further refining. A critical analysis (Stausberg 2022, 25) of some of the possible secondary sources showed that some of them made statements based on unverified emic sources. These sources were either moved to the primary category or omitted altogether. By scrutinizing the primary sources for relevant information, and by repeating the process for secondary sources, ultimately some answers, or at least indications of them, were found. The comparative approach meant that the research questions were adjusted over time as the descriptions were adjusted (ibid.).

## 5 Theory

This chapter covers part of the research of Kim Knott on the secular sacred and rituals, along with the research of Schilderman on defining the concept of religiosity. Knott has studied spatial properties of religion, including sacred spaces. She has also developed a spatial method for the study of religion involving the body as space, particularly the left hand. As Knott’s research on the left hand could fill a separate thesis, it was not included.

### 5.1 Religious Practice

Knott has studied how migrants practice religion and has identified six general conditions that apply to religious practice, regardless of groups or societies, so they may be of interest to spiritual practice too (2016, 3–4):

- It is impossible to separate practice from discourse, so even if, say, a ritual would be in focus, what is said about it from the practitioner or others is just as important.
- Religious practice creates private and public spaces, and they are affected by the contexts where they are practiced.

- Rituals may have the purpose of acquiring, containing, managing and fending off power, because religious practice encompasses using and manipulating power.
- Boundaries between the private and the public can be difficult to maintain, as the choice of clothing/covering in the place of practice will probably show in public.
- Religious practice is bound up with identity and recognition, and anyone studying this type of practice needs to be aware of *how* it is performed.
- The choice of how to research religious practice will most likely influence the conclusions drawn. If the research centers on the place of worship, the community will be in focus, but using interviews or autobiographies as sources will allow for individuals to influence the results.

## 5.2 Space

Religious practice from the Western perspective, writes Knott, is a set of traditions, beliefs and practices (2005, 59). She has investigated non-religious places and their relationship with the sacred (ibid., 61). There seems to be a common conception that, if spaces are not religious, it follows almost naturally that they are secular (Knott 2005, 62). However, the concept of space is not simply a backdrop used to position the secular or the sacred (ibid., 7). Knott discusses space across the concepts *sacred* and *secular* as follows: the body is a foundation in order to perceive, conceive and produce (sacred) space (ibid., 127). Then, space is ascertained as multi-dimensional, as it is intrinsically connected to social relations (ibid.). Space brings social, cultural and financial capital together; it also brings power, both hegemony and resistance (ibid.). Space can be local or global; it can be local in a parish church or comprise a worldwide evangelical organization (ibid., 128).

Knott writes that space is a practised, thought, and sensed concept, and that engaging in the above creates, reproduces and adapts space. To sacralize a place is to turn it into a sacred space (Knott 2005, 128). Space is a socially constructed concept; therefore, it has no fixed meaning, in a similar manner as the concept of religion (ibid.). In order to understand more about religiosity, Knott writes, its attachment to space makes it manageable (ibid.). There is also more to space than what dimensions, properties and aspects are tied to it (ibid., 129). Among other things, space will bring about responses and affects those who experience it. Thus, space is active, not by itself, but because of the actions it evokes by people existing in it (ibid.). But this thesis will now turn to a specific area: the secular sacred.

### 5.3 *Secular Sacred*

The *secular sacred*, writes Knott, constitutes a set of beliefs that are not understood as inherently religious (2017, 145). Knott highlights the break with the commonly-expressed view that the category *sacred* is exclusively religious and that the profane is secular by using the term *secular sacred* to illustrate that the sacred never left the secular (ibid., 146).

The term *sacred*, writes Knott, is not exclusive to religion, and therefore, the former pairing of religiosity and *sacred* needs decoupling (2013, 145). Conversely, the secular and the *sacred* are not mutually exclusive: they co-exist, which is why the term *secular sacred* was coined. Knott argues that the *sacred* never left the secular, but scholars did not notice this pairing or misunderstood it, so it was left without attention, especially in the West (ibid.). Knott uses the term *secular sacred* to clarify the dependence between the two, and she also uses the term *religious sacred*. She also writes that the secular profanes the *sacred* according to assumptions (ibid., 146). The discussion of religion and the *sacred* related to the modern age has been conducted for around one hundred years. On occasion, how they relate has been of interest, but most scholars have chosen to use the two terms interchangeably (ibid.). The question of the *sacred* began to be under scrutiny in the 1980s, but it was in the 1990s that it was truly reopened. Its uniqueness made it the target of theologians. Most theories have drawn on those of Durkheim, which distinguish between the *sacred* and the profane (ibid., 147). Knott argues that the term *sacred* creates no boundary between secular and religious contexts. Without religion, no secularism, and the two can be understood only by being related to each other, though they have been viewed differently over time (ibid., 148). In the Middle Ages, the term *religious* was reserved for monasteries and *secular* for other members of the clergy (ibid.). Over time, this changed to be a relationship of opposites. Knott, however, suggests that the two be viewed as two sides of the same coin (ibid.). With the secular being a highly integrated part of modern life, it is a hard concept to define. To overcome this, Knott suggests an approach of investigating *religious* and *secular* and what spaces they occupy (ibid., 149). As the secular was defined during the Enlightenment era, the privatization of faith led to the creation a non-religious area, where the boundaries were not clear, and, to this day, have not been defined (ibid., 150).

Knott has used a "spatial-discursive approach" (Knott 2017, 150) to explain how the relationship between the *religious*, the *secular* and the *postsecular* works. They all draw on the *sacred* in order to maintain their relationships (ibid.). Spaces such as the *religious* and the *sacred* are unstable, and the same applies to their boundaries (ibid., 151). Knott

argues that the *sacred* can transcend the boundaries of the *religious* and the *secular*, because the *sacred* does not inherently belong to the religious sphere. That *sacred* has only been used to describe religion does not imply a sense of total belonging (ibid.). To free the term *sacred* from religion is possible and indeed desirable. It is the *sacred* that can be used to distinguish concepts rather than *religion* and the *secular*.

The *sacred* has been focused on “embodiment, spatiality and cognition” (Knott 2017, 153), and Knott prefers to use cognition to mark the boundary between the inside and the outside of the sacred (ibid.). The *sacred* also exists in social and cultural contexts, as people have used it to create boundaries tied to practices, values, and beliefs. There are scholars who prefer the term *specialness*, which Knott finds bland, but she values a scale on which to differentiate the value attributed to concepts. Knott argues that things may be *special* but not *sacred* (ibid., 154). However, the *sacred* is neither universal nor permanent; within religion, it can be used to create boundaries within debates, such as the nature of the clergy or what relationships are approved (ibid., 155). Knott concludes that there is no clear connection between religious views and views on what is sacred. She considers the sacred not to be exclusive to the field of religion, and it does not oppose the secular, which means that the secular can indeed co-exist with the sacred (ibid., 160). But there are other scholars who have approached religiosity; one of them is Schilderman.

Schilderman’s research regarding religiosity favors the semiotic approach and addresses religiosity in terms of beliefs and rituals. The role of religion in society is emphasized and subject to careful examination, because Schilderman recognizes the need for questioning established views (2015, 177). The research of Schilderman is featured next.

#### 5.4 Defining Religiosity

There is no clear-cut definition of religiosity, according to Schilderman (2015, 176), so trying to define this concept is a complex matter. Using the method of theological thought, which draws upon established confessions, is problematic (ibid., 177). Often, religiosity is only one variable of many in a framework of culture, region, and history, making a comparative analysis incomplete (ibid., 178). The discipline of humanities can be understood as “readings of culture that aim at an explanation of human identity” (ibid., 179). This task could either be self-reflective and help broaden experience, it could be culture-centered, or it could focus more on the transfer of knowledge (ibid.). Schilderman considers that this definition is centered on interpretation, and there is thus a need for methodological tools (ibid.). Religiosity cannot be solely studied from a confessional

viewpoint; scholars must include historical and cultural variables (ibid.). Furthermore, there are three dependencies (ibid.; 179, 180):

- the beliefs and practices of any type of religiosity depend on other variables, such as the culture in which they exist
- religious studies have been influenced by the concept of power, which means that some interpretations are seen as more valid than others
- those who conduct religious studies need the element of reason, meaning that concepts such as truth are included

The final dependency means that anyone who conducts religious studies from the humanities perspective is taking the risk of re-introducing the ideological aspects, something that the discipline of humanities tries to avoid (Schilderman 2015, 180). There have been attempts at replacing the concept of religiosity with faith (ibid., 181), but such an action would simply mean that faith needs to be defined. There are those who consider religiosity as a concept that cannot exist in a cross-cultural context (ibid.). However, to use the term culture instead of religiosity (or even religion) is to introduce a far more complex concept (ibid.). Religious studies may use a monothetic, or single-idea, approach, which classifies practices and beliefs based on the presence of a set of attributes (ibid., 183). Alternately, these studies may use a polythetic approach, which is mainly concerned with finding similarities between different practices (ibid.). However, if religious studies are concerned with the meaning of signs, symbols and texts, namely the semiotic approach, it can be approached from different cultures and time frames (ibid., 185).

## 6 Previous Research

As some emic sources (e.g. Stiene 2022, 164) mention Shintō as one of several sources from which Reiki has stemmed (Buddhism being another), research on the subject is relevant to this thesis. Deal & Ruppert (2015) remark that the origin of rituals in esoteric Buddhism are coupled to court trends of the Medieval era. The nobility and royals gathered knowledge and treasures. Temples gathered Buddhist scriptures, and esoteric Buddhists in turn gathered lineages and oral traditions (ibid., 106). Traditions regarding rituals are part of Rambelli's research.

### 6.1 Initiation Rituals

Rambelli has studied initiation rituals that were originally esoteric Buddhist in late medieval and early modern Japan (2022, 265). Over time, the studied initiation rituals have included the transmission of knowledge of texts related to *kami* (deities of Shintō;

Schumacher & Woerner 1989, 324; Rambelli 2002, 266). Rambelli’s research mentions a text that was the source of these rituals known as the *Reikiki* (ibid.). The knowledge that the initiation rituals gave the disciples was secret, and there were promises of benefits to disciples upon initiation such as success (ibid.). Rand writes that the Reiki practitioner should keep the symbols private, because they are sacred (2020, 47). In other words, Reiki also incorporates the element of secrecy.

Shingon initiations, *kanjō*, are described as rituals where a master transmits “the essence of esoteric Buddhism” (Rambelli 2002, 267) to a disciple. The central part of the ritual is to pour water on the disciple’s head, which has given the ritual its Japanese name (ibid.). One of the more systematic forms, called *denbō kanjō*, interpreted as “initiation ritual of the transmission the Dharma”, is preceded by a phase of purification pertaining to the body and mind (ibid., 268). For the body, there are holy water baths and wearing a white robe (ibid.). For the mind, there are several steps to purification. One is the reception of precepts; the second consists of the Buddhist jewels, and the third is to pledge allegiance to “a number of Buddhist ethical propositions” (ibid., 268–269). The initiation ritual itself involves disciples throwing a flower at a mandala to determine to which deity they are related (ibid., 269). Masters generally instruct disciples on the performance of rituals and the interpretation of texts (ibid.). Disciples in turn receive sacred objects and are to pay homage to images of the Shintō patriarchs before they can take their place beside their master as an equal (ibid.). This type of ritual has served as a template for other knowledge transfer procedures, and over time, these rituals became more complex (ibid., 270). An example of a complex initiation will now follow.

A Miwa initiation in Shintō (tied to the *kami* named Miwa) involves passing through three *torii* gates, each gate representing heaven, man and earth (Rambelli 2002, 270). The *torii* gate symbolizes the separation of the sacred from the secular: outside the gate, there is the secular, inside it, the space is sacred. Initiates purify their bodies using holy water and incense while chanting mantras and formulas (ibid., 271). Then, they cover their eyes and approach the main altar. After the throwing of a flower, the eyes of the initiate are uncovered (ibid.). There is another sacred space behind this altar, fenced in by *torii* in all four directions, which represents a universe where the *kami* symbolize buddhas (ibid., 271–272). Upon entering this sacred space, initiates recite a secret poem (ibid., 272–273). Then, the



*A torii gate.*

disciple and master are seated together at an altar, where the master uses holy water to purify the disciple. The disciple uses incense for further purification before receiving a jewel, a sword and a mirror, which are the imperial regalia (ibid., 273). A secret poem intoned by the initiate confirms that all thoughts and actions now are the work of the *kami* (ibid.). Rambelli writes that the *kami* constitute the life force inside humans (ibid.). The initiation to the *Reikiki* has three different levels (ibid., 273–274). It may be of interest to outline the number of Reiki levels at this point.

### 6.1.1 Levels – and Gifts – of Reiki

According to Doi, Eastern Reiki (Dento Reiki) has three levels while Western Reiki has four (2014, 111). Rand uses three levels, though, with Advanced Reiki Techniques (ART) and Master forming Levels IIIA and IIIB and often taught together (Rand 2020, 104–107). The Reiki attunements (initiations) of Rand, however, have moved away from being complex to a simplified procedure, contrary to the observations of Rambelli. Earlier, attunements were performed for all levels in Usui/Tibetan Reiki. The first-degree initiation could either be performed in four attunements, with the original three Usui symbols and the Master symbol of Takata present (e.g. Rand 2015, 99–103). All attunements were performed in three parts. The gifts of the Reiki Master to the initiate consisted of reiki at the first level, the knowledge and use of the three Usui symbols at the second level and the Master symbol of Takata from level IIIA (ibid., 106). With the introduction of Holy Fire Reiki, attunements have been abandoned for placements and ignitions, allowing for the Reiki energy to take precedence over the Reiki Master (e.g. Rand 2019, 91–92). This ties in with the concept of surrender, which will now be outlined.

## 6.2 Surrender

### 6.2.1 The Etic Perspective

Beeler (2017, 467) has studied the concept of surrender within the Reiki community and argues that spirituality differs from practitioner to practitioner. Spirituality, writes Beeler, is relational rather than connected to a higher power (ibid.). New Age spirituality is linked with the concept of an internal authority, which makes it a subjective experience, thus accounting for the differences between individuals (ibid.). According to Beeler, no studies on Reiki had investigated the nature of *reiki* itself as an agent in 2017, which meant that her research was breaking new ground (ibid., 468).

Reiki Masters who have been interviewed by Beeler discuss surrender in terms such as letting go, acceptance, going with the flow, and self-surrender (2017, 468–469). One Reiki

Master, however, set the concept of surrender at a distance and stated that he himself was the authority figure through which *reiki* could work (ibid., 469). Beeler discusses *reiki* as a relational process where both internal (practitioners) and external (*reiki*) authorities are cooperating (ibid.). While surrender in academia usually encompasses trust in a higher power, the relational process adds the dimension of trusting in the self. Drawing on the research of Holbraad, Beeler proposes that *reiki* be regarded as an agent, which means that it is the “subject of action” and that the question of this agency needs investigation (ibid., 468, 470).

As both a form of energy and a concept, Beeler discusses *reiki* as an intelligent agent which knows where to go and what to do (2017, 471). Practitioners report that they can sense its actions because they are attuned to the energy/concept/agent (ibid.), and some of them characterize *reiki* with the ability to flow and move (ibid., 472). Beeler declares power to be a link between authority and agency, because power is tied closely to both concepts (ibid., 473). More than 30 Reiki practitioners, most of them Reiki Masters, were interviewed by Beeler and her findings suggest that *reiki* is also a relational power (ibid., 474). Practitioners discuss the motivations and influence of *reiki* as being external, and they can work with it by being either committed to it or using it intuitively (ibid.). However, most importantly, *reiki* can be seen as a guide along the spiritual path of the practitioner (ibid., 475). This guidance needs to be approached from the emic perspective as well. Interestingly enough, Rand advocates an experiment in surrender where the Holy Fire energy is the agent.

### *6.2.2 The Emic Perspective: a Reiki Application*

Rand has described an experiment in surrender. The procedure involves meditating on the affirmation of surrendering to the Holy Fire energy and letting it guide the practicing Reiki Master (Rand 2019, 119–120). In other words, *reiki* is both an agent and a guide (ibid.). This ties in with the research of Beeler, but this double function of *reiki* is also a property that could lead scholars to define Reiki as a religious practice. Schilderman is a scholar who considers the definition of religiosity a complex task, and this will be highlighted in the next section.

### *6.3 Religiosity and Roles*

Epistemological concerns are also embedded within religious studies: firstly, a researcher must do justice to religious practitioners, who build their practice on for example texts or rituals, whether they are clergy or laity (Schilderman 2015, 186). Secondly, most of those

who conduct religious studies have already been socialized to some extent, which is very likely to influence their view of the object of study (ibid., 187). Thirdly, there are so-called secular definitions, especially where Christianity is concerned, which has defined European states as far back as some two thousand years (ibid., 188). Schilderman favors the semiotic method to compare the similarities and differences and advocates the use of a comparative method related to resemblance, not a comprehensive approach (ibid., 195). It is also important to distinguish groups that can claim some sort of ownership, for example clergy or laity, and to investigate how they interact with each other (ibid.). In other words, groups and roles are of importance.

#### 6.4 Roles: A Continuum

On the subject of groups and roles, Knott remarks that scholars will find themselves thinking about how limited objectivity and subjectivity may be and how emic and etic perspectives position themselves (Knott 2009, 259). Knott writes that perhaps making the distinction between the perspectives of insiders and outsiders is simply not helpful (ibid.). She refers to the research of Gold & Junker in the 1950s and lists four roles, placed on a continuum, that may be adopted when researching religiosity (2009, 262):



As per the model of Knott, the opposites will be addressed first, then the midway positions. Insiders are scholars who write about their belief and are not concerned with objectivity (Knott 2009, 262). Moving to the opposite end, complete observers do not have any part in religiosity but look at it from the outside (ibid., 263). An observer as participant will most likely retain a critical viewpoint while being active in a movement. Knott uses the research of Eileen Barker as an example. Barker was a researcher who studied the Unification Church to find out how anyone could join the movement, so she took an active part in it while interviewing active members and ex-members alike (ibid., ). As an example of an observing participant, Knott uses Samuel Heilman, an orthodox Jew who made a sociological study of his religious community from his academic perspective as professor of sociology (ibid., 268). The sociologist stood on the outside and the believer on the inside while Heilman himself tried to tear down the boundaries between the two worlds where he viewed himself to live (ibid.). His studies ultimately led to a rediscovery of his faith (ibid., 269). In the case of Heilman, the observing participant became a full-

fledged insider. This thesis will address different perspectives and more in Chapter 9, *Discussion*. Before that, however, it is time to outline the background of Reiki and perform a comparative analysis of select rituals from select Reiki Masters in the following two chapters.

## 7 *Reiki Background*

This chapter begins with a brief presentation of Reiki according to what researchers have stated, namely the etic perspective. Then, Reiki is viewed from the perspective of some of its practitioners, meaning the emic perspective. The changing nature of Reiki concludes the chapter.

### 7.1 *Reiki: an Etic Perspective*

From the etic, or outsider, perspective, there are varied statements to be found on Reiki. Defined as “mysterious atmosphere” in recent Japanese dictionaries (Stein 2019, 85), the word itself is derived from the Chinese *lingqi*. Chinese folk religion associates *lingqi* with the presence of a deity and its accompanying supernatural power (ibid.).<sup>1</sup> Brown writes that there has been some dissent on the roots of Reiki among scholars: is it Buddhist, or is it Christian? (2013, 180). She does state that whatever may be said from within the community, treatment at the time of writing was based on Buddhism and metaphysics, fitting most definitions of religiosity (ibid.). Brown further mentions that there are multiple lineages, all of them claiming to be authentic (ibid.). Reiki lineages are, however, traced to Usui, not to the Buddha. Frisk is very brief on her treatment of Reiki, claiming that Usui reputedly created the method at the end of the nineteenth century, and that it was brought to the United States in the 1930s (1998, 176). She mentions that Reiki grew in popularity during the 1980s and 1990s as a New Age healing method, along with the goal of bringing harmony to the body, soul and spirit of its clients (ibid.).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified Reiki as a complementary medicine method. In a 2019 WHO report, 71 member countries mention that Reiki is used (WHO 2019, 47), which also makes Reiki a global phenomenon. In Sweden, Reiki treatment is recognized as a preventive health measure, so clients can claim a certain amount of money for treatments from their employer each year (Skatteverket 2023). Clarke (2006, 528)

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1 My daughter-in-law, Robin Runyeon Odeberg, who is a native Chinese speaker, relates that *lingqi* can mean soul or spirit within the field of belief, or clever/bright when describing a person. Searches showed similar meanings but also that the signs can be potential false friends in translation. A false friend, or *faux ami*, is when an word or phrase in a source language has a similar expression in the target language with a completely different meaning or where the process of translation simply does not work (e.g. Vinay & Darbelnet 1995, 68).

writes that Reiki is passed from master to student. While beginners focus on the positioning of the hands, higher level students focus on their inner growth (ibid.). A return to Frisk is appropriate here (1998, 176): advanced therapists are able to treat clients at a distance. Poijanheimo reflects on Reiki as being a kind of healing based in a spiritual context and attributes its fame to everyone being welcome to courses; anyone can learn healing through initiation rituals (2012, 294). Furthermore, its nature, although stated to borrow characteristics from Eastern spirituality, is flexible and possible to combine, or even integrate, with different or multiple practices (ibid.).

Roush (2016, 35) compares Reiki to therapeutic touch (TT), calling it an intervention “that claims to harness or direct metaphysical energy to promote relaxation and heal illness” (ibid.). Practitioners direct this energy by either holding their hands over or placing them lightly on the recipient to direct this energy, *ki* (ibid.). The goal is to release any negative energies that are causing physical or emotional pain and to balance the body’s energy system. Beeler refers to Reiki as “a practical healing method that has its roots in spiritual practice” (2017, 465). According to Sered & Barnes (2007, 202), ritual healing can be categorized depending on the role of healers. When the role of healers is maximal, their actions heal the patient (ibid.); at the other end of the spectrum, healers are seen as facilitators (ibid., 203). Reiki lies somewhere in between: healers pass reiki on to the client (ibid., 203). Sered discusses Reiki as a syncretic healing practice (2007, 234) and states that its description as not being part of any particular religion makes it possible to combine with other healing practices: Christian ones, otherwise religious ones or non-religious ones (ibid., 235).

Beeler & Jonker write about Reiki being ritualistic and symbolic (2023, 375). In their opinion, this spiritual practice entails the concept of surrender along with religiosity, and the classification of Reiki as CAM is due to its having been neither proven nor disproven (ibid.). According to Beeler & Jonker, on the one side, there is scholarly research, and on the other, there are Western beliefs such as Christianity; in between, there is Reiki (ibid.). They have identified five core elements that are part of Reiki, almost regardless of the style (ibid., 365–366):

- reiki (energy)
- a ritual that connects to the founder Usui, called initiation, attunement or *reiju*
- applying the aforementioned reiki energy by the laying on of hands
- using sacred symbols (at least three of them) alongside mantras, and
- Reiki ideals (called precepts) that form living guidelines for the practitioner.

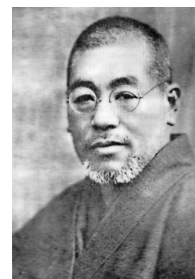
While *etic* accounts differ from scholar to scholar, Reiki is seen as a ritualistic form of spiritual healing with possible roots in Eastern spirituality. It is also flexible and syncretic, and it is open to everyone and seems to appeal on a grand scale, as the concept of pain relief and healing is something that is universally felt (Poijanheimo 2012, 294).

Having introduced the *etic* perspective, it is time to step inside the Reiki community and look at the definition and story from the *emic* perspective.

## 7.2 *The Reiki Story: an Emic Perspective*

This section briefly summarizes the story of Reiki from the *emic* perspective, beginning with its definition. The general consensus within the Reiki community is that Reiki was discovered by Mikao Usui on Mount Kurama in April 1922 (e.g. Rand 2020, 18–19), but Reiki has changed and diversified over the years. By 2000, there were more than 30 types of Reiki in the West alone (Lübeck, Petter and Rand 2000, 20). A Google search for “reiki” + “international” yields 18 different organizations (July 2023). Practitioners generally define Reiki as “a technique that aids the body in releasing stress and tension by creating deep relaxation” (e.g. Rand 2020, 3). The first two central figures are pictured in this section because they are common to most variants of Reiki.

The founder of Reiki according to most *emic* sources, Mikao Usui, was born in Japan, not far from present-day Nagoya (ICRT 2015, 22). According to some *emic* sources, Usui’s studies included subjects such as medicine, psychology, and religion (ibid.). Others say that the circumstances around his studies and work are not clear, and it can be disputed if he learned Reiki from teachers or developed the system himself (Stein 2015, 6). While searching for the meaning of life, Usui read a description of *An-shin Ritsu-mei*, a state of consciousness that enables its possessor not only to understand the meaning of life but also to be guided to achieve it (ICRT 2015, 22). Usui found that one possible way to achieve it was Zazen meditation, a practice said to date back to the Buddha (ibid.). After three years of unsuccessful attempts, he received advice to be prepared to die to achieve this state. Therefore, he went to Mount Kurama to fast and meditate and wait for his passage (ibid.). After twenty-one days, a light entered his mind, rendering him unconscious, and his previously weakened state was exchanged for a state of enlightenment upon awakening (ibid.). He ran down the mountain and injured his toe; when he put his hands on it to soothe the pain, he realized that he had the ability to heal himself (ibid., 24).



A few more details on Mount Kurama, the place where Usui reportedly discovered Reiki, are in order. On the mountain, there are spaces dedicated to deities from Tendai Buddhism and Shintō, among others. Some examples of deities are (Miller 2006):

- Bishamonten (Bishamon), a major deity of the mountain associated with Tendai Buddhism, located in the main temple among other places (176).
- Kannon, a bodhisattva, representations of whom are also located in the main temple (180).
- Maō-son, associated with Tendai Buddhism and connected to Kongoyashi, one of the Kings of Light (182–183).
- Sonten, the unification of the energy of the above three deities and local to Mount Kurama; hence considered to be part of every temple on the mountain (185).

Miller discusses the three deities representing the supposed original three symbols of Usui, and that the unification Sonten could represent the Master symbol that was added later. As this is an idea only, it is food for thought; however, there is no scholarly proof for this theory. Now, the emic story will continue.

Usui called his new discovery *Shinshin Kaizen Usui Reiki Ryōhō* – interpreted as “Usui Reiki for the Improvement of body and mind” (ICRT 2015, 24). In 1922, he established his first practice in Tokyo, and when an earthquake occurred in 1923, he treated as many people as possible with Reiki (ibid., 24–25). The demand for Reiki grew, which meant that Usui had to build a larger clinic and began traveling to treat and teach more people, including twenty *Shihan*, forerunners of Reiki Masters, who passed on his knowledge and could initiate others, with the initiation being the same regardless of degree (ibid., 25). Reportedly, early Usui practice did not include Reiki symbols. Three were added when the second clinic was built (ibid.): a power symbol, a mental/emotional symbol, and a distance healing symbol, which allows a practitioner to send Reiki from a distance. Within the Reiki community, the tradition and promise is taught to keep these symbols private (e.g. Rand 2020, 47). According to Rand, Usui also wrote five precepts or principles, the *Go-kai* (Doi 2014, 158), often referred to as the Reiki ideals (Rand 2020, 64). See Section 8.2 for a comparison of interpretations. There is a handbook (Usui & Arjava Petter 2003) reputedly authored by Usui, although its authenticity and original preservation has not been proven beyond any doubt, as it was distributed by the *Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai* (e.g. Stein 2019, 96). The name of the society may be interpreted as “Usui Reiki Healing

Method Learning Society”, and it may have been formed by students of Usui after his death.

The status of Usui as the founder of Reiki has been under dispute even within the Reiki community. Rand states that prior to Usui Reiki Ryōhō, a therapist named Mataji Kawakami practiced a system called Reiki Ryōhō (2019, 5–6). Searches for verification, or some confirmation, of this information have not revealed any peer-reviewed articles or otherwise; most search hits seem to point back to Rand. However, this thesis focuses on the story around Usui.



Usui asked one of his disciples, Dr. Chūjirō Hayashi, to open a Reiki clinic of his own and develop the practice based on his medical experience. This resulted in a manual of hand positions to use on clients or oneself (ICRT 2015, 25). Hayashi introduced the practice of performing Reiki treatments while the receiver was lying down rather than sitting (ibid., 26). One of Hayashi’s patients was Hawayo Takata,<sup>2</sup> a woman born in Hawai‘i who suffered from several serious illnesses and was preparing for surgery (ibid., 28). Through Reiki treatments, she improved and wanted to learn Reiki herself (ibid.). After being initiated, she began working at Hayashi’s clinic and eventually became a Reiki Master herself (ibid., 29).

It is said within the Reiki community (e.g. Haberly 1990, 45) that Mrs. Takata made it her mission to spread Reiki throughout the world (ibid.). Takata referred to Reiki as an oral tradition and generally did not allow students to take notes (ibid., 51). She also maintained that students should stay with a Reiki teacher for life (ICRT 2015, 29). Another legacy of Takata is the difference in initiations according to degree (ICRT 2015, 31). A first-degree practitioner did not receive the same type of initiation from Takata as a Reiki Master, and the master symbol is also her addition (ibid.).<sup>3</sup> Takata also recommended a special diet and even made a Reiki juice (Rand 2020 [1991], 161). The cost to become a Takata Reiki Master was \$10,000, although it was also possible to achieve the same degree by referring 100 students to her classes (Rand 2020 [1991], 27; Twan 2005, 8). After Takata had died, one of her students, Iris Ishikura, trained two masters for a lower fee and encouraged them to follow suit (ICRT 2015: 31). As a result, Reiki became a rapidly growing practice. By 2015, there were an estimated 1,000,000 Reiki Masters worldwide and at least four times as many practitioners (ICRT 2015, 31).

<sup>2</sup> No pictures of Mrs. Takata are available in the public domain, or she would be pictured as well.

<sup>3</sup> The name of the Master symbol can be interpreted as “treasure house of the great beaming light” (Schuhmacher & Woerner 1989, 81).

### 7.3 Reiki as a Changing Practice

Since the times of Usui, Hayashi and Takata, the term Reiki has expanded to include other types, e.g:

- Karuna Reiki
- Usui/Holy Fire Reiki
- Jikiden Reiki
- Animal Reiki

*Karuna* and *Usui/Holy Fire Reiki* were both developed by William Lee Rand, the founder of ICRT (Shanti Gaia 2001, 8; Rand 2020, 17). *Karuna Reiki* can be referred to as the Reiki of Compassion and includes eight symbols other than the four used by Usui and Takata (Rand 2019; 11, 37–48). The word *karuṇā* comes from Buddhism (Shah-Kazemi 2011, 44). Sometimes, *karuṇā* is interpreted as *love*, though *compassion* seems to be the most frequent interpretation (ibid., 54). *Holy Fire Reiki* is based on *Usui/Tibetan Reiki*, also a practice stemming from Rand, and adds the Holy Fire symbol to the Level II symbols of Usui and the Master symbol of Takata (Rand 2014, 60). *Jikiden Reiki* was founded by a student of Hayashi, Chiyoko Yamaguchi, who refers to her method as the direct teaching of Hayashi (Yamaguchi 2007, 13). *Animal Reiki* is taught by Colleen & Robyn Benelli, among others, and gives an animal symbol to those attuned (Benelli et al 2022). The differences between the practices are not limited to which symbols are used. However, Karuna Reiki no longer uses three of the originally introduced eleven symbols (Rand 2019, 37–48). In other words, methods of teaching and practice vary between the type of Reiki studied and used. There may also be variations and changes over time in a certain practice. One example is the attunements in Holy Fire Reiki: they were abandoned for placements in 2015 with the introduction of Holy Fire II Reiki (Rand 2015, 82–83).

Rand writes that Reiki is “a method of stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing [...] and is administered by the laying on of hands. It is based on the idea that all living things have a special energy flowing through them called life energy” (ICRT 2022b), and Brown recognizes it as a form of energy healing (2015: 364). Reiki can be used on oneself or on others; the preparations are usually the same. At the ICRT, there are three levels of Reiki: I, II, and IIIA/IIIB (Advanced Reiki Techniques, or ART/Reiki Master). Reiki I and II and the ART/Master levels are usually taught together (Rand 2020, 104–107). Rand also writes that Reiki can do no harm (ibid., 7), although there have been studies that report on charismatic Christians considering Reiki to be part of the occult (e.g. Moberg 2014, 84). However, Reiki is not the only phenomenon considered to be of

negative influence: a general antipathy seems to exist toward anything that is considered part of new religious movements (ibid.).

## 8 Comparative Analysis

This chapter is dedicated to outlining and comparing selected Reiki rituals as per the second research question on how rituals may differ between Reiki Masters. The Reiki Masters chosen for this thesis are Hiroshi Doi and three of his students, namely William Lee Rand, Amy Zaffarano Rowland, and Frans Stiene.

### 8.1 Three Pillars – Three Rituals

Rand writes that according to Usui, Reiki rests on three pillars (2020, 56–57):

- *gassho*, the meditation/prayer before a Reiki session
- *reiji-ho*, the direction of the spirit, meaning guidance on how to treat a client (or oneself)
- *chiryō*, or the treatment itself.

These three pillars are also discussed in the translated handbook of Mikao Usui (Usui & Arjava Petter 2003, 15–17), and the first two of them above are outlined and compared in this section. The treatment ritual, called *chiryō*, is replaced by a dry bath called *kenyoku-ho* for reasons of scope and complexity. The reason for this is that a full treatment may take an hour or more and often involves positioning of the practitioner’s hands, making the description of a Reiki session long-winded, so the much shorter procedure of *kenyoku-ho* was deemed the more viable choice. Below, the three selected Reiki rituals are presented and compared; first, their shared characteristics are listed, then, the differences between the practicing Reiki Masters are compared. *Kenyoku-ho* precedes *reiji-ho* because it is used in *reiji-ho* by one of the Reiki Masters; hence, the logical order was to switch the two around.

### 8.2 Gassho

As per above, *gassho* is a positioning of the hands, palms together, at the height of the heart, in front of the body (e.g. Doi 2014, 158). This position is maintained throughout the meditation, which has given it its name. Here, *gassho* means to meditate over the *Go-kai*. The *Go-kai*, also known as the Reiki ideals, form the reflective material of the meditations of all four masters. The interpretations – and scope used – of the *Go-kai* vary slightly from master to master, but there is no inherent conflict of meaning between them, as can be seen in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. The Reiki ideals as interpreted by four different Reiki Masters.

Japanese (Doi 2014, 105)	Doi (2014, 33) [Stiene (2017, 19)]	Rand (2020, 64)	Rowland (2006, 179)
<i>Kyo dake wa</i>	[Just for] today,	Just for today	(same as Rand)
<i>Okoluna</i>	do not be angry,	do not get angry;	do not anger;
<i>Shinpai suna</i>	do not worry,	(same as Doi)	(same as Doi).
<i>Kansha shite</i>	be thankful,	be grateful;	Be grateful.
<i>Goo hage me</i>	do what you are meant to do,	work hard;	Do an honest day's work.
<i>Hito ni shinsetsu ni</i>	be kind to others.	(same as Doi)	Be kind.

All four Reiki Masters interpret *gassho* as placing the palms together in front of the body with the fingers touching. Doi mentions that this position is taken when praying (Doi 2014, 158). Both Doi and Rand write that this meditation should be done twice a day and that it is beneficial (ibid.; Rand 2020, 56). Doi does not give a time frame for the meditation (Doi 2014, 158); the *Go-kai* are simply chanted (ibid.). However, Rand recommends that the meditation be done in silence (2019, 56). The practitioner should meditate in silence, keeping the eyes closed and focusing on the energy between the hands to create stillness (ibid.). Any intrusive thoughts that arise should be brushed away (ibid.). Stiene recommends using one ideal at a time (2017, 157) and repeating it for ten minutes. This is called “repetition, pulling it apart and throwing it in the air” (ibid.). Like Rand, Stiene recommends brushing away any intrusive thoughts and refocusing (ibid., 158).

Rowland has added a preparatory ritual called Connecting with the Reiki Light (2006, 179). This is done by raising one's hands with the fingers apart, as if reaching for the sky, and the practitioner is to feel surrounded by light and reiki flow before bringing the hands back together in *gassho* (ibid., 175). Afterwards, the practitioner should recite the Reiki ideals aloud or silently. Repeating the Reiki ideals is done for them to remain in the practitioner's consciousness (ibid., 180). In Table 2 on the next page, there is an overview of the differences between the Reiki Masters. The interpretation of *gassho* is excluded, since it is the same for all four.

Table 2. Differences in *gassho*.

Step/Master	Doi	Rand	Rowland	Stiene
Time frame	None	2 × 10 minutes	None	10 minutes
Frequency	Twice daily	Twice daily	None prescribed	None prescribed
Audibility	Aloud	Silent	Silent	Aloud or silent
Number of ideals	Complete	Complete	Complete	One at a time
Reiki Light	No	No	Yes	No

### 8.3 *Kenkyoku-ho*

According to Doi, purification by bathing before rituals is a Japanese tradition (2014, 159). Doi also states that the meaning of *kenkyoku* is “dry bath” (ibid.). Rand (2020, 61) concurs and adds that another possible use for this ritual is to release negative energy (ibid.).

Doi (2014, 143) advocates performing *kenyoku-ho* sitting. Rowland (2006, 170) states that this ritual may be performed either standing or sitting. Rand and Stiene do not specify if the practitioner should stand or sit. Doi, Rand and Stiene perform an initial *gassho* (e.g. Rand 2020, 61), but this meditation is not as lengthy as the meditation over the *Go-kai* above. However, Rowland writes that the practitioner should state the intention of performing *kenyoko-ho* (note that there is a slight difference in the name of the ritual; 2007, 170). She also directs the practitioner to make sure that the brushing arm lands in a relaxed manner (Rowland 2006, 170).

All Reiki Masters advocate brushing the torso first before the arms. This is done by alternately sliding a hand from the shoulder to the opposite hip, starting with the right hand on the left shoulder (e.g. Doi 2014, 143) and mirroring the procedure with the left hand before repeating the motion with the right hand (ibid.). The arms are then brushed by letting the right hand slide along the left arm; this procedure is mirrored with the left hand and then repeated with the right hand (ibid.). Stiene also writes that the elbow of the non-brushing arm is to be kept against the practitioner’s side (2016, 147).

Doi, Rand, and Stiene write that the brushing of the arms starts at the shoulder and extends to the fingertips (e.g. Stiene 2016, 147–148). Rand also advocates extending the arm and flinging the negative energy away with the brushing hand into the air (2020, 61).

Rowland instead lets the hand move from the shoulder or elbow to the wrist (2006, 170).

It is possible to add an audible exhalation each time the hand slides (Doi 2014, 143), or to inhale before the brushing and exhale while brushing (Stiene 2016, 147). Stiene also

writes that the practitioner should take a few deep stomach breaths (ibid.). Neither Rand nor Rowland direct the breathing of the practitioner.

While Doi concludes with bringing both hands back on the practitioner’s lap (2014, 143), Rand and Stiene conclude with a shortened *gassho* meditation at the end. In the case of Rowland, the practitioner states that *kenyoko-ho* is done (2006, 175). Rowland also notes that the speed of this technique should increase with practice and that it is one of the rituals that adds a level of intention and expresses respect for the value of Reiki (ibid.). In Table 3 below, the differences between the masters are summarized.

Table 3. Differences in *kenyoku-ho*.

Step/Master	Doi	Rand	Rowland: <i>kenyoko-ho</i>	Stiene
Position	Sitting	Arms extended	Standing/sitting	Elbow at side
Initial <i>gassho</i>	Yes	Yes	No; statement	Yes
Negative energy thrown away	No	Yes	No	No
Brushing of arms	Shoulder to fingertips	Shoulder to fingertips	Shoulder, or elbow, to wrist	Shoulder to fingertips
Directed hands at end of ritual	Yes	No	No	No
Directed breathing	Optional audible exhalation	No	No	Initial deep inhalation and exhalation
Final <i>gassho</i>	Rest hands on lap	Optional	No; statement	Yes

#### 8.4 *Reiji-ho*

*Reiji-ho* can be interpreted as “direction of the spirit” (Rand 2020, 56). It is a technique involving receiving guidance to the practitioner’s hands for them to find and treat the diseased area intuitively (Doi 2014, 161). Here, the four masters differ the most in their instructions about its practice.

Doi states that the ability of performing *reiji-ho* takes years to develop and there are no specific instructions by Doi (ibid., 112). A prerequisite is to sense the negative energy coming from the source of disease and to know for how long to treat it (ibid.). Stiene mentions *reiji-ho* as a method of being intuitively guided in treatment rather than to depend on hand positions (2016, 166) but does not have instructions of his own; he quotes Doi on the subject (ibid.).

Both Rand and Rowland have more specific instructions; while Rand starts with a one-minute *gassho* meditation (see Section 8.2), Rowland instead performs *kenyoko-ho* (see Section 8.3) and connects to Reiki light (see Section 8.2). Rowland also advocates *reiji-ho* through an entire Reiki treatment (2006, 189). Rand continues with two prayers: one in gratitude of Reiki and asking for it to flow, and the other for the client and complete healing (Rand 2020, 57). The *gassho* hands are then moved up to let the thumbs touch the area between the eyebrows and ask for guidance (ibid.). Alternately, it is possible to ask for the best position to treat the client, or which symbols or techniques to use) (ibid.). Rowland describes a similar approach with letting the hands touch the forehead, but this procedure could be omitted, in which case the connection to Reiki Light replaces it (Rowland 2006, 192). Rand writes that the practitioner’s hands are to be guided by reiki and any impressions felt by the practitioner should be used to improve the session (ibid.). This procedure can be repeated at any time as needed during a Reiki treatment (ibid.).

Rowland recommends that the client be treated with the eyes shut to avoid distraction (2006, 189). As with Rand, the practitioner asks *reiki* for guidance on where to begin the treatment (ibid., 190). Once guided, the hands are lowered toward the area requiring treatment, not necessarily touching it (ibid.). Rowland specifically states that the procedure be repeated from the *gassho* until the treatment is done (ibid., 191–192), at which point the practitioner performs *gassho*, states that *reiji-ho* is over, tells the client that treatment is complete and shakes their arms (ibid., 192). Table 4 below outlines the differences between the Reiki Masters in *reiji-ho*.

Table 4. Differences in *reiji-ho*.

<b>Step/Master</b>	<b>Doi and Stiene</b>	<b>Rand</b>	<b>Rowland</b>
Initial step	Learning to sense negative energy	<i>Gassho</i>	<i>Kenyoko-ho</i>
Following step	Not specified	Prayer	Reiki Light
Eyes	Not specified	Not specified	Shut
Repetition	Not specified	Yes	Yes, or continuous
Impressions	Not specified	Used for guidance	Not specified
Finalization	Not specified	Not specified	Statement, informing the client and arms shaken

Now that the select rituals have been compared, it is time for a general discussion.

## 9 Discussion

This chapter discusses the secular sacred, rituals, and how religiosity is defined from the humanities perspective. It is based on the work of Knott regarding the secular sacred, Schilderman regarding religiosity, and Rambelli on rituals.

### 9.1 Secular Sacred/Religiosity

Hood, Streib and Keller write that the definition of religiosity is a “troublesome issue” (2022, 582), because this kind of definition is likely to please only the person who thought of the definition (ibid.). Moreover, emic sources are often favored above etic sources so that those of a certain faith or spiritual practice (insiders to Knott) can explain their understanding of it (ibid.). There seems to be a tendency to put religiosity and spirituality at opposite sides of a thought spectrum as well (ibid.). Knott’s term of *secular sacred* (2017, 158), however, is a construction that allows for an alternative to this tendency. If the secular can be paired with the sacred, the spiritual can be paired with the religious.

To do the practitioners of Reiki justice (Schilderman 2015, 186) would encompass not to call Reiki a religion. However, that Reiki can be combined with any religion (e.g. Rand 2020, 11) does not exclude it being sacred. Another Reiki Master, Shanti Gaia, mentions the creation of a sacred space for treating clients, beginning with the self (2001, 84) and involving prayer along with the optional healing altar (ibid., 85–86). The symbols are called sacred, and Rand writes that practitioners should show respect for them by keeping them private (e.g. Rand 2020, 47). Stiene (2017; 64, 70, 77, 94) refers to the symbols as mantras and focuses on what they have to teach the practitioner (ibid.; 65, 70, 79, 95). Rowland mentions that the distant symbol can create sacred time and space (2006, 209) and has suggestions for meditations on them (e.g. ibid., 207).

In order to further find out how Reiki can be understood using the secular sacred, a detour must be made into the field of religiosity. Some have pointed to forerunners of the Reiki ideals, the *Go-kai*, existing in Shintō. Picken (1994, 247) lists ten *shinshū-kyō* precepts from a community within Shintō, where three of the five Reiki ideals can be recognized from the second, seventh and eight precepts. However, not even another *emic* source has been found that can verify this information, which makes the nature of it anecdotal at best. Others point to a work by Bizan Suzuki called *The Principles of Soundness*, where a health poem could have been the template of the *Go-kai* (Jonker 2016, 110–111; Stein 2015, 5). Stein references the actual health poem, and Jonker does point to a source from 2013; however, both of these sources seem only to be available in Japanese. That these

texts both precede the ideals and that the ideals are like them is not equal to scholarly proof, which means that the connection between them can only be suggested.

Even self-proclaimed non-religious people have told interviewers that they believe in karma, “something up there” (Knott et al 2013a, 119–120), or being drawn towards spirituality in general (ibid.). This is another indicator of the secular and the sacred being possible to pair.

## 9.2 Rituals

While the research of Rambelli points to a time where the sacred and the secular were separated, there are indications of syncretism: *kami* and *bodhisattvas* are present side by side in some Shintō initiations (e.g. Rambelli 2002, 271). The trend of higher complexity seems to have been abandoned, though, if the work of Rand is any indication.

According to Rand, Takata used the Usui power, mental and distance symbols along with her added master symbol for her attunements of all three levels of Reiki (2014, 99). Depending on the level at which the student was attuned, different symbols were placed in different locations, such as over the head and hands of the initiate (ibid.). Rituals involving these symbols and their different assigned places were in use in Usui/Tibetan Reiki, the Reiki system used by Rand, until Holy Fire II Reiki was introduced in 2015/2016 (Rand 2015, 99). From that point, attunements have been replaced by placements, which puts *reiki* in the double role of guide and agent (Rand 2019, 119–120). Beeler proposes exactly this method for viewing *reiki* in her research and also considers the element of power (2017, 473).

Knott also discusses power in connection to rituals: for example, they may be used to (2016, 3–4). There are rituals tied to Reiki symbols: they are used at the beginning of, or during, a treatment (e.g. Rand 2020, 49). Often, the first Reiki symbol to be taught to a student is the power symbol. Rand writes about this symbol as both a tool to increase *reiki* and as a protector of living beings or even objects (ibid.). Rowland has seven different meditations tied to the same symbol; some of them provide protection and others increase the energy flow or connection (2006, 211–212).

## 10 Summary of Results

### 10.1 Secular Sacred/Religiosity

Within the Reiki community, practitioners in general do not consider Reiki a religious practice; however, those interviewed by Beeler admit to the concept of surrender (Beeler

2017, 475). Knott, Schilderman and Beeler all acknowledge the presence of power: Knott as part of the ritual nature (2006, 4), Schilderman as a major influence on religious studies and an instrument of validity (2015, 179), and Beeler as the link between authority and agency (2017, 473). Perhaps the answer to it all lies in the concept of power. It is certainly present if a Reiki practitioner acknowledges surrender, and living by the *Go-kai* could also be considered a form of surrender. Regardless of the perspective used, Reiki can certainly sort under the *secular sacred*; the sacred nature of the symbols and rituals alone should be indications of it. The question of which perspective to use when investigating the Reiki phenomenon remains, however, and this will be addressed below in Section 10.4, *Considerations*.

### 10.2 Understanding Rituals

The research of Rambelli on initiation rituals has pointed to the importance of involving both the body and the mind (2002, 268–269). Disciples of the Buddhist/Shintō rituals of old received sacred objects; a Reiki initiate receives sacred symbols. These symbols are in use from the second level and upward, with added symbols at the third level, but they are present in the attunements if such are performed (e.g. Rand 2015, 103–106). The rituals of old could well be forerunners of those associated with Reiki, but there is not enough research to support such a conclusion. Again, similarities do not warrant a connection. One way of understanding the rituals of Reiki compared to the Buddhist/Shintō rituals described by Rambelli (2002) is that they both strive to give the disciple more knowledge and guidance along the spiritual path, in a manner similar to how Beeler describes the double agency of Reiki (2017, 475.)

### 10.3 Comparing Rituals

The comparative analysis of the *gassho*, *kenyoku-ho* and *reiji-ho* rituals show that even between Reiki Master Teachers and their students turned masters, there are significant variations on a given theme, and sometimes, new elements are introduced or former elements abandoned. It seems that Rand, Rowland and Stiene have all added their own characteristics to the teachings of Doi. As an alternate explanation to the differences between Rand, Rowland and Stiene, the teachings of Doi might have changed over time, but these differences may be the result of the sacred spaces that each Master has constructed (Knott 2016, 3). The rituals and what each Master says about them are equally important (*ibid.*). Moreover, the prayers or intentions could both be said to sacralize the space around the Masters, meaning that they do create sacred spaces (Knott 2005, 128).

Knott's research on space as a socially constructed concept (2005, 128) might provide another explanation for these differences: the active space inhabited by each Reiki Master evokes actions from them. Beeler & Jonker (2023, 368) do not refer to Knott; however, they write that the attitude of spirituality is associated both with a way of living and an outcome of the way of life. Knott uses the body as a base for conceiving and producing (sacred) space (2005, 127); this implies that Reiki is able to produce sacred space, being very centered on the body. In contemporary society, personal experiences are becoming more important than traditional narratives from world religions (Beeler & Jonker 2023, 368). Perhaps the personal experiences of each Master guided them to differentiate their rituals.

#### 10.4 Considerations

As previously stated, Reiki is a community where documentation has been scarce over time – the Reiki handbook of Usui is the only original document known to exist (Rowland 2010, 20). Whether it retains its original state can be disputed according to Stein – no one knows how it may have changed over time (2018, 21). As Takata also discouraged or even forbade students from taking notes during classes (Haberly 1990, 51), it is far from simple to determine what can be confirmed using scholarly methods.

In order to find material connected to Reiki as a spiritual phenomenon, or as a ritual practice, the researcher needs to search far and wide. There is a plethora of studies related to the *effects* of Reiki and its medical use (e.g. Dyer et al. 2019), and there are studies in nearby research areas that sometimes make claims based on opinion (e.g. McClenton 2006). However, studies such as those of Dyer *et al* do not focus on the ritual nature of Reiki. Or, in the case of the latter, there is not sufficient support for making any claims.

The continuum of Knott (2009, 262) raises the question of where to place research perspectives. Should a scholarly outsider approach always be favored over the insider insights, or should the perspective be placed somewhere in between the two? A scholarly outsider may lack a solid understanding of Reiki as a non-practitioner, while a Reiki Master may be partial to which research is chosen to support findings. Joint ventures such as those of Beeler & Jonker (2023) would be beneficial, because they might bring about the wider perspective of two different points on the Knott continuum.

## *11 Suggestions for Further Research*

As this thesis has touched on relatively new research ground, the possibilities for further research are considerable. Beeler & Jonker (2023, 371) write that the research regarding Reiki has been focused on the body, not on religiosity. However, Reiki is a process very much directed through the body of the practitioner and to the being of the person receiving the treatment, in body, mind, and spirit (ibid., 375). This can be interpreted as the need for a shift back towards the body. There is also a great need for academic research on the ritual nature of Reiki, as has been discussed here, which should probably be the primary priority. More field studies similar to that of Beeler (2017) could be conducted, for example interviewing Reiki Masters or practitioners how they view Reiki as a spiritual practice. Alternately, they could be interviewed on whether they consider Reiki practices to be ritualistic, or both. An investigation on the differences between Eastern and Western Reiki practitioners regarding spirituality or rituals is likely to provide the interested scholar with plenty of material. More variants of Reiki could be investigated; alternately, there could be discussion of other rituals and comparing them to other spiritual practices. In particular, the distinction between different practices of initiations, attunements or placements between a few select variants of Reiki could be of great interest to research.

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