

2013/2014 Graduate Research Grant Report
Religion and Diversity Project

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In July 2013, I traveled to British Columbia to collect oral histories from the last living members of the first generation of Canadian Reiki practitioners, including two of the first non-Japanese people to ever be authorized to teach Reiki. These interviews are crucial to my doctoral dissertation and the history of the growing number of Canadians who identify as “spiritual, but not religious.”

My proposed dissertation, tentatively titled *Alternate Currents: the Circulation of Healing Energies around the North Pacific*, will examine connections among practitioners of the healing techniques called Reiki in Japan, Hawaii, and British Columbia from the 1920s to the present, asking how Reiki practitioners have differently interacted with regulative institutions, including those of religion, medicine, and the state. One key mode of this interaction with institutions takes the form of self-conscious opposition to institutional forms and ideologies, as seen in the identity of “spiritual but not religious,” in the growing antipathy to biomedicine, and in the rejection of nationalistic discourse and projects. My dissertation proposal is still under review from my committee, but as a number of my interlocutors are elderly and some are infirm, I obtained approval for human research and began my data collection in Hawaii in June 2012. This summer I conducted follow-up interviews among my Hawaii cohort and began work with my second cohort in British Columbia.

Reiki is a set of healing techniques, today practiced by millions worldwide. First established in 1920s Tokyo, Reiki has been continuously adapted by subsequent generations who brought Reiki to Hawaii, North America, and around the world. One part of this history that has gone unexamined in scholarship to date is the community of Reiki practitioners in British Columbia that developed in the 1970s. Until 1976, there was only one teacher of Reiki outside of Japan: a second-generation Japanese American woman from Hawaii named Hawayo Takata (1900-1980). In the last five years of her life, Takata authorized twenty-two of her students to become instructors, commonly called Reiki Masters, themselves for a fee of \$10,000 USD. It is these Masters and their students who brought Reiki around the world, including to Europe, Australia, and back to Japan. Five of these twenty-two Masters were from the B.C. community and, today, only two survive.

My grant from the *Religion and Diversity Project* allowed me to travel to Vancouver Island and Cortes Island to conduct in-depth interviews with four Reiki Masters, including the two surviving Masters initiated by Takata and a third who also received initiations from Takata. These Masters' recollections about their experiences with Reiki in late 1970s British Columbia and their descriptions of their experiences with Reiki over the last thirty-five years represent an important data set for my research and I am grateful to the *Religion and Diversity Project* for the opportunity to undertake this fieldwork, which is an essential component of my dissertation research, and I will be sure to credit this funding in any future publications or presentations based on this fieldwork.