

Hawayo Takata – Historic Figure **without whom none of us would be here**

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René Vögtli

**<https://reiki-international.ch/der-samurai-reiki-meister-ein-neues-buch/>*

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Greetings

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to everyone in the audience.

It is a pleasure being here and I congratulate the Portuguese Reiki Association and João Magalhães to their continuous success!

My name is René Vögtli. I come from Switzerland and have been a full-time Reiki professional for over 30 years. For the last 10 years, I have actively pursued my contribution to the Reconciliation in the Reiki community. I was greatly motivated by the thought that our community is particularly well equipped to achieve a conciliatory environment because of what unites us all here today – and that is the *reiki* (energy) itself. And by doing so, we could be a shining example and a catalyst for reconciliation to take place in our families, organizations and nations beyond the Reiki world. Now that would be truly historic and the Peace Nobel Prize for our movement would only be a logical consequence, wouldn't it?

Talking of 'historic'

– as in 'History and Science' which are heading our seminar today.

I am not a historic figure. Maybe future generations will look back and call the reconciliation movement as historic. Today, in 2023, this is too early, we are too close and – most importantly – our project is still work in progress.

When the European Reiki Group was formed by 17 representatives from different countries in 2018 and we learnt about the work of the Portuguese Reiki Association, we were thoroughly impressed. It had an almost 'historic' feeling to those of us who were unaware of what has been built by our European colleagues here. And indeed the regularity of this very seminar may – as time goes by – prove to be historic.

To me, one thing is for sure: some of the people who are appearing here have the potential to be regarded in good time as 'historic'. Sometimes it is not so much the person him- or herself who sticks out but a particular achievement of theirs. To illustrate my point:

- The authors of 'Woman in Reiki' are here, Silke Kleemann and Amanda Jayne. Their work is significant because it brings to light important – historic – women who have not had their share of visibility in the male dominated narrative of most Reiki books. The focus of my presentation,

Hawayo Takata, is amongst these women, though she was certainly in the limelight after her death and did not lack publicity.

- I feel a profound closeness to João whom I admire as much in his humanness as in what he achieved in Portugal. For me to suggest, he is a historic figure would be with this huge personal bias. So, dear friend, history will have to tell.
- But there is one person present today who I do not hesitate to call a 'historic' individual. His life-time achievement as a teacher in and by itself is amazing. But even if I disregard his influence on generations of people ... he has written a book which has been a catalyst for the Reiki world with ever-lasting consequences. I am talking about Frank Arjava Petter and his publication of the discovery of the tomb-stone of Mikao Usui.

My approach,

when I talk about Hawayo Takata, is not one of a historian. I am not an academic such as, for example, Dr. Justin Stein or Dr. Jojan Jonker who have both been presenters in this 'History and Science' seminar of yours. Jojan, by the way, is currently endorsing the most recent publication of a book called 'The Samurai Reiki Master' with the promise of new information about Mikao Usui. So it appears, 'History' is constantly being re-written.

If you want to have documented insight into Takata's life, you will find lots of literature of which I particularly recommend the before-mentioned 'Women in Reiki'.

I, for one, cannot look at Takata without looking at her legacy and the polarization she left behind. That in turn, created much of the dissonance which gave birth to the search for and discovery of what many today describe as 'Western' and 'Japanese' Reiki.

Being this self-imposed 'agent for reconciliation' put me in the unique position of a journalist who found himself interviewing Takata's heir and granddaughter, Phyllis Lei Furumoto. This gave me intimate insights with which, today, I want to draw you nearer to this historic persona, Mrs Hawayo Takata.

History is a fickle thing. Depending on context and Zeitgeist, facts and individuals appear in often contradictory forms and shapes. I attempt to draw you closer to Hawayo Takata in her humanness, my point of entry being her

grandchild Phyllis and her daughter Alice through whose eyes we look at Takata.

(The documentary-interview 'RECONCILIATION - Along the Path of Mastery' (with Portuguese subtitles) and the archive with its raw material can be found on <https://reiki-conciliation.org/projects/reconciliation-along-the-path-of-mastery/>)

Hawayo Takata's heirdom

went to her daughter Alice. With heirdom I mean personal possessions, photos and documents. The granddaughter Phyllis was expected by her mother Alice to take-over Hawayo's business, because – in the eyes of her parents – Phyllis was a “ski-bum without a proper job”. With Takata's health waning they saw an opportunity for their daughter and, at the same time, a solution for Takata's dilemma.

Phyllis did not like her somewhat matriarchic grandmother and knew nothing about Reiki when, in 1979, she was pushed into accompanying Takata on a teaching tour.

In a way, it was Alice who was a successor of Hawayo, or at least a care-taker of her heirdom after Hawayo Takata died in 1980.

It was 33 years later, when Alice herself died in 2013 and when everything was finally passed on to Phyllis, that she dared to look at what she had inherited from Takata. To quote her: “The door really opened when my mother died, because I didn't have familial retribution”.

Although this is not of Takata's direct making, let's be clear that we are talking about Takata's legacy. If maybe only indirectly, Takata is co-responsible for the disarray of what she left behind. As the battle for succession would prove in the years following her death.

The video 'Betrayals'

gives insight into Takata's dilemma in 1979. While her health was diminishing, she had a fall-out with her foremost student, Barbara Weber-Ray with whom she had had big plans for the future. Barbara was the most dedicated of her Master students with the most in-depth training up to that point. Let's listen to what Phyllis says:

Two Video excerpts from 'Betrayals Adversity and Conclusions'; the full video can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/YFV4IcFbhUc>

I feel that the largest sort of betrayal or injustice in my life was definitely not understanding the point of my going on this trip with my grandmother 1979. And that.. I mean people laugh and I think they think I'm joking, you know, the difference between, you know, a person who decided to quit everything and become a ski bum, because skiing really transformed my life on a physical level as well as lots of other levels. And then I went off in the summer to travel with my grandmother, a person that I didn't really like, and I was really uncomfortable, we've had a really painful relationship with and at the same time I feel that somehow underneath it, Reiki was calling me, but I could only say that 20 years later, I couldn't have said that at the time.

And I really did think that I was going with her to carry her suitcases, make sure she didn't get robbed or carry the money anyway and make sure she ate well. So... much to my surprise it ended up to be the initiation as a master and my first teaching on how to teach classes and so on. And my first understanding about what Reiki was for her. So, I felt betrayed by my mother who encouraged me to go on this trip, never saying "Well you know, if you go, you're going to, you know, working with your grandmother and so on". And then, when my grandmother initiated me, you know, and I heard this kind of funny like clapping-hand-noise, and she says "And now you can work with me", you know, I really did have this picture of carrying suitcases, counting money and I never.. I never imagined teaching Reiki, because up to that time I didn't even know what Reiki was.

And then my grandmother died. That I felt was a betrayal, because she had told me that she would live until Christmas, that she would for sure be there for Christmas. And she died on December 11th I was really angry for a month or something because I felt that she had not kept her promise and that I would have done something really different if I had known that. But whenever I thought that I would always hear her words say "Reiki comes first" and then I would get even more angry because for me family duty was really the most important thing in my life at that point.

When Hawayo went to see Hayashi

in the 1930ies, she took Alice along who got initiated to Reiki by Haysashi sensei. Was it out of convenience to take the child with her, did Takata have longer-term plans? One thing is clear: later in life, Takata wanted her daughter to become a doctor first and foremost. But, according to Phyllis, Takata envisioned Alice to eventually become a Reiki Master, too.

Takata was very strong willed. So much so, that she disapproved of Alice's suitor to the point that Alice and her lover 'eloped' and went to live in Iowa. It

appears that Alice's emancipation also distanced her from Reiki – at least for her own life.

And another thing was clear to Takata: she had every intention to practice and eventually teach Reiki in Hawaii. So much so, that she declined Chie Haysahi's invitation to take over the Hayashi Reiki Institute in Japan.

Source: Video 'Grandmother Takata, Parents Furumoto, Childhood':
https://youtu.be/Kn-VA_jsN4

Hawayo Takata's wig

annoyed her family greatly. In California, Takata had a following of 'disciples', who wanted her to sit on a throne robed in flowing dresses and wear a wig, much like the stereotype of a sect-leader. Indeed these same people are believed to be the source of the term 'grand-master' borrowed from the language of the Free Masons or the Rosicrucians. The family intervened and the wig disappeared. The term 'grand-master' though remained and should cause much future discussion.

It's an anecdote really, but I feel it gives us a glimpse of Takata not only being this strong headed and determined person. She seems to have battled with her role, too. It is, for example, well known that she was inconsistent in the form of her teaching. In her conviction of Reiki, though, she never wavered at all.

Source: Video 'Mother's Reiki, Her Disapproval, Choice and Influence':
<https://youtu.be/gdhhMhrkt6M>

After Hawayo Takata died,

At the end of 1980, it was Alice who informed the Reiki community. At that moment, she seemed to me very much in charge and she had firm ideas who was a good and respectful student of her mother and who was less so. I wouldn't want to suggest that Alice was a master-mind of the ensuing battle for succession but I speculate that her actions had a greater influence than is often thought and certainly there is little mention of Alice's role in the records of the Reiki history. The fact that Alice produced the 'Grey book' in 1982 is an indication that rather supports my speculation.

Source: Video 'After Hawayo Takata's Death – Discrepancies and Struggles for Succession': <https://youtu.be/VQfU8sRNclY>

Phyllis was often flabbergasted at Hawayo's flexibility and multitude of knowledge. Let's listen to her:

Video excerpt from 'Did Hawayo Takata Introduce the Kanji to Bridge Cultures?'

The full video can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/VfhYgtJahyU>

what we know is that she taught each class individually, she taught each student individually, she taught each master how they needed to be taught. I saw that because I saw her prepare many masters and it really depended on their personality, right?

So Wanja Twan, who is very esoteric and has no shyness about asking questions about past lifes and all these others things. I mean she asked a lot of questions of my grandmother, I mean I wouldn't have the nerve to even think about. So she ended up with an interesting group of ...you know a knowledge from Hawayo Takata that I didn't have because I wasn't brave enough to ask the questions. And then there are other people who asked other kinds of questions or who took a part of the practice that they could relate to in their own personality and develop that part of it.

And it's just really wonderful because when I could imagine sitting around the circle of masters that Hawayo Takata initiated that her practice was not embedded in one of us, it was embedded in all 22 of us. And it was only if you could take the big picture of the 22 of us, then you would get her practice. And that's what was so magical for me. So I'm... I don't like this kind of saying about when did this appear and when did this disappear because it's calling for a lot of surmising that feel like is... I mean what is the point?

Some scholars say that

Hawayo Takata did – and I quote – “not just translate language but culture”. Here we have this ethnically Japanese lady, born into a Japanese community in the USA. The integration of cultures must have been an issue all the time. Every which way, this is! Let us not forget that Takata was seen foreign in Japan while in Hawaii, the Americans had concentration camps for the Japanese until 1946.

Phyllis objects to the scholars' view and says “It was not in Hawayo Takata's nature to make Reiki more palatable to the western mind.” Maybe the granddaughter is taking a too simplistic stance here, but who are we to make assumptions about Takata's intentions other than her wanting to spread Reiki best she could under sometimes very hostile circumstances.

I have lived some 12 Years in China and Korea. I regularly travelled to Japan and my wife's family has connections to Japan going back to the 1950ies. The Reiki community astonishes me today when it is blindly idolizing all things Japanese

which, to me, often seem to be expressions of unfulfilled longings and projections of needs.

Allow me to quote one of my spiritual inspirations, Nicklaus Brantschen, a Jesuit priest who has lived in Japan in the 70ies becoming a Zen master. He says: “Slap a Japanese in the face and his tears will be salty. Cut an African and his blood will be red.”

Cultural differences exist – of course – but underneath it all, we are all humans and less apart than it sometimes looks.

To illustrate my point – and ladies, (*addressing the two authors of ‘Women in Reiki’*) please forgive me if I make what might be viewed a critical remark about your book – it is not meant that way. You remind the reader that woman were in a subdued role in Japan mentioning that they received the right to vote only in 1922. I had to giggle when I read this because in Switzerland they received it only in 1971.

What I want to say is: let’s be cautious when we talk about other cultures and speculate how different they are from ours and let us carefully examine our own biases.

[Hayashi wanted Takata to spread Reiki.](#)

I think this is a fair statement to make. If I added ‘to the West’ or attempted to explain his motivation like: ‘because he foresaw that Reiki was at risk to be extinct in Japan’, I would fall into the trap I just tried to warn us of.

This is not to say that the scholars and historians who offer context are wrong. Or that their information is fake news insisting on our own narrative which we label as ‘oral tradition’. Also, I am not suggesting that the mean justifies the end. We can look at and discuss Takata’s inconsistencies, contradictions and imperfections, by all means. I have addressed some in this presentation. But I suggest, they should not sidetrack from asking some bigger questions, like: has she stayed truthful to her commitment to spread Reiki? Where would I be, Reiki wise, without her legacy? ... indeed, without the chaos she left behind?

It is true that Takata wanted Reiki to spread globally. But equally true is, that she was not comfortable doing so herself. This is how her grandchild experienced it:

Excerpt from Video “Succession of Phyllis Furumoto – an Individual or a Group’

The full video can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/nbUU4ojyHbs>

Hawayo Takata would never have been comfortable with all these different languages and all these different cultures. I mean she was not able to see the benefit of, you know, this global spread of Reiki, even though that’s what she wanted.

You know, she had... I had this very strange experience with her which really was difficult for me because we went to Puerto Rico. The first time I ever heard about Reiki, ever knew what Reiki was or anything. And she had a Spanish interpreter and she could not get that Spanish was a language that needed to be interpreted so that people could understand her. So she would just talk and never make space for interpretation, she would talk right over the interpreter. I mean, it was really embarrassing for me. And I had a talk with her and she said: “They just have to deal with it”. And I thought “this is not respectful!”. I’m sorry, but you know I just don’t get this. And I just think about this situation when I’m sitting in Poland or Russia or Italy or Spain or the Netherlands or even in England sometimes, you know, or Australia. Australia was really bad because there’s this old saying about thinking that you speak the same language but you really don’t.

The exclusive claim of succession

of Usui, or Hayashi, or Takata is the crux of the dissonance reverberating to this day throughout the energy-field we call Reiki. Reiki, spelled with capital R this is. Today, some scholars write what is often termed as the ‘energy’ with lower-case ‘r’, i.e. *reiki*. Thus making a differentiation between Reiki system or -- practice and the energetic phenomena *reiki*.

You will have noticed that earlier on I referred to ‘heirdom’ and ‘inheritance’. I mostly stayed away from the word ‘succession’ which Takata’s grandchild favours. This is because I distance myself from claims which have an exclusive nature.

It is a significant divergence between my own thinking and the one of Phyllis Furumoto. I personally – and the branch of Usui Shiki Ryoho I learned Reiki from – do not view her as an exclusive successor of Takata as it is often expressed with the terms ‘spiritual lineage bearer’ or ‘grand-master’.

It is a side note really but rather interesting and a tribute to Phyllis’ generosity that this divergence did not deter her from granting me the exclusive insights as I am showing you today.

You may have expected photos

of Hawaiyo in this presentation. There are many and most of you have seen them in print and online publications. Which ones should I have chosen, the one of her and Haysahi in Hawaii in 1938? Or maybe a childhood picture? All of them show her conscious of the camera. I tried to give you a less veiled look – even if it is through the subjectivity of her grand-daughter’s and my own eyes.

There are two more images I would like to convey to you yet.

Firstly, you may have expected me to expand on the historic adversity with which this woman has been fighting and which I have mentioned in the invitation. Yes, let’s look at that briefly, although the publications on the market give you a much more captivating picture than I can.

It is alien to me to see this young woman more than a hundred years ago working in the sugar plantation in Hawaii. That she got married at 16 and had her first child as a teen I can comprehend not least because of my own mother. But being a young widow with two children, battling with health issues to go to Japan in the 30ies, well, that is rather exotic to my imagination. Then the hideousness of the Second World War, the loss of her Reiki Master and the ensuing struggle to survive in her country of birth which now has turned hostile to her ... well, that really seems another world all together. Though, coming to think of the war right now – in Europe, in the 21st century! – well, maybe we should be reminded that the here and now, in a way, is not so different.

Which brings me to the second visualization of Takata I would like to invite you to:

Who in this room (or reading this text)

has children? And how many of you have children who grow up with their mothers?

Statistically, almost 50% of the children in school today have separated parents. A great many of the children today grow up with single mothers.

Let this sink in for a moment. Think of all the single mothers who carry the responsibility for their children and more often than not for the household income as well. Imagine the challenges such woman have in today’s society and allow your heart to open for them. You all know women like this. For a moment, allow your compassion for them to take hold of you.

And now, please grant Hawayo Takata that very same love and respect for she was such a woman.

With this image in your heart and mind let us look at the final chapter:

Finally, of course, her live-achievement:

Would Reiki in Japan after the Second World War stayed on into the 50ies, 60ies and on to this very day?

Yes, most likely, The Reiki Gakkai which goes back to the 1920ies still exists. Much like in the Yamaguchi household, Reiki would have been part of everyday life in some families in Japan.

Would Reiki have been ignited to go beyond Japan and become the global success story it is today?

Even within Japan, I venture to say that Reiki's popularity is highly unlikely without the catalyst as personified by Arjava Petter. Admittedly, it is hypothetical, but I for one am convinced that it is the influence of the Reiki people coming to Japan from the West, such as William Rand, to mention another name, who triggered the renaissance of Reiki in Japan.

Arjava was not the only one but he happens to be amongst us today and therefore, in my estimation, he stands in for all the others. Besides, it is a historic fact that Arjava's publishing the existence of the Usui tomb-stone in 1996 triggered the avalanche of Reiki's unfolding into modern times.

Let me clearly spell it out:

Until Takata's death in 1980 and for more than a decade thereafter, her work was the totality of Reiki other than unknown remnants in Japan. All that was known internationally as Reiki was of Takata's making.

And her making includes that she left a Reiki world in which "everything goes" – to paraphrase Phyllis. This is how I felt, too, and it is the experience of my contemporaries from the 80ies and 90ies. The positive aspect of the chaotic lack of clarity, the derangement and power-battles is, that it brought forward Reiki biographies such as Arjava's.

Which is why I say, without Takata – and the entirety of her legacy - none of us would be here today.

Having said this, I would like to grant a moment of silence.

Silence.

To finish my presentation and then to open the floor for questions allow me to show you this 40 seconds trailer. Not because I want to sell you something but for what Takata's granddaughter said in my interview with her and in which – I would like to emphasize – she asked for forgiveness for her contribution in the drama which she – and all of us – inherited from her grandmother. She apologized for the transgressions she is responsible for particularly addressing the protagonists I mentioned in this presentation.

Video Trailer: 66 Steps on the Path to RECONCILIATION

The video can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/33wyAlvivWc>

With all this momentum and moving into the future, it is clear to me that Reiki is saying "okay, now you're ready for the big picture." You know the world is not about mommy and daddy, my Reiki master, my lineage, it's about our Reiki. I had to go inside myself and find this truth. It's about our gift to humanity.

By the way, if you do want to have access to the exclusive archive which is promoted in this video, send me an Email and I give you a free of charge VIP access. In your Email please refer to this presentation.

Thank you for your attention.

René Vögtli

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