

## Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

### October 2023

## Opening of the Taos Institute Japan

By [Terumi Sameshima](#) & [Tomoko Higashimura](#), Taos Associates



On September 9 and 10, 2023, the inaugural meeting of Taos Institute Japan was held at Senriyama Campus of Kansai University in Osaka, Japan. This was the first event dedicated to social constructionist theory and practices held in Japanese, and an example of how a local group of Taos Associates self-organized and worked together beginning in March 2023 to plan this event and create a local community. At first, we were not sure how many people would join us. In the end, the meeting was a great success, with 72 people attending on-site, 52 registering for the information exchange session, and 55 participating online. Participants came from as far north as Hokkaido and as far south as Kyushu. The group consisted of researchers and practitioners such as school teachers, office workers, and staff members of nonprofit organizations.



On the first day, participants learned about the background of Taos Institute Japan and its objectives. In Japan, there are few places to learn about social construction, especially in Japanese. Dr. Gergen's Japanese book translation of "Relational Being" was published in 2020, which led us to meet many people with this similar interest, who later decided to establish Taos Institute Japan (TIJ). TIJ has four missions: 1) to build a network for collaboration and mutual support, led by Taos Associates whose native language is Japanese; 2) to provide a forum for dialogue centered on social constructionist theory; 3) to collect interesting cultural practices in Japan and disseminate them abroad; and 4) to contribute to the spread of social construction through translating foreign literature and holding seminars. We also confirmed that, like the Taos Institute, researchers and practitioners will work together to enrich theory and practice, aiming for a "symbiotic society." All participants had a World Café (a discussion designed to generate creative ideas) on the theme of "social construction" as a way of getting to know each other. At the end of the meeting, participants deepened their relationships through an information exchange session.



The second day began with an online conversation between Kenneth J. Gergen, Co-Founder and President of the Taos Institute, and Toshio Sugiman, Professor Emeritus of Kyoto University, who has contributed to the spread of social construction in Japan. Dr. Gergen described the activities of the Taos Institute and the basic ideas of social construction and

discussed the possibilities of how the Taos Institute and Taos Institute Japan can be connected in the future. Questions were raised about Buddhism and its connection with Japan. In the introduction to the Japanese edition of “Relational Being,” Dr. Gergen states that the basic idea of this book was based on his experiences in Japan, and that “This translation now enables the book to return to its birthplace.” Many readers are interested in this text because it is a good opportunity to rediscover their own Buddhist culture. Another topic that emerged was when Dr. Sugiman suggested it might be necessary to examine “What is modernization?” together with Japanese and American researchers to consider something different from “horizon games,” (the idea that no matter how much modern culture pursues its ideals, they can never be reached because the goal keeps receding.) We are so exhausted by this state of affairs that we need to think about post-modern approaches to overcome this kind of modern culture.



Afterwards, each Associate in Japan chose a theme based on their expertise and conducted workshops on "Communication," "Research Methodology," "Organization," "Medicine and Therapy," and "Education." In the closing session, a proposal was made to think together about various possible future activities through exchanges in the SNS community centering on a dedicated Facebook group, and the promise to hold a general meeting at the same time next year.



With the creation of the Taos Institute Japan, we believe that we now have a place to learn about and discuss social construction in the Japanese language. While we want to understand the theory, we would also like to think together with our colleagues about betterment and dissemination of practice. You are invited to join our [Facebook group](#), visit our website (<https://taosinstitutejapan.com>), or contact us via email at [info.taosjapan@gmail.com](mailto:info.taosjapan@gmail.com).