

Visualizing global representation for Indigenous nations

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Hiroshi Fukurai's latest book was influenced by his almost 20 years of teaching in international law, which includes an emphasis on regional conflicts across the globe. Credit: Carolyn Lagattuta

A new book by Professor of Sociology and Legal Studies Hiroshi Fukurai shows how Indigenous "original nations" around the world are fighting for sovereignty and the ecological preservation of their ancestral homelands across and within the geopolitical boundaries of state lines.

["Original Nation Approaches to Inter-National Law"](#) re-examines global politics and the history of regional conflicts from the perspective of

Indigenous peoples, whose traditional homelands have often been subdivided or combined as colonial empires shaped the states on today's world map. The book also considers new approaches to global governance that could help to reclaim rights for equitable representation in [global politics](#) by Indigenous nations.

Fukurai's book was influenced by his almost 20 years of teaching in international law, which includes an emphasis on regional conflicts across the globe. He has also conducted extensive research on law and politics in Asia and Indigenous approaches to law. Fukurai himself is originally from Northern Japan, where his ancestors share roots with the Ainu Indigenous people.

The Japanese government only began to recognize the country's multiple ethnic groups in 2008. Elsewhere in Asia, Indigenous nations were captured and partitioned across multiple states in the post-colonial period, fueling brutal modern-day conflict in places like the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Kashmir region, which includes parts of India, Pakistan, and China. Fukurai says the concept of original nations and their historical struggles against the state system is key to understanding these issues.

"You simply cannot look at international relations only from the state-centric perspective," he says. "You have to look into those internal dynamics within and across the state system. It provides a very different portrait of today's world when you analyze historical tensions between the original nations that have existed for thousands of years, compared to the state system, which came into being only in the last 200 to 300 years."

Fukurai has also studied settler-colonial processes in the United States, where governments pursued a policy of genocide and disenfranchisement against Indigenous nations over the course of many

centuries. And Fukurai says this "simultaneous process of state-making and [nation](#)-destroying" is still taking place around the globe today.

However, in many modern states, Indigenous nations are fighting for rights, recognition, and sovereignty. These efforts are typically not recognized by the international community. But in 2007, the United Nations—which is composed of 193 member states—adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which established a universal framework of standards for [human rights](#) and freedoms for Indigenous peoples.

Fukurai said enforcement mechanisms are now needed to ensure these rights under the U.N. framework. Additionally, he believes there are opportunities within international law to fundamentally and cognitively reimagine state systems for the future in a way that could be transformed to serve the interest of all people.

"The state system is what we call a legal fiction," he said. "Humans have the cognitive capacity to change and redefine it. We gave life into these fictional entities, and we can reconstruct them into a more amenable form so that their rights are not above the rights of humans or even non-human species."

More information: Original Nation Approaches to Inter-National Law: The Quest for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Nature in the Age of Anthropocene - www.palgrave.com/us/book/9783030592721

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