

## Impact Objectives

- Overview existing political and legal/institutional arrangements that have resulted in the recognition of indigenous autonomy and self-determination in the Americas
- Increase awareness and enact change in regards to indigenous people's rights

# Indigenous autonomy in the Americas

*Ritsuko Funaki, Miguel González, Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, José Mariman and Pablo Ortiz T are working collaboratively on a project that analyses factors relating to indigenous governance in Latin America*



Associate Professor Ritsuko Funaki



Assistant Professor Miguel González



Professor and Researcher Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor



Dr José Mariman



Professor Pablo Ortiz T

**MG:** Many of the contributing authors in our current collaboration are seasoned researchers in their specific fields of study.

They have gained

expertise by conducting research with indigenous peoples, but in some cases, they are indigenous scholars themselves, in positions of leadership and influence through knowledge dissemination within their respective communities. The role of contributing authors in this project is to produce a book chapter that carefully examines relevant dimensions of autonomy as an expression of self-determination for indigenous peoples.

**Finally, how important are such partnerships and collaborations to the research outcomes?**

**MG:** Partnership is central to our project. In the vast majority of case studies that will be examined in the book, contributing authors have established long-term collaborations with local communities, governing authorities and indigenous leaders. In a couple of cases, research papers are being written in co-authorship between the non-indigenous researcher and indigenous writers and collaborators. Our research therefore seeks to challenge common practices in knowledge production that prioritises academic voices and scholarly writing. ●

**Can you briefly describe your own research backgrounds?**

**RF:** My first contact with Latin American people was in my hometown of Seto city, Aichi, one of the industrial areas in Japan where many Nikkei Peruvian and Brazilian workers immigrated to in the 1990s. After the lost decade in the region and at the peak of the bubble economy in my country, the Japanese government decided to open its border to Japanese descendants living in Peru and Brazil, among others. There was a huge lack of understanding about the region, which was causing social and cultural conflicts where I was living, so I wanted to major in studies of Latin America.

**MG:** My research interests have been influenced by my interdisciplinary background in Political Science and Social Anthropology. Although the focus of my doctoral dissertation research was on political institutions, ethnicity and governance, my current research deals with a broader range of development issues related to indigeneity and indigenous peoples, a critical issue not only in most of contemporary Latin America, but also Canada and elsewhere in the world. I have

researched and published on indigenous governance regimes, sustainable livelihoods and small-scale fisheries, indigenous human rights, and the regulation and management of natural resources.

**Part of your research is using a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Why did you choose this method?**

**RF:** To study the indigenous peoples' realities, we have limited chances that quantitative methods could be useful. Because there is a shortage of statistical data, a set-theoretical approach that is the theoretical foundation of the QCA is appropriate. Generally speaking, any comparative case studies regarding this topic have been limited in the number of cases that can be analysed, but the QCA method allows you to capture the subjects qualitatively with all the complexities. It also enables you to analyse them systematically following Boolean algebra, with a simplification of the core facts.

**You have been collaborating with local partners. Can you talk a little about their role in the project?**



# Ethnic and political accommodation of indigenous peoples

*A highly collaborative project regarding indigenous autonomy and self-determination in the Americas has been established by researchers based in Central, South and North America, Europe and Japan*

When European settlers marched west across the American frontier in the 18th and 19th centuries they encountered indigenous people who had been living there for thousands of years. If these Native Americans were not killed, the US government would try to come to some form of arrangement, where ‘land rights’ were granted to tribes who had no concept of private, individual ownership. These land rights came with clauses, such as demanding that the specific tribe was not allowed to move beyond the boundaries of the agreement that was drawn up.

However, these agreements were not worth the paper they were written on. In 1868, the US government signed a treaty with the Sioux (a collective of Dakota, Lakota and Nakota bands), which established a reservation that ‘belonged’ to the Sioux. The Black Hills were within this reservation. When gold was found there, the US reneged on the agreement, redrew the boundaries of the treaty and confined the Sioux people to a smaller area where leading a nomadic lifestyle was practically impossible.

This is one tragic example of something that has been going on for centuries and it

continues into the present day. In the quest for profit, industries across Latin America expand into territory that is not theirs and embark on practices such as deforestation. In clearing trees, these companies destroy so much more: indigenous peoples’ laws, language, customs, culture, dignity, autonomy and possibility of surviving on land that has been their home for countless years.

Now researchers based at universities across the world have come together to find out more about indigenous peoples’ territorial and land rights in Latin America. Importantly, this is not just about preserving the rights of indigenous peoples. The team is hoping to demonstrate what is happening in the hope of increasing awareness and enacting change.

## STUDYING 13 COUNTRIES

The project involves Associate Professor Ritsuko Funaki, from Chuo University in Japan, and Assistant Professor Miguel González, from York University in Canada. In addition, there is a research coordinating team that is helping to drive the project forward which features Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor (CIESAS-Chiapas, Mexico), José Mariman (Rümtun Study Center, Chile)

and Pablo Ortiz T (Salesian Polytechnic University, Ecuador). ‘The project brings together a diverse group of scholars and indigenous activists who, from a range of different perspectives, have been studying the processes through which indigenous peoples in the Americas have gained notoriety in policy making within the societies they live in,’ outlines Funaki.

In the past, González, who is the principal investigator of the project, led an original collaborative effort on indigenous governance in Latin America that resulted in the publication of a book entitled *Autonomía a Debate*. ‘The current collaboration aims at providing an overview of existing political and legal/institutional arrangements that have resulted in the recognition of indigenous autonomy and self-determination in the Americas,’ explains González. ‘This research will feature ongoing processes of indigenous territorial autonomy in 13 countries in the Americas: Canada, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela, Chile and Argentina.’ ▶





## INDIGENOUS AUTONOMY

The research the team has done so far demonstrates that demand for autonomy of indigenous peoples does not threaten the unity and stability of the state with its design and imposed conceptions of 'nations'. Indigenous territorial autonomy refers to a great variety of self-governance mechanisms through which indigenous peoples around the world have been able to (or aspire to) assert the right to self-determination. 'The territorial aspect refers to the fact that certain rights are recognised and exercised in specific jurisdictional areas and spatial scales often involving exercising control over the ancestral lands in which indigenous peoples have inhabited since times immemorial,' highlights González. 'It is important to understand indigenous territorial autonomy because over

reality of implementation. In some cases, the implementation gap is as large as if you had no land rights recognised. 'I have almost completed the first evaluation of the existing implementation gap in the indigenous peoples' territorial and land rights in the 10 subject countries,' explains Funaki. 'With that result, you can perceive that the best and the worst cases are both two of the highest ratios in the Americas, with more than 40 per cent of the indigenous population in the country.'

The best performer is Bolivia, while Guatemala has the worst case for the largest implementation gap. Funaki wants to investigate the possible causal conditions to explain these results. By drawing attention to the harsh conditions that families are experiencing with regards to recovering their

*It is important to understand indigenous territorial autonomy because over the last two decades, and due to the global activism of indigenous peoples themselves, there has been substantive advancements in international norms protecting the rights of indigenous peoples*

the last two decades, and due to the global activism of indigenous peoples themselves, there has been substantive advancements in international norms protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.'

The study therefore seeks to understand the multiple political, cultural and legal dynamics through which indigenous self-governance has been able to ascertain the right to self-determination (or not) in the light of both global norms and domestic legislations. More importantly, the team wants to identify cases across the Americas, examine common challenges and discuss local specificities that speak to the complexities of rights' implementation.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

Funaki's involvement in the project enables her to use her knowledge and expertise of something known as the 'implementation gap'. Put simply, this is the distance in practice between the legally recognised land rights for indigenous peoples and the

land and territorial rights, the team is hoping to provide some resolutions to the situation in countries across Latin America.

## SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The next steps for the team is to submit the manuscript they have been working on with a view to getting the book published. Once this is done, they will embark on a series of knowledge dissemination processes, including a webinar hosted by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the participation of leading researchers in a thematic panel at the Annual Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA 2021); and the presentation of research results in indigenous and intercultural universities on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (2021). Funaki is hopeful that once the book is published and these dissemination events take place, awareness of the issues will be increased and that real change can take place. ●

## Project Insights

### FUNDING

JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists type-B Grant Number JP17K13678 and Fund for the Promotion of Joint International Research type-A Grant Number JP19KK0325 (2020-2021), Chuo University Overseas Research Program (2019- 20) and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)

### CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Orlando Aragón, Fernanda Herrera, Roberta Rice, Mariana Mora, Wilfredo Plata, John Cameron, Ana Cecilia Arteaga, Dalee Sambo, Viviane Weitzner, Frederica Barclay, Shapiom Moningo, Pere Morelli, Verónica Azpiroz, Consuelo Sánchez, Dolores Figueroa, Bernal Castillo, Magali Viena, Amy M Kennemore y Elizabeth López, Elsy Curihuinca N, Rodrigo Lillo V.

### TEAM MEMBERS

Ritsuko Funaki (Chuo University, Japan), Miguel González (York University, Canada), Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor (CIESAS-Chiapas, Mexico), José Mariman (Rümtun Study Center, Chile) and Pablo Ortiz T (Salesian Polytechnic University, Ecuador)

### CONTACT DETAILS

Associate Professor Ritsuko Funaki

T: +81 42 674 3568

E: funaki@tamacc.chuo-u.ac.jp

W: <https://researchers.chuo-u.ac.jp/Profiles/3/0000226/profile.html?lang=en>

Assistant Professor Miguel Gonzalez

E: migon@yorku.ca

W: <https://profiles.laps.yorku.ca/profiles/migon/>

