

and justice systems; coercive cultural assimilation; and particularly intense exposure to the evils of child labor and the economic and sexual exploitation of women.

Worse, the developing discourse on civil society in Asia-Pacific rarely embraces issues crucial to indigenous peoples—issues of political and economic autonomy, self-determination, self-government. Civil-society debates typically concern restricting government authority. But to many indigenous peoples, acquiring the authority of government, or at least access to government, is what matters most.

If there is anything that unites the disparate communities of indigenous and tribal Asia-Pacific peoples, it is powerlessness. This is what permits governments to ignore and deny their existence. It is what can perpetuate their exploitation, by foreigners and by their fellow citizens. It is why advocates for indigenous peoples, often with human-rights organizations, are starting to press their concerns onto government and international agendas. Concerns of poverty, of environmental degradation, of legal reform, of tourism, of exploitation by mining, forest and pharmaceutical industries.

It would not be easy for Canadians to advance these interests, much less to propose self-government. Asian governments, bristling at outsiders interfering, often answer questions about indigenous peoples with arguments for assimilation and social cohesion. Indigenous communities themselves are often isolated geographically or politically, and hard to mobilize effectively. Furthermore, Canadian aboriginal leaders see a certain hypocrisy in the image of Canadian authorities moralizing abroad while First Nations at home still endure old injustices and persisting grievances. Canadian government officials in the bureaucracy, it must be said, have tended not to address aboriginal issues when formulating or explaining policy in Asia-Pacific relations.