

KOREA'S INTERNAL CIVILIZING MISSION: EDUCATION IN THE ENGLISH EDITION OF *THE INDEPENDENT*, 1896–1898¹

By KLAUS DITTRICH

This article discusses the education-related contents of the English edition of the bilingual Korean newspaper *The Independent* which appeared from 1896 to 1898. The paper, edited by Sŏ Chae-p'il and Yun Ch'i-ho, was the key organ of the enlightenment party. It is argued that education was a key component of an internal civilizing mission spearheaded by the newspaper's editors. This mission involved two elements. Firstly, *The Independent* saw education as a major means to emancipate Korea from Confucian tradition (which was itself seen as backward) and forge a new sense of nationalism. Secondly, education was continuously linked to new (predominantly male) practices, such as sports and military drills, as well as public speech and debating contests. Furthermore, reporting in the newspaper provides insights into educational debates and practices in late nineteenth-century Korea.

Keywords: Civilizing mission, modern education, *The Independent*, Sŏ Chae-p'il, Yun Ch'i-ho

INTRODUCTION

The opening of Korea orchestrated by King Kojong, the penultimate ruler of the Chosŏn dynasty, from the 1870s onwards had direct consequences on education.²

¹ The present article presents results of research carried out with funding from a postdoctoral fellowship jointly sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Korea Foundation.

² Recent English language scholarship includes Yoonmi Lee, *Modern Education, Textbooks and the Image of the Nation: Politics of Modernization and Nationalism in Korean Education, 1880–1910* (New York: Garland, 2000); Leighanne Yuh, "Rejection, Selection, and Acceptance: Early Modern Korean Education and Identity (Re)Construction, 1895–1910," in *Reform and Modernity in the Taehan*

A process began that led to a massive transformation of education. New educational offers competed with and slowly replaced existing ones. During most of the Chosŏn dynasty, education for the nobility had been based on the Confucian classics, while local schools (*sŏdang*) had taught elementary skills to commoners. After the opening of the country, the Korean government played a fundamental role in the process of creating new educational institutions. The language school Tongmunhak (literally: Common Script Learning) was established in 1883 in order to train interpreters. This was at a time when Korea had just signed its first international treaties with the United States and a number of European countries. After the closure of this institution in 1886, Kojong, that same year, established the Yugyŏng kongwŏn (Royal College) for which three Americans were recruited as teachers. Despite initial enthusiasm, this school was closed in 1894.³

In addition, private actors also started to establish new educational institutions. These private schools can be roughly divided into three categories, the background of the founders clearly differentiating them from each other. Firstly, Koreans established schools that comprised new curricular contents. The Wŏnsan haksa founded in 1883 by local citizens of the port city in the north-eastern part of the country has been referred to as the “first modern school in Korea.”⁴ Secondly, American Protestant missionaries created schools, as education was one of their means to Christianize the Koreans. The most famous example was the Methodist Paejae Haktang for boys, established in 1885 by Henry G. Appenzeller.⁵ Mary F. Scranton of the same denomination founded Ewha (Ihwa) Haktang, Korea’s first girls’ school, in 1886.⁶ Thirdly, Japanese settlers also created schools for Korean students.⁷

The Kabo Reforms initiated in 1894 reformed Korean state education decisively. These reforms, modelled on the experiences of the Meiji state, were

Empire, ed. Dong-no Kim, John B. Duncan, Do-hyung Kim (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006); Leighanne Yuh, “Education, the Struggle for Power, and Identity Formation in Korea, 1876–1910” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008).

³ Kwang-rin Lee, “Royal College: The Earliest Modern Government School in Korea,” *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 21 (1964).

⁴ Yong-ha Shin, “The Establishment of the First Modern School in Korea,” *Social Science Journal* 5 (1978).

⁵ For consistency’s sake I use the Korean name of the school rendered in McCune-Reischauer Romanization, unless I am directly quoting from *The Independent*. In the case of Ewha Haktang, I use the Romanization ‘Ewha’, as it is still commonly used today.

⁶ Myung-Keun Choi, *Changes in Korean Society between 1884–1910 as a Result of the Introduction of Christianity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 71–126.

⁷ Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 55–58.

orchestrated by Japanese diplomats after their victory in the Sino-Japanese War that brought an end to Chinese influence on the Korean peninsula. The Confucian state examinations were abolished and a Ministry of Education was established. The government promulgated, but never effectively implemented, a comprehensive education system that even included compulsory primary schooling. Eventually, during the late 1890s, the Ministry of Education controlled a set of Foreign Language Schools (English, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, French and German), a Normal School, as well as nine primary schools in Seoul and twenty-one in provincial cities. Additionally, the government signed a contract with the Paejae Haktang to send two hundred students there annually on government fellowships.

It was in this situation following the Kabo Reforms that the bilingual newspaper *Tongnip sinmun* or *The Independent* started to be published, appearing from April 1896 to December 1898. It was Korea's first newspaper and appeared in two editions: the Korean version saw the first large-scale usage of the Han'gŭl script; the English version addressed the European and American community for which it soon turned into a major means of communication.

The main actors behind *The Independent* were Sŏ Chae-p'il and Yun Ch'i-ho. Sŏ, the naturalised American citizen also known as Philip Jaisohn—in the paper always referred to as “Dr. Jaisohn”—, had been among the first Korean students to receive an education in Japan during the early 1880s. After participation in the abortive Kapsin Coup of 1884 he went to the United States where he converted to Christianity. He was also the first Korean to earn a medical degree and married an American woman. Sŏ returned to Korea at the end of 1895.⁸ Similar to Sŏ, Yun participated in the Korean mission to Japan in 1881 and stayed to become a student in Tokyo. He continued his education at the missionary Anglo-Chinese College in Shanghai and subsequently at Vanderbilt and Emory universities in the United States, returning to Korea in 1893. Consequently, both editors had lived and received an education abroad; they had also embraced Protestant Christianity, a fact well mirrored in *The Independent*.⁹

Sŏ and Yun played a leading role in organising the Independence Club founded in July 1896 of which *The Independent* became the major organ.¹⁰ The

⁸ Philip Jaisohn, *My Days in Korea and Other Essays*, ed. Sun-pyo Hong (Seoul: Institute for Modern Korean Studies, Yonsei University, 1999).

⁹ Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 56–61.

¹⁰ Vipin Chandra, “Sentiment and Ideology in the Nationalism of the Independence Club (1896–1898),” *Korean Studies* 10 (1986); Vipin Chandra, *Imperialism, Resistance, and Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Korea: Enlightenment and the Independence Club* (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1988); Se Eung Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's reform movement, 1896–1898: a critical*

Independence Club brought together enlightenment thinkers who—despite being partially embedded in more traditional structures—opposed key aspects of Confucian culture and promoted comprehensive political, social and cultural reforms based on American and European models.¹¹ In so doing, they sought to foster a specific sense of Korean nationalism that was meant to serve as a framework and ideology for organising political action.¹²

The Independence Club and its enlightenment spirit were part of a global phenomenon.¹³ Ideas and practices to reform, improve and develop societies can be described as civilizing missions. Scholars have recently adopted this notion, transforming it from a programmatic term used by imperialists of the late nineteenth century into a heuristic tool for historians. Such an approach has been mostly applied to the British presence in South Asia.¹⁴ However, the concept of civilizing missions does not only apply to imperial countries acting upon their colonial possessions, it also applies to elites within European national contexts. In the aftermath of the Parisian Universal Exhibition of 1867, for example, when public instruction had yet to fully take hold in all the French provinces, one expert called for a “saint mission” to bring education to every French child.¹⁵ Similarly, as a consequence of their contact with European and American knowledge and practices, East Asian elites perceived their own countries as backward and engaged in civilizing missions. In Korea and elsewhere, enlightenment reformers adopted civilizing discourses and applied them to their own society.¹⁶ Such a

appraisal of the Independence Club (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).

¹¹ Jongtae Kim, “The Origins of Korea’s Eurocentrism: A Study of Discourses on *Gaehwa* and *Munmyeong*,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 25 (2012): 42–45. Vladimir Tikhonov has insightfully shown the contrast of Sō being a Republican in the United States and an advisor to the monarch in Korea, envisioning reforms from above. See Vladimir Tikhonov, *Social Darwinism and Nationalism in Korea: The Beginnings (1880s–1910s). ‘Survival’ as an Ideology of Korean Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 197. Yun as well saw the masses merely as objects for cultivation: Eun-Jeung Lee, *Yun Ch’i-ho. Intellektueller in einer Transformationszeit* (München: Iudicium, 2012), 62–63.

¹² Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹³ Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique,” *American Historical Review* 117 (2012).

¹⁴ Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel, ed., *Zivilisierungsmissionen: imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005); Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann, ed., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission. Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004); Carey A. Watt and Michael Mann, ed., *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia. From Improvement to Development* (London: Anthem Press, 2011). See also Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Philibert Pompée, “Collections diverses,” in *Rapports du jury international. Tome 13*, ed. Michel Chevalier (Paris: Dupont, 1868), 772.

¹⁶ Gil-jun Yu, “Levels of Enlightenment,” in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization. Volume II. From the*

“self-civilizing initiative”¹⁷ involved cultural transfers, that is, the appropriation of foreign ideas, practices, and techniques to one’s own territorial setting.¹⁸ It also involved cooperation with and backing from foreign actors. In particular, Sŏ and Yun’s civilizing mission coincided with a Protestant revival in the United States that brought American missionaries to Korea.¹⁹

Education was a key component of the Independence Club’s civilizing mission for the religious and moral improvement of the country. Newspapers and education were intimately linked in the late nineteenth century. Not only was education a central topic in a paper such as *The Independent*, but newspapers were also regarded as a means of education, where editors diffused their worldviews into society. Formal education in school and the newspaper were instruments that permitted elite actors to influence the allegedly ignorant masses. That is why contemporaries regarded newspapers as pedagogical tools beyond the school age. The eminent American educator William T. Harris had once argued that periodicals provided “by far the most potent educational energy in the civilized world.”²⁰ The link between education and the press was especially pertinent in the case of *The Independent*. Sŏ himself lectured on world history, geography, and political economy at the Paejae Haktang.²¹ All government schools received a copy of *The Independent* for students who could read the newspaper.²² Furthermore, from 1897, “education” appeared in the subtitle of the English edition, as *The Independent* understood itself as “an exponent of Korean news, politics, commerce, literature, education and progress”. Besides the forum of the Independence Club, the paper was the foremost tool to spread the civilizing mission into Korean society.

Seventeenth Century to the Modern Period, ed. Peter H. Lee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Michael Mann, “Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress: Britain’s Ideology of a ‘Moral and Material Progress’ in India,” in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission. Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 13.

¹⁸ Young-sun Ha, “The Global Diffusion of the Western Concept of Civilisation to Nineteenth-Century Korea,” in *Cultural Transfers in Dispute. Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages*, ed. Jörg Feuchter, Friedhelm Hoffmann and Bee Yun (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2011); Si-hyun Ryu, “Multiply-Translated Modernity in Korea: Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help* and its Japanese and Korean Translation,” *International Journal of Korean History* 16 (2011).

¹⁹ Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World. The Creation of America’s Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

²⁰ William T. Harris, “The Centennial Exposition,” in *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the St. Louis Public Schools, for the Year Ending August 1, 1876* (St. Louis: Slawson, 1877), 181.

²¹ *The Independent*, I, 87, 24 October 1896.

²² *The Independent*, I, 14, 7 May 1896.

The Independent's reporting provides a comprehensive archive that allows for the tracing of the relevance of education as part of the enlightenment intellectual's civilizing mission. Whereas earlier scholarship referred to *The Independent* on a case by case basis, this article builds upon a close reading of the English edition and aims at providing an empirically rich survey of its educational content. The analytical notion of a civilizing mission helps in maintaining a critical distance between the discourse of *The Independent* and my own analysis. My purpose in revisiting the often polemical language of the editors is not to validate their representations of "Confucian" and "Western" culture; rather I am interested in analysing how this rhetoric constituted a powerful tool to justify the implementation of the enlightenment project. The first part discusses how education was a catalyst for a myriad of debates that turned around the value of "old" and "new" knowledge, nationalism, and Korea's place in the world. The second part shows that changes were most visible in practices related to the new schools, such as festivities, military drills and debating societies. The third and final part discusses a broad variety of pedagogical topics that were regularly dealt with by *The Independent*.

EDUCATION FOR THE NATION

The first editorial on education in *The Independent's* English language edition appeared on May 16th 1896, one and a half months after the launch of the paper. It attributed to education "a leading place" among the "many civilizing agencies." The authors criticized the new schools of the 1880s such as the *Tongmunhak* as "mere interpreter-mills" that did not provide general education and argued that "the time has now come when Korea should adopt a national system of education." Japan and the United States were mentioned as models.²³ Other editorials argued that Koreans would need Christianity, education, or both to lift up the moral and intellectual standard of the people and to promote "inner changes,"²⁴ that is, a thorough transformation of the Korean mentality as opposed to a mere superficial adoption of foreign techniques. These early editorials outlined the main characteristics of the place of education within the editors' civilizing mission: nationalism, its role in replacing "Eastern" with "Western" references, and its relation to a myriad of social and cultural transformations in late nineteenth-century Korea. The West, in this context, was

²³ *The Independent*, I, 18, 16 May 1896.

²⁴ *The Independent*, II, 55, 11 May 1897 and II, 56, 13 May 1897.

not necessarily a geographical unit but a Korean category of perceiving the world.²⁵

The editors labelled hitherto dominant ways of education as “old,” “Confucian,” or “Chinese,” and contrasted them to a set of knowledge and practices they perceived as “new,” “modern,” or “Western”. In April 1898 *The Independent* reported on scholars of the Sōnggyun’gwan (Confucian Academy) who had memorialised the throne that since the Kabo Reforms not enough attention had been paid to Confucian temples. The memorialists stated that “Korea cannot be considered as a civilized nation unless numerous sacrifices are offered to the sages of the past” and that “the ruin of the temples means the ruin of the country.”²⁶ In polemical language typical for the newspaper, Confucian culture was disqualified from the outset. *The Independent* presented this memorial as a mere strategy of traditional scholars for transferring money from the state “to fill some body’s sleeves.”²⁷ Honoring Confucius, in the eyes of the editors, eventually meant “dishonoring Confucius”²⁸ when they compared the—in their opinion—noble though backward theories to corrupt practices. In consequence they regarded Confucianism as an evil outgrowth of a corrupt state apparatus.

Education played a central role in the intellectual readjustment and nation-building process that Andre Schmid has interpreted as “de-centering the middle kingdom.”²⁹ This implied a departure from Sino-centric worldviews and contributed to the geo-cultural positioning of Korea between China and the United States, shortly after the tributary ties between China and Korea had ceased. Enlightenment actors, proud of this new independence wanted to emancipate themselves from a China that was now perceived as backward.

In place of rituals that underscored Korea’s participation in Chinese culture, *The Independent* sought to foster a sense of Korean nationalism. In 1897, the students of the Paejae Haktang intended to celebrate January 14th as the Independence Day of Korea. On this day Kojong had declared Korea independent in 1895, ceding to Japanese demands. Celebrations were to take place “with the same spirit as Americans celebrate the fourth of July.” However, the minister of education Min Chong-muk forbade the festivities, probably

²⁵ On this question with reference to China see Barbara Schulte, “Europe Refracted. Western Education and Knowledge in China,” *European Education* 44 (2012): 77, 82.

²⁶ *The Independent*, III, 41, 7 April 1898.

²⁷ *The Independent*, III, 90, 4 August 1898.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Schmid, *Korea between Empires, 1895–1919*, 55–100.

considering them to be too subversive. *The Independent* criticized this measure and supported the students' pro-Korean and anti-Chinese patriotism.³⁰

The Independent not only used Han'gŭl—usually referred to in the paper with the contemporary term *ŏnmun*—for its Korean edition, but also actively promoted it as a national alphabet. This implied that Korean youths should be taught Han'gŭl. An editorial of August 1897 argued that the Ministry of Education should start a school for the Korean language in order to “teach the people their own language so that they will be able to learn sciences and arts through *eunmun* books.”³¹ Koreans, according to the editors, should learn their own script and not Chinese characters. Usage of Chinese characters, however, traditionally had been a daily practice of Koreans. What *The Independent* suggested as one of the ingredients of Korean nationalism was therefore radical. It established the basis for nationalism, but was not the outgrowth of long internal traditions.

The editors' view was shared by the missionary and government school teacher Homer B. Hulbert who took over the principalship of the Normal School in May 1897. At this stage, Hulbert argued that instruction should be in Korean, not Chinese. Consequently new textbooks were needed. He envisioned that Chinese in Korea would in future play a similar role to “Latin for the Englishman.”³² Concomitantly, there was a desire to teach Korean history and geography as distinct disciplines in order to instil a sense of national pride. A related issue was the adaptation of the solar or Gregorian calendar which was also a result of the Kabo Reforms. This transition, too, was interpreted as a passage from Eastern or Chinese to Western standards. Beyond their symbolic relevance, calendars had practical implications when school holidays needed to be negotiated and Korean children sometimes enjoyed holidays according to both calendars.³³

Educational reforms had not only intellectual, but also practical consequences that were well represented in *The Independent's* editorials. Instruction in government foreign language schools as well as the Paejae Haktang comprised educational practices that were entirely new in Korea. This included students sitting on chairs

³⁰ *The Independent*, II, 3, 9 January 1897. The enthusiastic reporting of *The Independent* is in sharp contrast to the depressed atmosphere depicted by the British traveller Isabella Bishop who assisted at the initial ceremony of 1895. See Isabella Bird Bishop, *Korea and Her Neighbours: a Narrative of Travel, with an Account of the Recent Vicissitudes and Present Position of the Country* (London: John Murray, 1897), 31–32.

³¹ *The Independent*, II, 96, 14 August 1897.

³² *The Independent*, II, 69, 12 June 1897. On the other hand, contemporary Chinese became a “foreign” language useful for commerce. On the status of Chinese and its relation to the vernacular languages in East Asia see Michael Facius, “Japanisch–Kundoku–Chinesisch. Zur Geschichte von Sprache und Übersetzung in Japan,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38 (2012).

³³ *The Independent*, III, 6, 15 January 1898.

at tables in orderly rows. Such an arrangement entailed new forms of classroom interaction. The teacher addressed all students simultaneously. A modern system of classroom interaction had found its way to Korea.³⁴ The use of educational appliances such as blackboards and chalk also dates from this time.

More importantly, school uniforms were “icons of improvement”³⁵ and as such a central component of the civilizing mission.³⁶ The question of uniforms was first dealt with in May 1896 when *The Independent* reported that

the students of the Royal English School [...] have been allowed to assume military dress. It will be a great change in student life. We commend the spirit of these progressive young Koreans and trust that with Western garments they will also adopt some of the more useful western ideas.³⁷

A few weeks later the students presented themselves to Kojong in their new uniforms. The paper reported that Kojong “was very much pleased with them” and that “they looked really nice and orderly.”³⁸ This reference to neatness and order became a paradigmatic feature in the reporting on schools because it best symbolised the transformation of educational practices. Some days later *The Independent* informed in its typically paternalistic language that the students of the Paejae Haktang had also received new uniforms and commented:

The students of Pai Chai School are looking well in their new caps and uniforms. They seem to be proud of their new dress and all regret that they did not adopt it sooner. [...] Long live Pai Chai.³⁹

The students' hair style was even more controversial.⁴⁰ Korean males used to have long hair. The Kabo Reform government tried to change this through the so-called hair-cutting edict. In May 1897, it was announced that “the students of the

³⁴ On the implementation of a modern system of classroom interaction in Europe see Marcelo Caruso, *Geist oder Mechanik: Unterrichtsordnungen als kulturelle Konstruktionen in Preußen, Dänemark (Schleswig-Holstein) und Spanien 1800–1870* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010). For a vivid description of older class room practices see Daniel Gifford, “Education in the Capital of Korea. I,” *Korean Repository* 3 (1896): 281.

³⁵ Mann, “Torchbearers,” 14.

³⁶ Hyung Gu Lynn, “Fashioning Modernity: Changing Meanings of Clothing in Colonial Korea,” *Journal of International and Area Studies* 11 (2004): 78.

³⁷ *The Independent*, I, 16, 12 May 1896.

³⁸ *The Independent*, I, 22, 26 May 1896.

³⁹ *The Independent*, I, 10, 28 April 1896.

⁴⁰ Sukman Jang, “The Politics of Haircutting in Korea: A Symbol of Modernity and the ‘Righteous Army Movement’ (1895–96),” *Review of Korean Studies* 1 (1998).

government schools decided to have their hair cut and in a few days the scholars will do away with the time-honored top-knots.”⁴¹ The students, praised and supported by the paper, set an example in a time when the question of hairstyles was highly controversial. Students belonged to an avant-garde that adopted the new clothing and hair styles.

As part of their civilizing mission, the editors labored to eradicate the dichotomy between *yangban* and commoners. In Chosŏn Korea, birth determined the social position of an individual. This changed with the Kabo Reforms when social distinctions were officially abolished. Education became a means to implement a new social order based on merit, not descent where educational success should decide an individual’s position in society.⁴² This implied a devaluation of Confucian knowledge and the revalorization of practical skills, a process that was controversial and not shared by all. A case in point occurred in February 1897 when the minister of education Min Chong-muk requested that other ministries appoint the graduates of the Confucian school to good positions. The War Office, among others, replied that it did not need such men, as Confucian knowledge would be of little use, an opinion shared by the editors.⁴³ It testifies to a certain professionalization, one’s educational background was desired to be practical and related to one’s future employment.

An anecdote from September 1897 highlights the same idea when the paper reported on a nobleman who had committed suicide and left behind a farewell letter. Therein the *yangban* explained his decision to put an end to his life by having consumed all his inherited fortune and having never learned any useful profession. He left one central message to posterity:

Teach your children a skillful trade or some of the new knowledge of the West while they are young. If they grow up as I did some of them will be, in after years, in the same condition I am at the present.⁴⁴

The Independent emphasised the moral dimension of this incident and commented in a paternalistic manner: “We hope the letter will produce the desired effect in the minds of those Koreans who have children.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ *The Independent*, II, 52, 4 May 1897.

⁴² On how modern education started to influence career paths from the late nineteenth century onwards, see Kyung Moon Hwang, *Beyond birth: Social Status in the Emergence of Modern Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

⁴³ *The Independent*, II, 16, 9 February 1897.

⁴⁴ *The Independent*, II, 104, 2 September 1897.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

The Korean elite did not embrace *The Independent's* civilizing mission unanimously. Consequently, the civilizing mission encountered resistance. In this regard, the polemics between *The Independent* and the minister of education Sin Ki-sŏn, Min Chong-muk's predecessor, were particularly significant. Sin had been an enlightenment thinker and participated in the Kapsin Coup of 1884, but later returned to Confucian orthodoxy when he was appointed minister of education in February 1896.⁴⁶

The polemics started in early June when Sin submitted a memorial, criticizing foreign innovations, including universal public instruction, government students sent abroad, the use of Han'gŭl, the Gregorian calendar, as well as the new classroom practices.⁴⁷ He also opposed Sunday rest, offending the editors' Christian convictions.⁴⁸ Sin specified his critiques when he ordered that Korean history and geography textbooks should disappear, that all kinds of physical exercises should be stopped and that taking off hats in classrooms should be prohibited. Also, he wanted Korean teachers to be present when foreign teachers were instructing students, revealing distrust of the foreign teaching staff. *The Independent* commented in its polemic style:

The Minister is carrying out his plan of instructing young Korea remarkably well, but he may be more useful in China than in Korea. Korea wants statesmen for Korea, by Korea and with Korea. Korea is on her march of improvement and enlightenment, and however much the Minister tries to stem it the mighty tide of progressive spirit can not be checked by one Minister of Education.⁴⁹

Sin, in short, opposed all the achievements enlightenment thinkers associated with modern life and straightforwardly opposed the editors' nationalization efforts and emancipation from China. *The Independent* started a campaign against the minister who was repeatedly associated with the "Donghak rebels."⁵⁰ Such statements served to delegitimize the minister, but were obviously not based on facts, as the Tonghak rebels had fought against Korea's *yangban* elite.

⁴⁶ On this affair see also Chandra, *Imperialism*, 137–138; Young Ick Lew, "The Perception of the United States during the Enlightenment Period," in *Korean Perceptions of the United States: a History of Their Origins and Formation*, ed. Young Ick Lew, trans. Michael Finch (Seoul, Jimoondang, 2006), 183–185. Lew argues that Sin's views were rather balanced and the critique made by *The Independent* exaggerated.

⁴⁷ *The Independent*, I, 26, 4 June 1896.

⁴⁸ *The Independent*, I, 28, 9 June 1896.

⁴⁹ *The Independent*, I, 34, 23 June 1896.

⁵⁰ *The Independent*, I, 27, 6 June 1896 and I, 31, 16 June 1896.

School uniforms became one central point of Sin's criticism. Sin ordered that government school students be forbidden to wear Western clothes. Students and teachers alike were to be punished if they showed up in Western dress.⁵¹ This enraged the students and teachers of the English Language School who presented a petition in favor of uniforms to the minister. The question of student's dress became highly politicized. *The Independent* mobilised the students and, supported by the paper, they continued to wear their uniforms despite the order. In a letter addressed to Sin, the students and teachers of the English Language School stated that Kojong had allowed them to choose the clothes they liked, that they considered European-style uniforms the most convenient, and that the minister does not have the right to infringe upon their liberty. They presented their action as lawful and patriotic; not allowing them to wear the uniforms was equivalent to disrespect for the King. The students delivered their letter marching to the ministry in their uniforms.⁵²

Shortly thereafter, Sin amplified his critique, harshly criticizing the new classroom practices for which he was in turn attacked by *The Independent*:

The latest antics of the Minister of Education may be of some interest to Korea's well-wishers. He ordered that the students sit on the benches cross legged; fold their arms on the seats like Buddha, walk on the streets like the letter S, that is, lean forward the body to one side and slowly drag the legs toward that side making the shape similar to the letter S. This kind of walking seems to his excellency to be dignified and Confucian. In the school room the students must sit in the shape of the character [...] and when they meet face to face they must shake their own hands. This custom was originated by one of the Confucian disciples. The Minister has invented a new fashioned hat and coat which are modeled after the costumes worn by the Chinese some 2000 years ago.⁵³

What *The Independent* presented in intentionally sarcastic language had been common practice in Korean schools. The editors contrasted these allegedly backward practices to new ones which they perceived to be universal.

A Confucian textbook recommended by the Minister incited further debate and eventually would lead to his dismissal. According to *The Independent*, the book spoke insultingly of Europe and America, and praised China. The paper commented: "This man is a good representative of the hermit kingdom."⁵⁴ The

⁵¹ *The Independent*, I, 29, 11 June 1896.

⁵² *The Independent*, I, 35, 25 June 1896. See also *The Independent*, I, 36, 27 June 1896.

⁵³ *The Independent*, I, 44, 16 July 1896.

⁵⁴ *The Independent*, I, 76, 29 September 1896.

newspaper also printed numerous critical letters from readers creating the impression of public opinion being hostile to the minister. The American diplomat Horace N. Allen went so far as to arrange a coordinated action of European and American diplomats against Sin.⁵⁵

Minister Sin resigned at the beginning of October 1896. *The Independent* commented sarcastically: "Our readers will be sorry (?) to hear that the Minister of Education Mr. Sin Ki Sun has resigned his position, and intends to go back to his native [town] where he will commune with his genial friends the 'righteous army.'"⁵⁶ Min Chong-muk became his successor. One of his first actions was to pay a visit to the Paejae Haktang.⁵⁷ This action presaged a considerable change in educational policy. *The Independent's* review of the year 1896 stated proudly:

The educational work has been interfered with a little by a conservative Minister and received a slight check, but fortunately the Minister resigned his office and a more progressive man succeeded him. Even under such circumstances the schools which foreigners teach went on with their work with zeal and push. The students of several schools have been wearing uniforms in spite of the orders to the contrary from the Minister of Education. These students knew that they were legally and morally right in wearing their uniforms, so they fought the battle bravely with the Minister of Education, and deservedly came out victors.⁵⁸

Indeed, this was one of the "successes" *The Independent* claimed for itself. One of the opponents of the editor's civilizing mission was eliminated. The editors used the paper to put pressure on government officials and this of course demonstrated the potential political power of the press. Debates on education contributed to the creation of a public sphere where foreigners and Korean elites discussed policy issues and presented their arguments.⁵⁹ *The Independent* was skillful in imposing its opinion in this struggle. It also shows once again that the reforms promoted by the paper were far from well accepted among large parts of the elite.

⁵⁵ Byong-ik Koh, "Diplomacy and Missionary in the Late 19th Century Korea—the Case of Education Minister's Slandering of Christianity," in *Essays on East Asian History and Cultural Traditions*, ed. Byong-ik Koh (Seoul: Sowha, 2004).

⁵⁶ *The Independent*, I, 78, 3 October 1896. On the Independence Club's role in the dismissal of Sin see also Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn's reform movement*, 99.

⁵⁷ *The Independent*, I, 86, 22 October 1896.

⁵⁸ *The Independent*, I, 115, 29 December 1896.

⁵⁹ Michael Kim, "Giving Reasons to the Unreasonable: Philip Jaisohn and the New Urban Space of *The Independent*," *Comparative Korean Studies* 11 (2003).

During 1898, the last year of appearance of *The Independent*, some editorials, most likely authored by Yun after Sŏ had left the country in early May 1898, sum up the recent educational achievements and persistent shortcomings. There was the expectation that education might change Korea in the future, as an editorial of May 1898 argued:

In spite of the loosely and unscientifically governed system of the Educational Department, there are over a thousand boys attending the primary schools, where they learn geography, arithmetic and history, which enable them to know that there are other countries in the world besides Korea, Japan and China; and they understand the different forms of Government in a general manner. The different mission schools and private secular institutions (not so many as there might be), train the youth of the capital in morality, patriotism, fundamental science and arts. When these young men grow up and take their fathers' places, undoubtedly they will make better citizens; hence the whole nation will receive the benefits of the knowledge of these trained men. [...] Absence of education has brought Korea to its present lamentable condition, and education alone, if anything can, will save us. What Korea needs most is the primary education which may enlighten the mind and elevate the morals of the young of the land. Not a cent should be spent by the government in high schools or colleges until the people of the entire peninsula have been provided with rudimentary schools where the children may learn some of the elements of education which shall make them more intelligent farmers and artisans than their fathers.⁶⁰

Thus, elementary instruction was the absolute priority for Korea, according to this editorial. Yun went on with a statement he repeatedly used in order to hint at the, in his opinion, false priorities of spending: "The Department of Education we believe to be a farce."⁶¹ Yun considered the ministry as being too expensive, criticising the fact that too many officials served there and the money could be better used for additional schools.⁶²

One week later an editorial on foreign language schools partly put the uselessness of education above elementary level into question:

What we want is the rich, renovating, nay, revolutionizing ideas of the West introduced and naturalized, as it were, in Korea. Cotton goods and implements, all useful in their places, can not give us this desirable result.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *The Independent*, III, 77, 5 July 1898.

Mere imitation of Europeans modes of architecture, or of dress or of cuisine, will be mere empty show unless we are quickened by the great epoch-making and world-moving thoughts of the occidental races. The adoption of the superior political institutions of Europe or America without our being first educated up to them will be worse than a farce. Hence, we must, first of all, possess not only, but assimilate as well, the ideas which have produced the Western civilization.

Now, the only means of unlocking the rich magazines of Western thoughts is the tongue. The study of the great languages of the world is not a luxury but a necessity to Korea. The money which our government spends in this direction is the best investment we can recommend. We are glad to know that some progress has been made in the existing foreign language schools, thanks to the skill and faithfulness of the instructors, in spite of many disadvantages and discouragements.

The role of higher education in Korea was to appropriate Western knowledge and, Yun argued, foreign language schools played a positive role in this process. But what were the “disadvantages and discouragements?” Yun deplored the fact that all foreign language schools were independent from one another, “with no common management, no common discipline, no common uniform, no common feeling among them.” This state of affairs led to practical problems, such as higher costs and students not being able to study more than one language. But this arrangement, according to Yun, was also “full of dangers,” the biggest problem being the proliferation of “partisan spirits.” Expertise in a certain language may lead to advocating closer relations with that foreign power to the disadvantage of a student’s ties with Korea:

It is an open secret that they become the partisans of the country whose mother tongue they study. Partisan quarrels sacrificing great national interests to miserable factional gains has been the bane of Korea. We hoped that the study of foreign languages, so full of precepts and examples of broad patriotism, would mitigate and gradually eradicate the narrow spirit of the Korean youths.

Finally, Yun urged the Ministry of Education to establish one big school located in a common building so “that the study of a foreign language is not to make [students] half-fledged foreigners but full developed Koreans with higher ideals and nobler patriotism.”⁶³ The Italian diplomat Carlo Rossetti who stayed in

⁶³ *The Independent*, III, 80, 12 July 1898.

Seoul in 1903 advocated the same position, arguing that the foreign language schools served primarily diplomatic, not educational purposes.⁶⁴

Yun, in conclusion, stressed the necessity of both elementary and higher education for Korea's development. As in other fields, such as railway construction and the exploitation of gold mines—in which the Korean government had given concessions to foreign companies—Yun warned against imperialist encroachment. To his eyes, the foreign dimension, the appropriation of Western knowledge, played a crucial role. However, it was important to him that this process was not foreign-controlled, but regulated by Koreans, so that education produced Korean patriots and not “half-fledged foreigners.”

The articles in *The Independent* consciously ignored and devalued Eastern knowledge and its institutions which could otherwise have been a basis upon which to build. The contributions in *The Independent* have to be understood as part of a struggle in which Enlightenment radicals helped by their foreign friends—mostly American missionaries drawn to Korea by the Protestant revival in the United States—tried to impose their vision, and gain power and authority. This was a specific point in Korean history when the future status of non-Western educational knowledge and practices was at stake.⁶⁵ The question was how much of Confucian ideas and practices should be retained in modernity. Exactly as the British perceived “Oriental despotism” in India,⁶⁶ the crusaders Sō and Yun perceived Confucianism as decayed and labelled it as foreign, Chinese, and backward. The shift from Eastern to Western knowledge took place in a polemical confrontation between two camps. Enlightenment reformers considered that all Confucian traditions to be outmoded and needing to be overthrown. Within the Korean discursive field *The Independent* took a radical position.⁶⁷ The *Hwangsōng sinmun* was a newspaper of similar importance, edited by Confucian reformists and written in classical Chinese. Unlike the editors of *The Independent* these Confucian reformers did not reject tradition completely. Yet, the contributors to the *Hwangsōng sinmun*, as for example the intellectual Chang Chi-yōn, also saw

⁶⁴ Carlo Rossetti, *Corea e Coreani: Impressioni e ricerche sull'impero del gran Han* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1904–1905), 142–144.

⁶⁵ For a similar discussion with regard to India, albeit with a stronger emphasis on foreign imperial interference see Tim Allender, “Closing Down an Intellectual Interchange: The Gifting of Text to Colonial India,” *Comparativ* 22 (2012). Until the first half of the nineteenth century British colonisers regarded Indian scientific and medical practices as essentially having the same value as their own and considered further developing them. Only afterwards were they perceived as categorically inferior.

⁶⁶ Mann, “Torchbearers,” 5.

⁶⁷ I am using the term “field” in Bourdieu's understanding: Pierre Bourdieu, “Quelques propriétés des champs,” in *Questions de sociologie*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Paris: Minuit, 1980).

education as a key force in developing Korea. They also suggested, for example, the recruitment of elites by talent, not lineage, and urged the cultivation of abilities through education. Confucian reformers favoured the practical application and use of new knowledge, albeit—and this crucially distinguished them from enlightenment thinkers—negotiated through traditional practices.⁶⁸ In the long term, however, the enlightenment reformers' civilizing mission was successful in delegitimizing Eastern knowledge in Korea and making Western knowledge prestigious and important to Koreans.

A SET OF NEW PRACTICES

The enlightenment reformers' civilizing mission found expression not only in discourses and institutions. We have already seen how hair styles and seating arrangements were reformed and became the subject of heated debate. This section further analyses changes in educational practices with a special focus on school celebrations, sporting events and debating societies which appear to be the most frequent educational themes in *The Independent*.

The paper regularly reported on the celebrations, picnics and military drills of the government schools and the Paejae Haktang.⁶⁹ On these occasions, it was constantly emphasised that the locations had a “pleasing and festive appearance”, that the guests were “comfortably seated”, “dainty refreshments” served and that, as one example proves, “there were a large number of ladies present in their pretty summer dresses making the assembly appear very picturesque”.⁷⁰ Korean and foreign dignitaries were present, Kojong was also often in attendance, which provided occasions for the students to demonstrate their talents before the king while teachers had the chance to have an audience. These festivities included the singing of patriotic songs in English and Korean, as well as praise of the king. They were important social events that emphasised contemporary bourgeois values and forms of interaction.

The closing exercises of the Paejae Haktang in July 1897 were an especially well-organized event and resulted in some especially vivid reporting. *The Independent* invited the entire foreign community to participate. The paper also

⁶⁸ Dohyung Kim, “Modern Reform Theories and Confucian Thought of Chang Chiyŏn,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 2 (2002); Dong-no Kim, “Views of Modern Reforms as Depicted in the *Hwangŏng sinmun* during the Taehan Empire,” in *Reform and Modernity in the Taehan Empire*, ed. Dong-no Kim, John B. Duncan and Do-hyung Kim (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006), 45–50.

⁶⁹ *The Independent*, I, 24, 30 May 1896; I, 26, 4 June 1896 and I, 38, 2 July 1896. Similarly, students of various schools also participated in the ground breaking ceremony of the Independence Arch, see *The Independent*, I, 100, 24 November 1896.

⁷⁰ *The Independent*, II, 72, 19 June 1897.

underscored the fact that the event took place in the brick building of the recently completed Methodist Church in Chōngdong.⁷¹ Brick buildings were “icons of modernity”⁷² and made a difference in a Korean neighborhood composed of wooden houses. A printed program—this detail also being an innovation—was distributed among the audience. It included Chinese recitations, singing of religious songs in Korean and English, English language performances and orations by the students, speeches by missionaries and other officials, a public debate contest as well as a sports drill by the students.

The guests included the elite of the Anglophone community of Seoul. There were the diplomatic representatives of the United States and Great Britain, John M. B. Sill and John N. Jordan. The leading American missionaries Hulbert, C. F. Reid and George Heber Jones, as well as the British missionary Alexander Kenmure, were all present. The teachers of the government English Language School W. du Fon Hutchinson and Thomas E. Halifax, both from Britain, also attended. From the Korean side, the article mentioned high government officials, including ministers and vice-ministers as well as the governor of Seoul. However, only the minister of education Min Chong-muk is mentioned by name. The Paejae Haktang appeared as a quasi-official United States school in Korea.

One of the central points of the editorial is the positioning of Korea between the East and the West and the role of education in this process of positioning. In fact, the ceremony consisted of a Chinese and an English program. The author of the editorial highlighted a contrast between the two parts, writing in an extremely negative way about the Chinese part. In his opinion the Chinese presentation was “comical,” “painful,” and “tiresome”: “The sooner the teaching of Chinese classics and the doctrines of Chinese sages in the Korean schools are abolished, the better for the country and its people.” The disdain for China and Chinese education also found expression in Yi Sūngman’s (Syngman Rhee who was one of the Paejae students and would become the first President of the Republic of Korea) oration on the independence of Korea. In strong contrast to the negative evaluation of China, most participants in the ceremony seemed to show great enthusiasm for everything related to the “West.” Reverend Jones argued that “education stands in a vital relation to the West.” He “regarded with much pleasure the broadening interest of Korea in schools.” Without any doubt, the author of this editorial agreed with this opinion. In this sense embracing the West also had an important religious dimension, as it entailed accepting Protestant Christianity.⁷³ The yearly closing ceremonies and similar celebrations were

⁷¹ *The Independent*, II, 79, 6 July 1897 and II, 80, 8 July 1897.

⁷² Mann, “Torchbearers,” 14.

⁷³ *The Independent*, II, 82, 13 July 1897.

important social events that showed the beginning of a patriotic festival culture in Korea.

Similarly, pageantry became a prominent part of regular school activities.⁷⁴ King Kojong lived in the Russian legation compound for almost a year from 1896 to 1897. In June 1896 the students of the Russian and French language schools performed for Kojong which provides us with an impression of patriotic culture during this period: "The boys marched into the Russian legation headed by a drum corps and went through the exercises very credibly and received hearty praise from his Majesty." Each student received a gift, and after dinner fireworks were set off. Russian and French teachers, diplomats and officers were also present.⁷⁵ When Kojong left the Russian legation compound in February 1897 the Paejae boys formed a line, carrying Korean flags, throwing flowers, and cheering. According to the editors they were learning modern patriotic festival culture. Their loyalty to King Kojong symbolised their commitment to the Korean nation. The students' behavior showed their "progressive spirit as well as their knowledge of foreign customs."⁷⁶ Similar to the aforementioned campaign against Minister Sin, this example shows how the editors used the students as agents for their civilizing mission.⁷⁷

As the analysis of the festivities indicates, sports and military drills acquired a central role in education, or at least in its public representation in the newspaper.⁷⁸ Seoul experienced a veritable "military craze."⁷⁹ In May 1896, *The Independent* reported for the first time from a picnic of the students of the Royal English School. The meeting featured a military drill supervised by the British military officer Boxwell. It was explained that "this is a branch of school training which

⁷⁴ For a comparison with Japanese and European pageantry see Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Johannes Paulmann, *Pomp und Politik: Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000); Shun'ya Yoshimi, "Les rituels politiques du Japon moderne. Tournées impériales et stratégies du regard dans le Japon de Meiji," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 50 (1995): 363–364. Yoshimi notes how the Meiji Emperor visited schools and attended performances of military exercises.

⁷⁵ *The Independent*, I, 35, 25 June 1896.

⁷⁶ *The Independent*, II, 21, 20 February 1897.

⁷⁷ Yun also mentions in his diary how students participated in the Independence Club's protests against Russian control of Korea in March 1898. See *Yun Ch'i-bo's Diary. Yun Ch'i-bo ilgi. Volume 8* (Seoul: National History Compilation Committee, 1975), 141.

⁷⁸ Gwang Ok, *The transformation of Modern Korean Sport: Imperialism, Nationalism, Globalization* (Elizabeth: Hollym, 2007). With an emphasis on imperialism see J. A. Mangan, *The games ethic and imperialism: aspects of the diffusion of an ideal* (Harmondsworth/New York: Viking, 1986).

⁷⁹ Vladimir Tikhonov, "Masculinizing the Nation: Gender Ideologies in Traditional Korea and in the 1890s–1900s Korean Enlightenment Discourse," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66 (2007): 1051.

has been found of great value in western countries, and is carefully cultivated in every school which claims to be of any importance.”⁸⁰ A sergeant of the United States Marines drilled the Paejae boys;⁸¹ the students of the Russian Language School were trained on the Russian Legation grounds by their teacher Nikolay Biryukov.⁸²

Schools had to be equipped with facilities for physical exercise. Initially, the paper continuously lamented that schools in Seoul did not yet have drill grounds. One year later, however, it could be reported that the new gymnasium at the Paejae Haktang had finally been completed: “The Paichai School boys are enjoying themselves nowadays in their new gymnasium. Some of the lads are quite expert with the horizontal bars, swings and ladders.”⁸³ Team sports were also introduced to Korean schools. *The Independent* reported on the allegedly first football match played in Korea. The match was played between a team made up of British Marine guards and officers from a warship harboring in Chemulp’o and one composed of British residents and students of the English Language School. “Korea eventually scored one goal nothing. [...] May it be the commencement of a long series of matches,” *The Independent* commented.⁸⁴ More football matches involving students of the English Language School followed in the months and years to come.⁸⁵

The government schools started to organise annual athletic exercises.⁸⁶ In June 1897, the English, Russian and French language schools held a common exercise before Kojong. All key diplomats were present. Z. Polianovsky, the Russian vice-consul in Seoul, acted as chief examiner. According to *The Independent*, the schools were

all doing excellent work, and the scholars are showing not only that they have no mean capacity for learning languages, but also that they have an aptitude for physical exercises, which, in our opinion, though Koreans as a race are well developed, are necessary to stir up the blood made stagnant by their hitherto indolent and sedentary manner of life. [...] The English School [students] appeared first on the parade ground, looking very smart

⁸⁰ *The Independent*, I, 13, 5 May 1896. See also *The Independent*, I, 22, 26 May 1896.

⁸¹ *The Independent*, I, 31, 16 June 1896.

⁸² *The Independent*, II, 115, 28 September 1897. On Biryukov see Aleksandr Nikolaevich Khokhlov, “Pervyj prepodavatel’ russkogo yazyka v Koree N. N. Biryukov: pedagog, organizator voennoy razbedki i diplomat,” *Problemy Dal’nego Vostoka* 2 (2008).

⁸³ *The Independent*, II, 47, 22 April 1897.

⁸⁴ *The Independent*, II, 37, 30 March 1897.

⁸⁵ *The Independent*, II, 149, 16 December 1897.

⁸⁶ *The Independent*, II, 50, 29 April 1897; I, 22, 26 May 1896.

in their new khaki uniforms with red stripes and facings. The first company carried rifles, the remainder of the English scholars, being mostly newcomers, were not yet sufficiently proficient to drill with arms on such an occasion. Next came the Russian School, looking very neat in white uniforms with blue stripes; the French scholars, in Korean costumes, bringing up the rear.⁸⁷

Praising the students' efforts, *The Independent* wrote that on this occasion

every contestant showed on his face the determination that he went into the game to win. The most pleasing feature of the whole exercises was that the boys showed their manly spirit and gentlemanly demeanor.⁸⁸

Debates intensified in spring 1898 when the government schools held a field day for athletic contests: "The exercises will consist of races, jumping, putting the shot, throwing at a mark and other events common to such occasions. It is said that interest in the event is keenly felt by the Koreans and we doubt not that this joint field day will be a grand success. We trust the public will be allowed to attend for it will be a new number on Seoul's social program."⁸⁹ During April and May 1897, notices appeared continuously in *The Independent* announcing the sports contest and inviting Seoulites to donate for a School Sports Fund especially created for that event.⁹⁰ In early May the Government School Sport Committee had raised over four hundred dollars.⁹¹ The retrospective editorial on the athletic sports contest stated:

Why, these very lads were only a few years ago nothing but young fossils, not as old, it is true, as their fathers, old fossils, but almost as dead. Bodily exercise was unknown to them. We are glad that the foreign teachers to whose care has been committed the delicate and responsible duties of educating the Korean scholar, have taken the pains not merely to cram into his head verbs and nouns but also to develop the thus far latent resources of his muscles and limbs. This is one of the best means of introducing the active and up-and-be-doing spirit of the progressive West into stagnant Korea, and we go so far as to say that we should be inclined to pardon the

⁸⁷ *The Independent*, II, 75, 26 June 1897.

⁸⁸ *The Independent*, II, 72, 19 June 1897.

⁸⁹ *The Independent*, III, 39, 2 April 1898.

⁹⁰ *The Independent*, III, 49, 26 April 1898.

⁹¹ *The Independent*, III, 55, 10 May 1898.

boy who takes a prize in the 100 yards race for any number of grammatical rules he may break.⁹²

Just a few days later the government primary schools organized a similar contest. According to *The Independent*, “the fact that several hundred lads are interested in this physical exercise points to a new and brighter day for Korea.”⁹³ This emphasis on fitness (and patriotism) at the expense of academic skills was often repeated. To use a Foucauldian term, these practices expressed the bio-political desire of Korean reformers to radically transform bodily practices and form what they regarded as manly citizens—to “raise their levels of manliness and morality.”⁹⁴

Not only was physical exercise in the form of competitive sport new to Korea. Debating societies became increasingly popular in Korea and introduced a new form of sociability. In November 1896, the students of the Paejae Haktang established a debating society. The society’s purpose was, as *The Independent* stated, to learn parliamentary practice and public debate. For their “fine speeches concerning various topics” the students used Luther Stearns Cushing’s *Manual of Parliamentary Practice*.⁹⁵ The use of this American book permitted them to get acquainted with the procedures of public speeches and debates. *The Independent* saw the debating society as “a sign of Korea’s regeneration,”⁹⁶ especially praising the orderliness of debates, the strict enforcement of rules and the earnestness of discussions.

The first anniversary of the debating society resembled the many school celebrations analysed above. At this time membership had increased from the initial thirteen members to over two hundred. The building was decorated with Korean flags and more than three hundred people joined the event. Before the contest began, the participants and attendees sang the Korean national anthem. Sŏ, who was referred to as “the father of the Society,” and Yun were the invited speakers.⁹⁷ At the aforementioned closing exercises of the Paejae Haktang in July 1897, the Debating Society also took an active part. The students discussed the

⁹² *The Independent*, III, 62, 31 May 1898.

⁹³ *The Independent*, III, 64, 4 June 1898.

⁹⁴ Paul Dimeo, “Sporting and the ‘Civilizing Mission’ in India,” in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission. Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

⁹⁵ Luther Stearns Cushing, *Manual of Parliamentary Practice. Rules of Proceedings and Debate in Deliberative Assemblies* (Boston: Reynolds, 1845). The book was reedited several times until the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁹⁶ *The Independent*, I, 103, 1 December 1896.

⁹⁷ *The Independent*, II, 143, 2 December 1897.

following issue: "Resolved that the time has come for the Orient to accept in the main the civilizations of the Occident." Obviously, the "question was overwhelmingly carried in the affirmative."⁹⁸

In February 1898 the students of the government schools organized their own debating society. Every Saturday, they discussed scientific and economic questions at the Normal School building. The students elected a Korean teacher of the Normal School as president of the society. Initially the society had eighty members. Their object was "to cultivate friendship among the students of various schools and to learn the art of public debate."⁹⁹ *The Independent* commented that

the new debating society among the government schools is a sign of the times. It is to be hoped that all such societies will serve to inculcate knowledge as well as create orators. It should also be an incentive to better study and clearer and more pronounced views. We hope such views will always be enlightened, patriotic and worthy of the times in which we live.¹⁰⁰

The author praised the debating society of the Paejae Haktang and the military drills as a moment of modernity that would profoundly change the country's future: "Young Koreans take to them as ducks to water."¹⁰¹ The festivities, sporting contests, and debating events were meant to make the students feel that they belonged to the same political community and create a sentiment of national belonging. Sports and public debates were two of the foreign practices brought to Korea in the late 1890s, both constituting typically male forms of sociability.

These practices were part of a new form of masculinity that emerged in the late nineteenth century, as Vladimir Tikhonov has convincingly argued.¹⁰² This new masculinity was a combination of older rough elements that included bloody practices such as stone fighting which were combined with European bourgeois manliness. Moreover, it was embedded in a specifically national framework. It is striking that *The Independent* wrote extensively about the Paejae Haktang, while

⁹⁸ *The Independent*, II, 82, 13 July 1897.

⁹⁹ *The Independent*, III, 17, 10 February 1898 and III, 19, 15 February 1898.

¹⁰⁰ *The Independent*, III, 35, 24 March 1898.

¹⁰¹ *The Independent*, I, 104, 3 December 1896.

¹⁰² Tikhonov, "Masculinizing the Nation." On similar discussions in China see Barbara Schulte, *Zur Rettung des Landes: Bildung und Beruf im China der Republikzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008), 229–232. For Germany and France see Karen Hagemann, "Of 'Manly Valor' and 'German Honor': Nation, War, and Masculinity in the Age of the Prussian Uprising against Napoleon," *Central European History* 30 (1997) and Thierry Terret, Jean Saint-Martin, "Journey in the historiography of the French Method of Physical Education: a matter of nationalism, imperialism and gender," *History of Education* 41 (2012).

Ewha Haktang as the foremost missionary girls' school was largely absent from its pages. As in other societies during the late nineteenth century, the access to modern knowledge was reserved for men. The question of how and to what extent women should be allowed access was subject to debate.¹⁰³ Even the most progressive reformers in Korea favored subordinate roles for women.

Educational opportunities for girls were rare.¹⁰⁴ However, some coverage in *The Independent* dealt with this issue. As Hyaeweol Choi shows, Sŏ and Yun favored women's education as part of their civilizing mission. According to the two editors, the way a society treated women—whom they saw as the “weaker sex”—revealed how civilized it was. Their aim was to produce well educated wives and mothers. In September 1896 an editorial advocated the education of women. Written from a thoroughly Protestant perspective, Christianity and Western culture were depicted as treating men and women equally which would also entail offering the same educational opportunities.¹⁰⁵

In September 1898 Korean women formed a Female Education Society with the purpose of urging the government to establish a school for girls.¹⁰⁶ *The Independent* translated and reproduced the Society's manifesto:

[...] We women, like the blind and deaf, still adhere to old customs. Why is this? Is it because our hands or feet, our eyes or ears are different from those of man? Why is it that we, like idiots, are contented to depend on the bounty of men, living in lifelong seclusion under the control of the stronger sex?

Behold the woman of a civilized nation! She enjoys equal rights with man. She studies all branches of learning in schools. When she grows up into womanhood marriage does not mean bondage to her. Nay, she is honored because she is not inferior to her husband in education and

¹⁰³ Christophe Charle, *La discordance des temps: une brève histoire de la modernité* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011), 268.

¹⁰⁴ Hyaeweol Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 35–38.

¹⁰⁵ *The Independent*, I, 71, 17 September 1896. As a reaction to this editorial, a letter by a certain Fairplay (probably a pseudonym for a Catholic missionary) appeared in *The Independent*, arguing that 150 girls were currently receiving education in the Roman Catholic Orphanage in Seoul. See *The Independent*, I, 76, 29 September 1896.

¹⁰⁶ On the women's school movement see Choi, *Gender and Mission Encounters*, 38–42; Se-Mi Oh, “Women, Newspapers, and the Public Sphere in Turn-of-the-Century Korea,” in *Epistolary Korea: letters in the communicative space of the Chosŏn, 1392-1910*, ed. JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Yung-Hee Kim, “Under the Mandate of Nationalism: Development of Feminist Enterprises in Modern Korea, 1860-1910,” *Journal of Women's History* 7 (1995): 128–130.

accomplishment. Our hearts are sad when we think of our wrongs! Men, by mere superiority of force, kept us in oppression. Their books tell us that a woman must always be secluded; that she must not speak of the outside affairs, and that she must only attend to the preparation of wine and food. Why should we, not differing from men in the enjoyment of physical and mental faculties, endure wrongs in ignorance of the world like dead people? We propose to establish a female school where girls may learn all kinds of accomplishment to prepare them for the duties of intelligent womanhood. We hope that our sisters will send their girls to the school.¹⁰⁷

This manifesto has been referred to as “the first declaration of women’s rights in Korea.”¹⁰⁸ One month later, about 100 members of the Female Education Society memorialised the throne that the Ministry of Education should establish schools for the education of girls. *The Independent* positively commented that “to our knowledge this is the first time a body of women combined in a public petition of this kind. We wish the Society all success.”¹⁰⁹ However, for the time being the society’s efforts were not successful.

In conclusion, the editors’ civilizing mission comprised various practices newly introduced to Korea and essentially reserved for men. On the one hand, these practices fostered discipline and order, as in the case of sports. On the other hand they also promoted liberal values, as in the case of the debating societies which would prepare Korean youth for parliamentary debates.¹¹⁰

A VARIETY OF EDUCATIONAL TOPICS

Beyond the use of education in direct relation to the editors’ civilizing project, *The Independent* dealt with various other aspects of education. An overview of these topics provides insight into pedagogical debates as well as the daily experience of modern education in Korea during the late 1890s.

Education Abroad

The paper occasionally reported on education in foreign countries. Firstly, there were reports concerning Japan and the Japanese Empire. A notice on education in

¹⁰⁷ *The Independent*, III, 106, 10 September 1898.

¹⁰⁸ Seung-kyung Kim and Kyounghee Kim, “Mapping a hundred years of activism: women’s movements in Korea,” in *Women’s Movements in Asia. Feminism and Transnational Activism*, ed. Mina Roces and Louise Edwards (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 190.

¹⁰⁹ *The Independent*, III, 120, 13 October 1898.

¹¹⁰ According to Se Eung Oh, debating societies were part of a “self-training process to create a political force.” See Oh, *Dr. Philip Jaisohn’s reform movement*, 56.

the Japanese colony of Taiwan in January 1898 draws on the Japanese newspaper *Asahi shinbun*. *The Independent* reported that government schools had been founded in over sixteen places on Taiwan, for the education of more than 1,400 students. In order to encourage attendance, students received an allowance. A problem highlighted in the piece was that students left the schools as soon as they could earn more than the allowance.¹¹¹ Another article copied from the same paper discussed trends in Japanese higher education over the previous five years. Tokyo Imperial University had most graduates in law, but the strongest increase could be observed in engineering.¹¹² Further short notices from the specialised pedagogical journal *Kyōiku jiron* reported about foreigners employed by the Japanese Ministry of Education¹¹³ and foreign schools in Japan.¹¹⁴ Moreover, *The Independent* reported that an ordinance of the Japanese Ministry ordered that no religious instruction or ceremonies should be performed in government schools or schools funded by the government.¹¹⁵

Secondly, the paper featured educational news from China related to the Hundred Days Reform, a short-lived reform movement of 1898. An article taken from the journal *Guowen bao* announced that China would establish government schools and a university, following the Japanese example, a project highly praised by Yun.¹¹⁶ In October 1898, a notice taken from the *Peking and Tientsin Times* announced the opening of Peking University with a foreign president and over 1,000 students. The article did not forget to mention the excellent facilities for physical recreation. “Properly carried out, the institution promises well,” *The Independent* judged.¹¹⁷ Another piece of information on the Chinese reform movement reported that 100 youths drawn from the literati and merchant class from Hubei province and 50 from Hunan would be sent to Japan to study mechanics, chemistry, law and military sciences, according to the *North China Daily News*.¹¹⁸

Thirdly, *The Independent* reported on education in Europe and the United States. In March 1897 the paper reproduced some statistical indicators from the latest report of the United States Bureau of Education, edited by the aforementioned William T. Harris. This tells us that one of these reports must have found its way

¹¹¹ *The Independent*, III, 9, 22 January 1898.

¹¹² *The Independent*, III, 89, 2 August 1898.

¹¹³ *The Independent*, III, 47, 21 April 1898.

¹¹⁴ *The Independent*, III, 129, 3 November 1898.

¹¹⁵ *The Independent*, IV, 11, 17 August 1899.

¹¹⁶ *The Independent*, III, 94, 13 August 1898.

¹¹⁷ *The Independent*, III, 121, 15 October 1898.

¹¹⁸ *The Independent*, III, 115, 1 October 1898.

to Seoul.¹¹⁹ In 1898, the opening of the first gymnasium for girls in Germany was announced, based on an article from the *Boston Globe*.¹²⁰ Another article discussed a rather curious topic: Kissing of hands has been forbidden in Austrian schools.¹²¹

This reporting testifies to the vivid transnational exchange with other East Asian and American newspapers.¹²² Although some of the news was certainly reproduced solely because of this exoticism, most reports related to debates going on in Korea of the time. The Japanese restrictions on missionary schools surely concerned the Protestant editors of *The Independent*. Reformist developments in China could be seen as a potential model for Korea. But information about foreign educational practices was not always accurate. German secondary girls' schools were not called 'gymnasium' and, in fact, Germany was not the leading country in the field of secondary education for girls within Europe.¹²³ However, such references nonetheless served the arguments of the Korean reformers who favored female education. This example shows that Korea had actually joined an on-going global debate.

Education for European and American children in Korea

The English edition of *The Independent* catered to the American and European community in Korea. For this reason it is not surprising that the newspaper discussed issues pertaining to the education of the children of these people. An editorial of July 1897 dealt with this question for the first time, suggesting the creation of a fund that would enable the hiring of a teacher.¹²⁴

In June 1898 Americans organised a party on the occasion of Children's Day exclusively for American and European children. The comment that "some [children] who were with us in the past are now in school in Chefoo and in Lausanne in Switzerland" informs us that it was common for foreign children to receive an education outside the peninsula.¹²⁵ In order to find a remedy, Ellen Pash, a graduate of Cambridge University and a missionary, planned to establish a

¹¹⁹ *The Independent*, II, 28, 9 March 1897. The original report is probably *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1894–1895*, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1896.

¹²⁰ *The Independent*, III, 49, 26 April 1898.

¹²¹ *The Independent*, III, 78, 7 July 1898.

¹²² Bryna Goodman, "Networks of News: Power, Language and Transnational Dimensions of the Chinese Press, 1850–1949," *The China Review* 4 (2004).

¹²³ *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World. From the 18th to the 20th Century. Secondary Education in a Changing World*, ed. James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman and Rebecca Rogers (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹²⁴ *The Independent*, II, 88, 29 July 1897.

¹²⁵ *The Independent*, III, 68, 14 June 1898.

high school for the children of the foreign community in Seoul that would prepare the children for American and English universities.¹²⁶ Lessons were scheduled to take place in the house of a missionary from Monday to Friday for five hours a day and included subjects such as French, Latin and needle work for girls.¹²⁷ Due to the lack of documentation, it is not known to what extent this project was actually implemented. In his book, Horace H. Underwood merely indicates that Pash and a certain Miss Perry occasionally provided informal schooling. Only from 1912 onwards, did the Seoul Foreign School offer a more stable form of instruction for American and European children.¹²⁸

A Japanese School in Seoul

Japanese actors played a significant role in introducing modern education to Korea. These activities are partly related to the Christian educator Honda Yōitsu who had been a Japanese army chaplain in Manchuria during the Sino-Japanese War and apparently was on good terms with the editors of *The Independent*. While visiting Seoul on his way back to Tokyo in June 1895, Honda delivered a speech at the Paejae Haktang on his experiences with the Japanese Army.¹²⁹ Honda was a Japanese activist inspired by Pan-Asianist ideologies who Akira Iriye compared to Western missionaries. They were at times at odds with the official line in Tokyo, but could nevertheless count on diplomatic backing and eventually facilitated the Japanese penetration of Korea.¹³⁰ Already in one of its first issues in April 1896, *The Independent* reported that the Japanese had opened a school for the purpose of educating Koreans.¹³¹ The Keijō Gakkō (known as the Kyōngsōng Haktang in Korean) was supported by the Dai Nihon Kaigai Kyōikukai (Foreign Education Society of Japan), a Protestant organization that fostered Japanese-style modern education in continental Asia, in which Honda played a central role.¹³² Besides the Japanese language, students received primary instruction in history, arithmetic, geography, and physical drill.

¹²⁶ *The Independent*, III, 117, 6 October 1898.

¹²⁷ *The Independent*, III, 129, 3 November 1898 and III, 144, 13 December 1898.

¹²⁸ Horace H. Underwood, *Modern Education in Korea* (New York: International Press, 1926), 155–157. See also Donald N. Clark, *Living Dangerously in Korea: the Western Experience, 1900–1950* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2003).

¹²⁹ *Korean Repository*, II, 6, 1895, p. 239.

¹³⁰ Akira Iriye, “Japan’s Drive to Great-Power Status,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan. The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge et al., Cambridge University Press, 1989), 756–757.

¹³¹ Han Yong-jin, “Kyōngsōng Haktang,” in *Kūndae Han’guk kodūnggyoyuk yōn’gu*, ed. Han Yong-jin (Seoul: Koryō taehakkyo, 2012).

¹³² *The Independent*, I, 6, 18 April 1896.

One year after its foundation the school had fifty-eight students. *The Independent* extensively covered its anniversary ceremonies in mid-April 1897, which were modelled after similar ceremonies that had taken place at Korean government schools. Students performed athletic exercises and military drills under the instruction of three Japanese officers. The director of the school, the Japanese ambassador, Katō Masuo, and the Korean Foreign Minister Yi Wan-yong (who later would be one of the signers of the annexation treaty contributing to the loss of Korean independence) addressed the audience. The speeches of the officials and students alike stressed Korean-Japanese cooperation. Katō emphasized the importance of language learning, at the same time trying to allay Korean fears of Japanese cultural domination. Yi in contrast stressed that “learning progressive spirit and patriotic sentiment” was much more important than language skills.¹³³

In November 1897 the number of students had tripled, as Honda announced at a speech before the imperialist Tōa Dōbunkai (East Asia Common Culture Society) in Tokyo. *The Independent* concomitantly asserted that “the close affinity, both in constructions and genius, between the Korean and Japanese languages, enables the students to master the latter with incomparably less effort and in far less time than any other foreign tongue.” The authors went on to say that “consequently the students of the Japanese School have the great advantage of acquiring more of substantial knowledge, besides more linguistic study, than those of other schools where instruction is given in a European language.” The article also claimed that the school received more applications than it had space for.¹³⁴

During his visit to Korea in August 1897, Itō Hirobumi visited the Keijō Gakkō and addressed the students. The Japanese statesman “emphasized the importance of education as the best foundation for individual welfare as well as for national prosperity.”¹³⁵ In his speech Itō promoted Korean-Japanese friendship and Japanese efforts for Korean independence vis-à-vis China, as he had done in a meeting with the Japanese residents of Seoul some days earlier.¹³⁶

Study Abroad in Japan

The Japanese connection also played out on another level. One measure decided during the Kabo Reform period was to send students to Japan at Korean government expense to receive a higher education. *The Independent* regularly

¹³³ *The Independent*, II, 44, 15 April 1897.

¹³⁴ *The Independent*, II, 139, 23 November 1897.

¹³⁵ *The Independent*, III, 101, 30 August 1898.

¹³⁶ *The Independent*, III, 102, 1 September 1898.

reported on the fate of the Korean students in Japan. In December 1896, the paper broached this topic, writing that of the 300 students sent to Japan at the time of the Kabo Reforms, 78 were still there. They had graduated from the preparatory school of Fukuzawa Yukichi's Keiō Gijuku and entered different technical schools for further study.¹³⁷ Based on an article of the English language newspaper *Japan Times*, *The Independent* wrote in May 1897 that the Korean students had made linguistic progress and were almost fluent in Japanese. However, there would still be deficiencies "in mathematical aptitude and scientific reasoning."¹³⁸ The article also lamented that the Korean government would not send more students to the archipelago. Another notice in August 1897 provided information on the funds for the students' instruction. The Ministry of Education spent 13,860 dollars a year which translated into a monthly stipend of about 15 dollars per student. In addition to the government students there were also 16 privately-funded Korean students in Japan.¹³⁹

The paper also reported regularly on the cultural activities of the Korean students in Japan. They created the "Society of Korean Students in Japan" for the purpose of "cultivating mutual friendship and exchanging views on various topics, generally relating to their studies and the political and social affairs of their native land."¹⁴⁰ Twice a year, this society published a journal in the mixed script of Chinese characters and Han'gŭl. *The Independent* reviewed the third issue of this journal and came to a rather ambivalent conclusion:

The articles are like essays of school boys, but they show one fact and that is the authors are familiar with the text books which they study. There are very few original ideas in these questions which they discuss but everyone quotes freely from the European and American authorities on these subjects. The publication is very valuable as it adds to the literature of this country, the reading of which by the students of the different schools during their leisure hours will give them a wide scope of information on matters of general interest.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ *The Independent*, I, 113, 24 December 1896.

¹³⁸ *The Independent*, II, 61, 25 May 1897. This article also provided the affiliations of the students: Seijo School 22, Waseda 4, Keio 2, Industrial School 1, Agricultural Department of Tokyo Imperial University 3, Meiji Law School 2, Post and Telegraph School 2, Board of Metropolitan Police, Treasury Department 2, Shizuoka Prefectural Office 2, Railroad Bureau 2, Tokyo Hospital 1.

¹³⁹ *The Independent*, II, 92, 5 August 1897.

¹⁴⁰ *The Independent*, I, 80, 8 October 1896.

¹⁴¹ *The Independent*, II, 131, 4 November 1897.

The funding of the students provoked major debates when it was decided to recall all government students from Japan in 1898. One third decided to return, the rest wanted to continue studies at their own expense.¹⁴²

In short, *The Independent's* reporting on the Keijō Gakkō reveals the Pan-Asianist dimension of the Korean enlightenment movement. Korean actors emulated Japanese models and were open to Japanese offers of assistance. The Japanese and Korean civilizing missions developed synergies. Nonetheless, this dimension was ambiguous, as distrust of Japanese intentions was sometimes felt.¹⁴³ However, the Christian faith of Honda made his undertaking in Korea more acceptable to Korean enlightenment thinkers.

Establishment of the German Language School

Whereas most government foreign language schools had already been established before 1896, the German language school was created in 1898, during the time when *The Independent* was published. Consequently, the paper reported on the inauguration of this school. The first notice appeared in October 1897 when the paper reported that “the Educational Department intends to establish a Royal German School in the city.”¹⁴⁴ This happened during a stronger engagement of Germany in imperial enterprises which included the forced occupation of a part of Shandong. The first mention of Johannes Bolljahn, the newly selected German teacher, was made at the beginning of July 1898 when the paper reported that he had arrived in Chemulp'o and stayed at the Seoul Hotel in the capital.¹⁴⁵ One month later *The Independent* stated that Bolljahn again lived in the same hotel, indicating that he had in the meantime left Korea for a trip to Japan. In fact, Bolljahn had close ties with Japan where he had worked as a German teacher for several years.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² *The Independent*, II, 151, 21 December 1897. See also *The Independent*, IV, 11, 17 August 1899.

¹⁴³ Vladimir Tikhonov, “The 1890s Korean Reformers' View of Japan—A Menacing Model,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 2 (2005).

¹⁴⁴ *The Independent*, II, 117, 2 October 1897.

¹⁴⁵ *The Independent*, III, 78, 7 July 1898. On Bolljahn see Sylvia Bräsel, “Johann Bolljahn (1862–1928): Begründer des Deutschunterrichts in Korea—zur interkulturellen Karriere eines pommerschen Lehrers in Ostasien,” *Baltische Studien. Pommersche Jahrbücher für Landesgeschichte* 95 (2009); Hans-Alexander Kneider, *Globetrotter, Abenteurer, Goldgräber. Auf deutschen Spuren im alten Korea. Mit einem Abriss zur Geschichte der Yi-Dynastie und der deutsch-koreanischen Beziehungen bis 1910* (München: Iudicium, 2010), 136–145.

¹⁴⁶ *The Independent*, III, 92, 9 August 1898. Interestingly, the notice directly following announced the death of the German ex-chancellor Bismarck, which found expression in the fact that the national flags of most foreign legations and consulates in Seoul were at half mast to mourn the deceased statesman.

On 15 September, finally, *The Independent* signalled the opening of the German Language School with sixty students.¹⁴⁷ At the opening ceremony German diplomats and high Korean officials were present, including the minister of education Ko Yŏng-hŭi. The German consul Ferdinand Krien—glorifying his home country—“referred to the great value of the German language as evinced by the thousands of foreigners who crowd the lecture halls in German universities.” The authors of the article hoped that the German Language School would “in due time turn out many a scholar who will interpret for Korea the master mind of Germany, the land of profound thought and thorough researches.”¹⁴⁸ This rhetoric demonstrates how stereotypes of German science and education had found their way to Korea.¹⁴⁹

Illegal Behaviour

In a situation where education slowly became the instrument of social advance, students of modern schools benefitted from a high status. When the students did not live up to the social expectations, they were sure to attract the rage of their surrounding. A drunken student at the Russian Language School used abusive language one evening in Chongno. When people from the neighbourhood started to attack him the police had to intervene.¹⁵⁰ As a consequence, the students of the Russian Language School sent a petition to the Ministry urging to expel the culprit from school.¹⁵¹ The Ministry endorsed this decision.¹⁵²

Some criminal cases were related to modern schools. *The Independent* reported about a person who carried out robberies in the Korean countryside claiming he was a student of the Paejae Haktang. After an investigation principal Appenzeller found out that the arrested person was registered with Paejae but never attended classes, thus being a “black sheep.”¹⁵³ Another incident testifying to the high status of modern schools occurred when a man addressed a policeman in the low form of the Korean language claiming that he was a student of the English Language School and was entitled to use this language style whenever he liked. It turned out, however, that the man was not from that school.¹⁵⁴ These examples

¹⁴⁷ *The Independent*, III, 108, 15 September 1898.

¹⁴⁸ *The Independent*, III, 109, 17 September 1898.

¹⁴⁹ On German cultural imperialism see for example Lewis Pyenson, *Cultural Imperialism and Exact Sciences: German Expansion Overseas 1900–1930* (New York: Lang, 1985).

¹⁵⁰ *The Independent*, II, 78, 3 July 1897.

¹⁵¹ *The Independent*, II, 82, 13 July 1897.

¹⁵² *The Independent*, II, 83, 15 July 1897.

¹⁵³ *The Independent*, II, 28, 9 March 1897.

¹⁵⁴ *The Independent*, II, 93, 7 August 1897.

demonstrate how students were seen as role models who had to behave appropriately.¹⁵⁵ When doing so, they profited from social privileges.

Ministerial Ups and Downs

Moreover, the English edition of *The Independent* featured a translated version of the Government Gazette with appointments and resignations of government officials and major edicts and laws. These also allow us to trace the recruitment of teachers for government schools. Most importantly, it reflects the instability of the teaching staff. Many teachers served only for a period of some months before they left the government school service. *The Independent* regularly informed on current school affairs. In April 1896 the newspaper announced that the public schools would select more students aged between eight and fifteen to start their course in May.¹⁵⁶ In August and September 1896 it wrote about the opening of additional public schools in the following month and encouraged teacher candidates to provide their name, age and address to the Ministry.¹⁵⁷

In January 1897, *The Independent* revealed an instance of corruption in public schools when ten students from the lower grade common school proceeded to the higher grade without passing the necessary examinations.¹⁵⁸ In April 1898, *The Independent* deplored the fact that students of the government school in Chŏnju were recruited to the army by force.¹⁵⁹ The paper also revealed irregularities during the recruitment process for the Military Academy (Mugwan Hakkyo) when some of the applicants had to undergo humiliating examinations while others were accepted, bypassing the usual procedures.¹⁶⁰ Once again, *The Independent* on these occasions used the power of public discourse to denounce corruption.

In February 1897 another issue occurred. It was announced that the money used for students' lunch in the Royal English School should be used for hiring a Chinese teacher. *The Independent* and the students opposed this policy and campaigned for free lunches.¹⁶¹ Moreover, relations between the Ministry and the teaching staff seemed often strained. A ministerial official told a group of teachers who had business in the Ministry that "they run around like a herd of

¹⁵⁵ On the dismissal of students of the English and Japanese language schools because they broke the school regulations see *The Independent*, I, 4, 14 April 1896.

¹⁵⁶ *The Independent*, I, 10, 28 April 1896.

¹⁵⁷ *The Independent*, I, 57, 15 August 1896 and I, 74, 24 September 1896.

¹⁵⁸ *The Independent*, II, 5, 14 January 1897 and *The Independent*, II, 8, 21 January 1897.

¹⁵⁹ *The Independent*, III, 41, 7 April 1898.

¹⁶⁰ *The Independent*, III, 73, 25 June 1898.

¹⁶¹ *The Independent*, II, 13, 2 February 1897 and II, 16, 9 February 1897.

pigs.”¹⁶² On this account the teachers went on strike and the government schools had to be closed for several days in Seoul in May 1897. These narratives show the beginnings of the nascent teaching profession in Korea.

Despite the pre-eminence of the Paejae Haktang and the English Language School in the reporting of *The Independent*, information on the remaining schools can also be found. This is the case of the Chinese¹⁶³ and Japanese¹⁶⁴ language schools, the Law School (Pöpkwan Yangsöngso),¹⁶⁵ the Police Training School,¹⁶⁶ the Medical School,¹⁶⁷ the planned French-style Industrial School,¹⁶⁸ as well as the Ewha Haktang.¹⁶⁹ The paper also wrote on more specialised educational themes when female missionaries proposed a home for destitute children¹⁷⁰ as well as an educational institution for the blind.¹⁷¹

CONCLUSION

Education was a central theme in *The Independent*. For the editors Sö and Yun education played a central role in their civilizing mission which sought to transform Korean society profoundly. The editors were not especially qualified education experts and wrote the editorials as journalists. They were guided more by political than by pedagogical considerations. Their perspective on education was often instrumental as a tool for fostering their enlightenment project. Education was thus seen as a panacea for myriad woes. Sö and Yun shared this ambition with similar internal civilizing missions, for example in Japan, China and Egypt.¹⁷²

The reporting was most extensive on the government language schools, especially the English Language School, and the Paejae Haktang. This clearly shows the editors’ preference for Anglo-Saxon and Protestant references. This

¹⁶² *The Independent*, II, 60, 22 May 1897.

¹⁶³ *The Independent*, II, 76, 29 June 1897.

¹⁶⁴ *The Independent*, II, 81, 10 July 1897.

¹⁶⁵ *The Independent*, I, 12, 2 May 1896. For details on this school see Chong-Ko Choi, “The Reception of Western Law in Korea,” *Korea Journal* 20 (1980).

¹⁶⁶ *The Independent*, II, 79, 6 July 1897.

¹⁶⁷ *The Independent*, IV, 11, 17 August 1899.

¹⁶⁸ *The Independent*, III, 14, 3 February 1898.

¹⁶⁹ *The Independent*, III, 143, 10 December 1898.

¹⁷⁰ *The Independent*, III, 139, 29 November 1898.

¹⁷¹ *The Independent*, IV, 1, 8 June 1899.

¹⁷² Carmen Blacker, *The Japanese Enlightenment: A Study of the Writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964); Schulte, *Zur Rettung des Landes*, 206–211; Hoda A. Yousef, “Seeking the Educational Cure. Egypt and European Education, 1805-1920,” *European Education* 44 (2012).

emphasis was also due to the strength of Protestant missionary networks in which Sō and Yun were well integrated. The Russian, French and German language schools were also present in *The Independent*, but they were referred to significantly less often. The Japanese reference, mostly visible through the Christian Keijō Gakkō, presents an ambiguous special case.

Educational articles in *The Independent* were almost always about “modern” or “Western” education. Confucian academies were generally not referred to, and if mentioned, they were referred to in a negative way. The *sōdang*, still schooling most Korean youth, was also absent from the reporting. What was modern education in Korea then? After screening *The Independent*, the extent that modern education in Korea meant military drill and physical exercises is astonishing. This might be the most distinguishable characteristic of new schooling in Korea in the late 1890s. Ironically, the curriculum itself was rarely discussed. Furthermore, modern education meant uniforms, short hair, singing songs, a new model of manliness (girls basically did not matter), Han’gūl, public speeches, brick buildings, school desks and chairs—that is, a new way of sitting in classrooms—, foreign teachers and a patriotic festival culture. A close reading tells us much about the novelty of practices and how they were politicized. Changes were especially pronounced at the everyday level. It was at this level of supposedly ordinary practices that a lot of debates had their origin. These practices were, to a large extent, recent appropriations from abroad; they were “Western,” as Koreans used to say. It becomes evident how Koreans creatively (and sometimes less creatively, strictly following American guidebooks) appropriated foreign practices. Moreover, the language used was often polemical and revealed a strong sense of paternalism in the promotion of bourgeois values along with Christianity and a certain form of liberalism. These results should be compared not only to the Korean edition of *The Independent*, and the *Hwangsōng sinmun*, but also to magazines such as the *Taehan chaganghoe wōlbo* or the *Sōbukhakhoe wōlbo*.

The Independent was discontinued in 1898 and the Independence Club was disbanded, too, despite the fact that “young Korea” demonstrated against the government in October of that year.¹⁷³ Was Sō and Yun’s civilizing mission unsuccessful? One could have this impression when we take into account that the government schools were closed or rearranged after the Japanese seizure of power in 1905. But, experiencing Korean education at the beginning of the twenty-first century, one cannot deny that some of the enlightenment spirit survives even today.

¹⁷³ *The Independent*, III, 120, 13 October 1898.

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KLAUS DITTRICH (ragazzodelleuropa@hotmail.com) is a Research Associate in the Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education at the University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg.

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