

“Editorial,” Independent (Seoul), June 6, 1896.

Shin Kisŏn, Minister of Education, published 儒學經緯 Yuhak Kyŏngwi [The Warp and Woof of Confucianism] (Seoul: Hakpu, 1896). He argued

“According to the views of recent generations, what Westerners call the Christian religion is vulgar, shallow, and erroneous and is an instance of the vileness of barbarian customs, which is not worthy of serious consideration. The term used by Christians in speaking of heaven, happiness and misery, are similar to those employed by the Buddhists. They worship the heavenly spirits, but do not sacrifice to parents. They insult heaven in every way and overturn the social relations. This is truly a type of barbarian vileness and is not worthy of treatment in our view of foreign customs, especially as at the present time the religions are somewhat on the wane. Europeans have planted this spawn in every country of the globe with the exception of China. All of them honor this religion, but we are surprised to find that the Chinese scholars and people have not escaped contamination.¹

... How grand and glorious is the Empire of China, the Middle Kingdom! She is the largest and richest in the world. The grandest men of the world have all come from the Middle Empire.” (Pages 41-42, 50)

The Independent, edited by Philip Jaisohn (Sŏ Chaep'il) criticized his view by its editorial.

The Minister of Education, Sin Ki Sun, has memorialized the Throne to the effect that adoption of foreign clothes by the soldiers, policemen and Government students and the cutting of the hair is the first step toward making them barbarians; that the use of the *unmun* and the adoption of the western calendar is the first step to throwing off the yoke of China; that the new regulations for the Cabinet, giving them freedom to discuss public matters, deprives His Majesty of some of his power and encourages the freedom and liberty of the people. These were things contemplated by the former traitorous Cabinet. He has been appointed Minister of Education but he cannot perform the duties because the office so long as the students have their hair cut and wear foreign clothes. The use of the *unmun* is the act of the beast and is like going into the fire with powder, and is first beginning of the destruction of the government and the venerable Chinese classics. He, therefore, hope His Majesty will dismiss him from the Cabinet.

We are sincerely glad the Minister has thus delivered his opinion. Nothing could have been better for the country; for, as the mouth-piece of the conservative party he has put himself and his following into such an extreme situation that they must be discredit before the Korean Government and people. In this memorial he completely disarms himself and his party. The “yoke of China” forsooth! It is refreshing; the best joke of the season. Let someone tell the venerable Minister that Yuan no longer brow-beats the Korean ministry and court, that China, herself is

¹ See H. N. Allen to the Foreign Office, Oct. 5, 1896, in *Kuhan'guk oegyŏ munsŏ*, vol. 11 (Seoul: Koryŏ University Press, 1990), 188.

tottering to her fall, that the boasted classics which have striven for three thousand years to elevate Korea have only plunged her deeper and deeper into the mire. Let someone tell him that Korea can no more go back to ten years ago than he can go back to his swaddling clothes. He must have been asleep these last two years not to see the impossibility of his proposition. It will be a glad day for Korea when the generation which hob-a-nobbed with the sometime Chinese “resident” and his fellows is dead and gone. He thinks that discussion of public questions by the Cabinet infringes upon the Royal prerogative, and wants to go back to the time when the King, hedged about and kept in ignorance of the actual state of things, was at the mercy of anyone who could by hook or crook gain his ear. In other words a return to an utterly corrupt and corrupting form of Government. He wants, again, to make the provinces the prey on which the officials of the capital shall batten. He wants to make the government, again, a field for personal exploitation, for indirection and intrigue. This is what his memorial means and what one knows it means. It should call down upon itself the scorn and ridicule of the world for its utter lack of knowledge of the actual state of things today and the needs of the country. We sincerely hope his request will be granted and that he will retire to some quiet place and watch the evolution of his country.

(transcribed by Sung-Deuk Oak)