



# Western Civilization as a Cannibalistic Beast: Early 20th-Century Korean Newspapers' Perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion and Their Impact

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## Abstract

*The Boxer Rebellion was an international conflict involving military clashes between China and eight foreign powers. This event encompassed complex layers of conflict between Western and Eastern civilizations, as well as between Christianity, Confucianism, and Daoism. In 1900, when the Boxer Rebellion was taking place in China, there were two Korean newspapers that were published by Koreans in circulation: the Jeguk sinmun and the Hwangseong sinmun. The Jeguk sinmun held a Western-centric view of civilization and a Protestant-centric religious perspective, while the Hwangseong sinmun maintained a view with respect for different civilizations and a Confucian-centered religious stance. The multifaceted nature of the conflicts within the Boxer Rebellion was interpreted in different ways by these two newspapers. The Boxer Rebellion significantly influenced how the Korean press came to understand both Northeast Asian geopolitics and Western civilization, fundamentally transforming their perspectives on these matters.*

**Keywords:** Boxer Rebellion, *Jeguk sinmun*, *Hwangseong sinmun*, Christianity, Confucianism, Western civilization

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## Introduction

In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion broke out in China. It represented multiple intersecting conflicts: Western imperial aggression versus Chinese resistance, Eastern versus Western civilization, and Christianity versus Confucianism (or Daoism). Western discourse typically framed the Boxer Rebellion as a struggle between progressive, civilized, enlightened forces and those of ignorance, superstition, and xenophobia. China, conversely, defined it as a patriotic anti-imperialist struggle against foreign powers (Cohen 2001, 17). Today, studies that approach the Boxer Rebellion through various analytical frameworks have been published (Bickers and Tiedemann 2007).

Research since the 2000s has notably revealed how perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion varied significantly even within individual nations. For instance, Ariane Knüsel (2008) demonstrated that British media outlets viewed the Boxer Rebellion in different ways according to their political leanings, while Uroš Lipušček (2013) pointed out similar ideological divergences among Slovenian newspapers covering the events.

In such ways, studies have revealed that perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion varied even within the same country, depending on the ideological orientation of media outlets. This raises an important question: How did Korean perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion manifest in contemporary discourse?

Korea was not directly involved in the Boxer Rebellion. However, its proximity to China, where the uprising occurred, and its long-standing relationship with China made the events particularly significant for Koreans, and the uprising had a marked impact on Korea. Despite this importance, Korean perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion have received limited attention in international scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

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1. However, Andre Schmid (2002), who conducted a seminal study on how the Korean press helped construct nationalist discourse, briefly addressed the Korean press' perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion. Schmid noted that *Hwangseong sinmun* expressed sympathy toward China, but its reporting on the Boxer Rebellion was nonetheless negative. In other words, he did not clearly identify the divergence of opinion among Korean newspapers regarding the Boxer Rebellion.

Within Korean academic circles, fortunately, there has been research on the Boxer Rebellion's impact. In particular, Cha Kyeong-Ae (2003, 2004, 2005) examined Korean perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion in detail. In one study, Cha concluded that the Korean press viewed the Boxers in a negative light, as blindly xenophobic rioters, while concluding that the general populace likely held more positive views (Cha 2003, 71–72, 77–78).

While Cha's study was significant in being the first to examine the Korean perspective of the Boxer Rebellion, its conclusion that the entire Korean press uniformly condemned the Boxers warrants reconsideration. Given the findings about ideological diversity within national media responses in international scholarship since the 2000s, it seems plausible that Korean newspapers also exhibited varied perspectives based on their respective ideological orientation—a possibility that Cha's research did not fully explore.

Newspapers published in Korea during 1900, when the Boxer Rebellion was in full swing, fell into three categories: missionary-published religious papers, Japanese-published papers, and Korean-published papers. Only two newspapers constituted the authentic “Korean press” at this time: *Jeguk sinmun* (Imperial Newspaper) and *Hwangseong sinmun* (Capital Gazette).

The *Jeguk sinmun*'s staff primarily comprised graduates of Pai Chai Hakdang, established by American Protestant missionaries. They advocated comprehensive Westernization, including institutional reforms as well as religious and moral transformations. In contrast, the *Hwangseong sinmun* employed writers who had received traditional Neo-Confucian education before engaging with Western learning. They supported Western-style institutional reforms but sought to maintain Confucian religious and moral frameworks.

These contrasting backgrounds and ideologies of the writing staff of the two newspapers produced substantive differences in their perspectives on civilization and religion.<sup>2</sup> The concepts of civilization and religion played a crucial role in the ways the Korean press viewed the Boxer Rebellion.

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2. Previous studies (D. Kim 2014; D. Noh 2010; Jung 2024) have pointed out the differences in the Korean press' perspectives on civilization.

Religion functioned as an absolute and ultimate value system, while civilization represented the direction in which Korean society was expected to progress. Both were central to the cognitive framework of the media at the time (D. Noh 2010, 239–241). Moreover, the Boxer Rebellion itself was inherently a clash between religions (Christianity versus Confucianism, and Daoism) and between civilizations (the East and the West). Therefore, contrary to Cha's approach of portraying the Korean press as of one mind, the Korean press' perspectives on the Boxer Rebellion diverged considerably based on differing conceptions of civilization and religion.

This article examines how perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion differed between these two newspapers that constituted the Korean press at the time. To this end, the following sections will analyze these papers' perceptions of and responses to the Boxer Rebellion and their respective views on civilization and religion, which were the causes of their divergent perspectives. Through this analysis, this study aims to illuminate the significance of the Korean press' diverse perspectives of and responses to the Boxer Rebellion within the historical context of Northeast Asia.

### **Korean Press' Perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion and Their Impact**

#### *The Jeguk sinmun's Criticism of the Boxer Rebellion and the Russo-French Alliance*

The competition among the world powers to divide China peaked in 1898, provoking the emotions of the Chinese people and becoming a significant catalyst for the Boxer Rebellion. By May 1900, the Boxer Rebellion had spread to Tianjin and Beijing, where the Boxers destroyed telegraph lines, railroads, and set fire to churches. In June 1900, even Chinese soldiers joined the Boxers in besieging foreign legations in Beijing. In response, the Eight-Nation Alliance—comprising Russia, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, France, the United States, Austria, and Italy—was formed in May of the same year.

Meanwhile, the Qing's Empress Dowager Cixi sought to dethrone the Guangxu Emperor—who had been confined by Cixi after the failure of the

Hundred Days' Reform in 1898—and to enthrone a young imperial family member she could control. Consequently, Pujun was named crown prince in the early 1900s. However, due to opposition from Western powers, Cixi was unable to depose the Guangxu Emperor. Amid these circumstances, the Boxers declared resistance against the Western powers, and the allied forces, which were organized to suppress the Boxers, advanced on Beijing in June 1900. On June 21, 1900, the Chinese government led by Empress Dowager Cixi officially declared war on the aforementioned eight nations. After fierce fighting, the Eight-Nation Alliance captured Beijing on August 15, and the Boxer Rebellion was forcibly suppressed. Following a year of negotiations, the Boxer Protocol was signed in September 1901, effectively ending the rebellion (Cha 1997, 11–13).

During the Boxer Rebellion, various powers invaded parts of China. Russia, Great Britain, and Japan, in particular, mobilized their troops in areas they intended to bring under their influence. In response to attacks on their facilities in Manchuria in June 1900, Russia deployed a large force in July and occupied Manchuria. Great Britain focused on the Yangtze River region, which was within its sphere of influence, and sought to take control of this area before other powers could intervene. The British army entered Shanghai but failed to occupy the city when other powers intervened (Cha 1997, 167–181). Japan also occupied Xiamen in Fujian Province during the Boxer Rebellion, but due to opposition from other powers, its attempt to occupy Xiamen also ended in failure.

In early 1900, the *Jeguk sinmun* misreported that Crown Prince Pujun had become emperor, and that the Guangxu Emperor had died (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 3, 1900). The news of the Guangxu Emperor's death was soon corrected, but the newspaper continued to report on the movement to dethrone the Guangxu Emperor as well as the opposition to this movement (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 5, 1900). The *Jeguk sinmun's* writers understood the movement to dethrone the Guangxu Emperor as deeply connected with international affairs. They observed that Britain, Russia, and France were in conflict over China, where Britain supported the Guangxu Emperor, while Russia and France maintained close ties with China's conservative factions. In this context, the newspaper's writers asserted that, with Britain facing

frequent defeats in the Boer War, China's conservatives were taking the opportunity to dethrone the emperor and eliminate the reformists, while Russia and France took advantage of the situation to focus their efforts on China (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 17, 1900). Thus, their understanding was that Empress Dowager Cixi seized this moment when Britain could not interfere to dethrone the Guangxu Emperor with the approval of Russia and France (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 13, 1900).

The *Jeguk sinmun* also reported on the movement to counter the Guangxu Emperor's dethronement. One article stated that patriots abroad (Chinese reformist exiles) believed the dethronement to be a plot of Russia and France, who were requesting Japan's assistance (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 5, 1900), while another reported on the Chinese people in Japan who planned to send telegrams to the governments of Japan, Great Britain, and the United States, asking for the protection of the Guangxu Emperor (*Jeguk sinmun*, July 3, 1900). Moreover, another article reported on the Shanghai movement in opposition to the dethronement, a movement supposedly backed by Britain and Japan (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 17, 1900).

This series of reports depicted an alliance between China's conservatives and Russia and France, and another alliance between China's Guangxu Emperor and reformists on the one hand and Great Britain, the United States, and Japan on the other. At the time, the *Jeguk sinmun* viewed China's reformists positively (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 22, 1900). Because the newspaper supported Chinese reformists, it had a negative view of Russia and France, and thus the Franco-Russian alliance, which was perceived as being in opposition to the Chinese reformists.

By May 1900, the Boxer Rebellion was growing more intense. The *Jeguk sinmun* published extensive reports on the uprising, focusing on the Boxers burning churches and killing missionaries (*Jeguk sinmun*, May 23, 1900; June 20, 1900), and heavily criticized the Boxers for their violence.

While the Boxers did commit acts of violence, the response of the allied troops of the eight nations was also marked by massacres and looting, which were committed by all troops involved (Hevia 2007). The *Jeguk sinmun* reported differently on these violent acts, depending on the country involved. In its report on the allied troops' looting in Beijing, the newspaper

described Russia as committing the most brutal massacres and looting, followed closely by France. It reported that Britain initially refrained but eventually followed Russia and France in looting, while the United States strictly forbade it, though there were instances of private looting by soldiers. Japan's looting was described as limited to seizing a safe from the state treasury rather than private property. Toward its conclusion, the same article highlighted looting and massacres committed by Russians, noting that even the Russian diplomat reportedly wept over the horrific intensity of the atrocities committed by his compatriots (*Jeguk sinmun*, October 26, 1900).

The *Jeguk sinmun*'s reports emphasized the barbarity of Russia and France. Japan, however, was portrayed in a different light. The newspaper reported that Japan's intervention aimed to reform China and lead the country to civilization rather than to seize its territory (*Jeguk sinmun*, September 12, 1900). Although the newspaper's writers occasionally expressed suspicions about Japan's territorial ambitions (*Jeguk sinmun*, August 16, 1900), they generally defended Japan's actions during the Boxer Rebellion. Regarding the Boxer Rebellion, the newspaper made contrasting assessments of Japan and Russia, perceiving Japan as supporting the Guangxu Emperor and the reformists and aiming to lead China to civilization, while seeing Russia as supporting Empress Dowager Cixi and the Chinese conservatives and engaging in barbaric behavior in China.

The *Jeguk sinmun* depicted Great Britain and the United States in a contrasting manner to Russia, something particularly clear in its coverage of China's negotiations with the foreign powers over indemnity payments. The *Jeguk sinmun*'s writers predicted that the world powers would demand unbearable indemnities from China and eventually partition and occupy the country (*Jeguk sinmun*, September 24, 1900).<sup>3</sup> However, the newspaper reported that Great Britain advocated for the preservation of China's territorial integrity (*Jeguk sinmun*, November 12, 1900), and that the United

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3. An earlier editorial (*Jeguk sinmun*, September 12, 1900) opined that the great powers wanted to obtain territory but found it difficult to demand it, and thus they would forcibly seize concessions. However, given that the editorial of September 24 superseded this, this author believes the latter more accurately reflects the stance of the *Jeguk sinmun* regarding the peace negotiations.

States strongly opposed the partitioning of China's territory and even sought to reduce the indemnity (*Jeguk sinmun*, April 24, 1901; May 1, 1901). Further, the newspaper's writers commented that the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion did not lead to the partitioning of Qing China and that the indemnity was minimal, remarking that this was a benevolent act toward the Qing (*Jeguk sinmun*, April 30, 1902; December 3, 1902). The staff writers of the *Jeguk sinmun* perceived Great Britain and the United States as the forces preventing the partition of China.

The *Jeguk sinmun*'s perception of the allied troops reflected its views on civilization and religion. As previously noted, the newspaper minimized the aggression by Great Britain, the United States, and Japan, whom it regarded favorably from a civilizational and religious perspective. In contrast, it emphasized the aggressiveness of Russia and France. The *Jeguk sinmun* attributed the violence displayed by the powers during the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion mainly to the Franco-Russian Alliance, guiding readers to criticize France and Russia rather than the Western alliance as a whole.

At the time, there were voices of self-reflection in the West regarding the looting by the allied troops, with widespread criticism particularly aimed at missionaries benefiting from the looting (Hevia 2007). However, the *Jeguk sinmun* did not report on this at all. As will be discussed later, the newspaper, with a Protestant-centered religious view, focused on publishing favorable articles about missionaries and tended to avoid negative coverage of them.

About China, the *Jeguk sinmun* published considerably negative reports:

Internationally, the nation [China] is unable to maintain amiable relations with the great powers; domestically, it has no time to suppress unrest among its people. What will become of it in the future? Unfortunately, our country, Korea, borders [China]. We can imagine our future by observing the fate of our neighbor. Let us act swiftly to defend ourselves, lest we meet the same fate. (*Jeguk sinmun*, July 5, 1900)

In this piece, the newspaper diagnosed China as facing serious crises both internationally and domestically, stating that Korea "unfortunately" bordered the country. This implied that Korea sharing a common fate with

China was in itself an unfortunate situation. Although the newspaper's writers recognized a shared destiny between China and Korea as two Eastern nations, they expressed a sense of burden rather than empathy for China, fearing that China's mistakes would have negative repercussions for Korea. This stance differed from that of the *Hwangseong sinmun*, which expressed sympathy and pity toward China. In addition, the *Jeguk sinmun* argued that Korea must not follow in China's footsteps because China was a model of failure that Korea should by no means emulate.

The *Jeguk sinmun* held a pessimistic view of China's future post-Boxer Rebellion due to its negative perception of China from both civilizational and religious perspectives, as will be discussed later in this article. The newspaper's writers predicted that China would fail to handle the situation, leading to internal strife, and that the countries attacking China would clash, ultimately resulting in a large-scale and prolonged war (*Jeguk sinmun*, July 9, 1900). Additionally, they criticized China for showing no fundamental change in its attitude after the Boxer Rebellion, making recovery uncertain (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 3, 1900).

#### *The Hwangseong sinmun's Sympathy for the Boxer Rebellion and Criticism of the Western Powers*

The *Hwangseong sinmun* viewed the Guangxu Emperor, who attempted to push through the Hundred Days' Reform, as well as the Chinese reformists in a positive light, while holding a negative attitude toward Chinese conservatives and Empress Dowager Cixi, who had imprisoned the Guangxu Emperor. However, this negative perception of Empress Dowager Cixi was not consistent. For instance, in January 1900, the *Hwangseong sinmun* reported on a secret edict issued by Cixi, which listed the incursions by Western powers and appealed for Chinese officials to unite regardless of their positions and for authorities to defend the country. Although the newspaper expressed doubts about whether the edict was merely rhetorical, it praised its strong and impassioned tone and its attempt to restore the disrupted social order (*Hwangseong sinmun*, January 10, 1900). In this way, the *Hwangseong sinmun* showed a somewhat positive response to Cixi's

appeal to defend the country against the Western powers.

In February 1900, however, not long after the publication of the previously mentioned editorial, the *Hwangseong sinmun* reported rumors of the Guangxu Emperor's assassination. Assuming the emperor was dead, the newspaper published an editorial expressing deep sorrow, seeing the Guangxu Emperor as the only ruler who recognized the crisis faced by China, which was under invasion by foreign powers, and attempted reforms. Furthermore, the piece emphasized the "lip-and-teeth" relationship of China and Korea, and their ability therefore to work together to maintain power in the East, but that given the current situation, Korea must strive to overcome the impending crisis (*Hwangseong sinmun*, February 8, 1900). In the editorial, the *Hwangseong sinmun*'s writers showed support and deep sympathy for the Guangxu Emperor and the Chinese reformists who advocated the Hundred Days' Reform.

In the spring of 1900, as the Boxer Rebellion intensified and battles ensued between the Western powers and the combined forces of the Boxers and Chinese troops, more Koreans began to sympathize with the Boxers' struggle against the Western forces. This tendency was particularly strong among the Confucian scholars who constituted the main readership of the *Hwangseong sinmun*. Consequently, the *Hwangseong sinmun* criticized those who were pleased about the Boxer Rebellion, arguing that China, having failed to defeat even Japan, would be unable to withstand the combined forces of multiple allied nations (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 26, 1900). Distancing itself from the positive view of the Boxer Rebellion, the newspaper predicted its ultimate failure.

Despite its criticism of the Boxer Rebellion, it is difficult to say that the *Hwangseong sinmun* viewed the Boxers with outright hostility. The newspaper showed some sympathy toward the Boxers, as evidenced by editorials published on July 16 and 17, 1900. In these dialogical editorials, a speaker praised the "Boxer heroes" for doing a good thing and driving out the Japanese and Westerners (*Hwangseong sinmun*, July 16, 1900). This was likely the perspective of Confucian scholars who constituted the main readership of the *Hwangseong sinmun*. The newspaper's perspective on the issue was as follows:

If the yellow race could take this moment and rise up to strike the white race at once, driving them out of the East, what greater fortune could there be? I, too, as a fellow member of the yellow race, will only be able to raise a glass and offer a sincere toast to that cause...If [China], like Duke Xiao of Qin, had undertaken change and reform in pursuit of the nation's prosperity and strength to rise as a dominant power among all nations, bore resentment, and led its fearless people with righteousness to launch the rebellion, the claim that "We will not let Japan and the West set foot in China" would not seem so far-fetched. But as things stand, the turmoil in northern China is as plain as day. In terms of policy, its politics are corrupt; customs, obstinate; and in talent and strength, it is unable to match the West. (*Hwangseong sinmun*, July 17, 1900)

As evident in this passage, the writers of the *Hwangseong sinmun* agreed with the goal of driving Japan and the West from China. Yet they also predicted that China would fail, as it launched the rebellion without instituting reforms, and its government was corrupt and the country weaker than the West.

These editorials showed that both the Confucian scholars, who comprised the main readership of the *Hwangseong sinmun*, and the newspaper's writers agreed on the goal of expelling Western forces from the East. However, the newspaper argued that without reform, this goal was unattainable, and thus they did not support the activities of the Boxers. While sympathetic to the context and goals of the Boxers, the *Hwangseong sinmun* was critical of their methods and the Chinese conservative faction that backed them. This nuanced stance was not shared by the *Jeguk sinmun*. There were evident differences in the two newspapers' attitudes toward the Boxers.

Regarding the cause of the Boxer Rebellion, the *Hwangseong sinmun* attributed it to a series of political actions taken by China's conservative faction. It perceived the Boxer Rebellion as having been initiated by China's conservatives, represented by Empress Dowager Cixi and Prince Duan, by first scuttling the Hundred Days' Reform and then attempting to dethrone the Guangxu Emperor (*Hwangseong sinmun*, January 21, 1901; November 19, 1901). As for the international dimensions of the Boxer Rebellion, the

newspaper focused on the roles of the Franco-Russian Alliance and Great Britain. It suggested that Russia and France took advantage of Britain's preoccupation with the Boer War to incite the movement to depose the Guangxu Emperor (*Hwangseong sinmun*, February 15, 1900), assisting the Chinese conservatives and Empress Dowager Cixi behind Britain's back. In contrast, it viewed Great Britain, the United States, and Japan as nations friendly toward China (*Hwangseong sinmun*, February 8, 1900). The *Jeguk sinmun* and *Hwangseong sinmun* agreed on the international causes and the positions of conflict of foreign powers involved in the Boxer Rebellion.

Nevertheless, the *Hwangseong sinmun* covered aspects of the Boxer Rebellion's causes that the *Jeguk sinmun* did not. One such cause was the activities of Christian missionaries (Cha 1997, 39–43), and the *Hwangseong sinmun* published several reports on the West's internal criticisms that excessive missionary policies were partly to blame for the Boxer Rebellion. It covered a universal peace congress passing a resolution to restrict aggressive missionary activities (*Hwangseong sinmun*, November 6, 1900), identifying missionary misconduct as a cause of the rebellion (*Hwangseong sinmun*, December 4, 1900).<sup>4</sup> In addition, it reported a speech by a German parliamentarian condemning Western missionaries' high-handedness and identifying it as a cause of the uprising (*Hwangseong sinmun*, January 24, 1901). These reports highlighted the misconduct of Western missionaries, something absent from the *Jeguk sinmun* reportage. In contrast, the *Hwangseong sinmun*, which held a Confucian-centric religious view, freely criticized missionary problems. As will be discussed later in this article, the two newspapers had different views of religion, which resulted in considerable differences in their coverage of the relationship between religion and the Boxer Rebellion.

The *Hwangseong sinmun* had an optimistic outlook on post-Boxer

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4. In an article from November 6, 1900, the *Hwangseong sinmun* mentioned an "international peace conference" (*gukje pyeonghwa hoeui* 國際平和會議) held in Paris, and in an article on December 4 reported on a "universal peace congress" (*manguk pyeonghwa hyeophoe* 萬國平和協會) held in Paris in October. Though the names differ, both the international peace conference and the universal peace congress seem to refer to the 9th Universal Peace Congress held in Paris, France, from September 30 to October 5, 1900.

Rebellion China. Even as the Boxer Rebellion intensified, the paper maintained in its pages that even though China was going through a difficult time it would undoubtedly recover (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 11, 1900). The newspaper's positive outlook was grounded in its opinion that China would not collapse despite the Boxer Rebellion (*Hwangseong sinmun*, March 22, 1901). This optimism for China's future seems to have stemmed from the belief in the country's resilience and its capacity to rectify its mistakes (*Hwangseong sinmun*, April 28, 1900), which was in direct contrast of the *Jeguk sinmun*'s disdain of China, predicting that China would fail to overcome this crisis and descend into a massive war.<sup>5</sup>

The *Hwangseong sinmun*'s assessment of the foreign powers involved in the Boxer Rebellion differed from that of the *Jeguk sinmun*. While the *Jeguk sinmun*, as previously analyzed, viewed Russia as barbaric and Japan as civilized, the *Hwangseong sinmun* applied its criticism of Russia equally to Japan. In its reports on the Boxer Rebellion, the *Hwangseong sinmun* frequently cited the Japanese media, relaying that the Japanese forces were at the forefront of the struggle against the Boxers and that they were achieving more success than other foreign armies.

However, in these reports glorifying Japan's achievements, the *Hwangseong sinmun*'s writers remained wary of Japanese aggression. They predicted that Japan, having spent significant military resources to suppress the Boxer Rebellion, would demand land from China, likely aiming for Fujian Province. Furthermore, they anticipated that Japan's greed would not be satisfied with Fujian alone but would extend to Korea (*Hwangseong sinmun*, August 8, 1900). The *Hwangseong sinmun* interpreted Japan's claims of success in suppressing the Boxers as a sign of invasion.

Additionally, the *Hwangseong sinmun* reported on the looting by various nations during the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion. It criticized Japan for looting the most silver and gold, condemned the Russian army for extreme brutality in massacres and plundering, and noted that Britain, the

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5. The Japanese media, which expressed disdain of China from a civilizational perspective, had a similar stance. Asserting that China will fall, the Japanese media advocate the Japanese government's military intervention to quell the Boxer Rebellion (Wang 2015).

United States, France, and Germany also focused on looting (*Hwangseong sinmun*, October 10, 1900). The newspaper highlighted Japan and Russia in criticizing looting by the foreign forces, which reflected a significant level of wariness toward these nations. The *Hwangseong sinmun*'s critical stance on Japan's actions during the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion was in stark contrast to the perspective of the *Jeguk sinmun*, which, as will be further discussed later, led them to frame the relationship between Japan and China as that of civilization versus barbarism, justifying Japan's invasion of China as a legitimate intervention of civilization against barbarism. On the other hand, the *Hwangseong sinmun*, considering both Japan and China as part of Eastern Confucian civilization, viewed Japan's invasion as a fratricidal conflict and thus adopted a critical stance toward that country. Due to this difference in their civilizational perspectives, the two newspapers had completely different understandings of Japan's involvement in the Boxer Rebellion.

#### *The Impact of the Korean Press' Perceptions of the Boxer Rebellion*

How did the perception of the Boxer Rebellion influence the worldview of the Korean press in the aftermath of the uprising? This question can be explored by examining the Korean press' diplomatic theories and perceptions of the Western powers.

Around the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion, the primary diplomatic theory in the Korean press was the theory of the three-nation alliance (*samguk jehyuron*). This theory advocated that Korea, China, and Japan should unite against Western aggression. The theory was frequently featured in the *Jeguk sinmun*, which emphasized that the three nations were a community of shared destiny (*Jeguk sinmun*, June 25, 1900). However, the claim of a shared destiny did not necessarily translate into empathy. Throughout the course of the Boxer Rebellion, the *Jeguk sinmun*'s stance on the three-nation alliance mainly shifted to the idea that Korea must brace itself as China faced problems (*Jeguk sinmun*, June 25, 1900). Although the newspaper claimed the three nations were a community of shared destiny, in context, the underlying implication was that China's backwardness led to

its problems, thus necessitating that Korea prepare itself for the aftermath. The sentiments of the *Jeguk sinmun*'s writers toward China were closer to contempt rather than solidarity or empathy, indicating that Korea should prepare in advance for whatever issues that were sure to arise from China.

The *Jeguk sinmun*'s theory of the three-nation alliance, intertwined with a sense of disdain toward China, did not stem from empathy but from a perspective that considered China inferior, based on their view of civilization. By Western standards of civilization, the *Jeguk sinmun* defined China as barbaric, and consequently reinterpreted the meaning of the three-nation alliance in civilizational terms. To the *Jeguk sinmun*'s writers, the three-nation alliance signified solidarity on the one hand, but on the other, it implied a relationship in which, if one of the three nations faltered, another should intervene to help. Describing China as a "person who was sick to the bone," the *Jeguk sinmun* suggested that Korea should extend compassion to treat the illness of its Asian brother (*Jeguk sinmun*, January 17, 1901). Since the three-nation alliance theory at the time included the idea that Japan, as a civilized nation, should lead the alliance, the newspaper effectively argued for a hierarchical order with Japan at the top, Korea in the middle, and China at the bottom. This hierarchical perspective could potentially justify Korea's intervention in China. Therefore, in essence, the *Jeguk sinmun*'s theory of the three-nation alliance had a logical structure that could lead to aggression rather than solidarity.

The *Hwangseong sinmun* also supported the three-nation alliance theory (*Hwangseong sinmun*, May 10, 1900). However, it argued that if strong nations did not oppress weaker ones but instead helped each other, the East could be preserved (*Hwangseong sinmun*, November 26, 1901). This was a warning that the alliance would founder if a powerful Japan harmed other Eastern nations, leading to the eventual destruction of the entire East. Thus, the *Hwangseong sinmun*'s theory of the three-nation alliance was framed as a caution against Japan. The newspaper warned Japan and advocated for the three-nation alliance out of fear that Japan might invade Korea. It also predicted that Japan, having deployed a large military force to suppress the Boxer Rebellion in China, would seize Fujian Province and, still unsatisfied, attempt to take over Korea as well. Therefore, *Hwangseong*

*sinmun* writers urged the Korean government to take action, emphasizing the Korean identity by stating, “we are Koreans” (*Hwangseong sinmun*, August 8, 1900). The involvement of Japan in the Boxer Rebellion led the newspaper’s writers to realize that Japan might also launch armed invasions against other Asian countries. As such, the newspaper began to identify more strongly with the identity of “Korea” rather than “the East.” Eventually, the *Hwangseong sinmun* shifted its stance from advocating the three-nation alliance to emphasizing self-strengthening, a change rooted in Japan’s intervention in the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion.

One significant impact of the Boxer Rebellion was the dramatic change in the *Hwangseong sinmun*’s perception of the West. Prior to the Boxer Rebellion, the newspaper did not blindly follow the West but held the view that Western civilization was advanced, and that Korea had much to learn from it, reflecting a certain degree of respect for Western civilization.

However, witnessing the Western powers’ harsh suppression of the Boxer Rebellion, the *Hwangseong sinmun*’s perception of Western civilization changed significantly. The newspaper published one article sarcastically likening the Western armies involved in the suppression to “cannibalistic beasts” for killing the elderly and raping women, which implied that Western civilization was far from admirable (*Hwangseong sinmun*, January 30, 1901). One editorial criticized the Western powers for the disconnect between their words and actions—outwardly claiming to be civilized nations that uphold laws and treaties, only to abandon righteousness for profit (*Hwangseong sinmun*, November 4, 1901). Another editorial condemned the Western powers for attacking China during the Boxer Rebellion, labeling them an “enemy of civilization and humanity” while hypocritically defending Russia’s plundering and massacres in Manchuria simply because they were fellow whites (*Hwangseong sinmun*, July 25, 1903). The *Hwangseong sinmun* writers observed that while the Western powers professed to be civilized nations, their actions during the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion, which included murder, looting, and rape, revealed otherwise. These writers also became aware of the racial discrimination underlying the Western dichotomy of civilization and barbarism. After the Boxer Rebellion, the *Hwangseong sinmun* writers came

to harbor doubts about the morality of Western civilization, and their respect for the Western powers as civilized nations significantly weakened. This stance differed from that of the *Jeguk sinmun*, which continued to display admiration for Western civilization even after the Boxer Rebellion. Thus, the Boxer Rebellion exacerbated the fissures in the Korean press' perception of Western civilization.

### **The Korean Press' Views of Civilization and Religion**

Why, then, did the two Korean newspapers, the *Hwangseong sinmun* and the *Jeguk sinmun*, have such divergent views on the Boxer Rebellion? At the heart of this divergence was their variant worldviews—more specifically, their different views on civilization and religion.

#### *The Jeguk sinmun's View of Civilization and Religion*

The editorial staff of the *Jeguk sinmun* maintained close ties with Pai Chai Hakdang, a school founded by a Protestant missionary. The students of Pai Chai Hakdang were deeply devoted to Protestant Christianity (Yoo 2004, 267–271). In 1896, they organized a debate society called the Hyeopseonghoe (Association for Cooperative Achievement) to promote the reform of Korean society. Their strong interest in spreading Protestantism in Korea was evident from the fact that one of their chosen debate topics was: “Is it right for Protestantism to become the national religion of Korea?” (Shin 2006, 147). In January 1898, the Hyeopseonghoe expanded its activities by launching an official publication, *Hyeopseonghoe hoebo*, and began accepting members from the general public. By April 1898, the publication had evolved into a daily newspaper titled the *Maeil sinmun* (Daily Newspaper), with the president of Hyeopseonghoe also serving as the newspaper's president.

However, ideological divisions emerged within the organization during the summer of 1898. In August, the radical faction within the Hyeopseonghoe broke away and founded the *Jeguk sinmun* (Moon 2012, 253–270). This radical group, composed of Pai Chai Hakdang alumni, included Syngman

Rhee (1875–1965), Yu Yeong-seok, and Choe Jeong-sik. The newspaper’s president, however, was Yi Jong-il, a progressive reformist who had little ties to Pai Chai Hakdang (Moon 2012, 269–274). The *Jeguk sinmun*’s editorial team was well aware of the paper’s close connection with Pai Chai Hakdang (*Jeguk sinmun*, June 18, 1902).<sup>6</sup> Given this background, how did *Jeguk sinmun* writers, who were shaped by a worldview formed at Pai Chai Hakdang, an American missionary school, understand and articulate their views on civilization and religion?

The *Jeguk sinmun* writers recognized only Western civilization as the true civilization, disregarding all others. Consequently, the world they viewed was bisected into civilization and barbarism.<sup>7</sup>

In this worldview, the writers of the *Jeguk sinmun* believed that civilization was globally expanding. In editorials published on August 20 and 21, 1902, they argued that as civilization spread across the world, it blew the wind of “strong energy” to confront “stagnant energy” (*Jeguk sinmun*, August 20, 1902; August 21, 1902). They posited that peace would be restored only when the peripheral areas, to where civilization spread, reached a similar level of civilization as the central area, from where civilization originated. This implied that civilization was expanding worldwide, and that Korea needed to embrace cultural enlightenment to achieve domestic stability and international peace.

The *Jeguk sinmun* writers believed that civilization influenced war and international politics. An editorial discussing the laws of warfare established at the Hague Convention in 1899 expressed admiration for the power of civilization to control even the evil deeds in war, stating, “Even in war, evil deeds are increasingly curtailed; such is the grandeur of civilization” (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 2, 1902). Just ten days later, the newspaper introduced the idea of prohibiting war and instead introducing arbitration for

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6. In a 1902 editorial commemorating the death of Henry Appenzeller (1858–1902), founder of Pai Chai Hakdang, the *Jeguk sinmun* editorial team stated that the newspaper originated from Pai Chai Hakdang.

7. The discussion of the *Jeguk sinmun* and *Hwangseong sinmun*’s views on civilization in this article is based on a summary and further development of the author’s previous article: Jung (2024).

international disputes, attributing this to the “ongoing progress of civilization and enlightenment in all nations” (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 12, 1902). Since international law was included within the scope of civilization, the staff writers of the *Jeguk sinmun* equated the strengthening of the international legal order with the strengthening of civilization, believing that the power of civilization governed international politics.

The *Jeguk sinmun*'s view of civilization served as an important yardstick in its evaluation of other countries, as its writers classified nations around the world into superior and inferior ones based on their level of civilization.

To examine how the newspaper's perspective was applied to different countries, let us first look at its application to Russia. At times, the *Jeguk sinmun* excluded Russia from the list of civilized nations (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 26, 1898) and perceived it to be the least civilized among the world powers (*Jeguk sinmun*, June 16, 1902). In contrast, it portrayed Japan as a symbol of freedom that stood against oppression (*Jeguk sinmun*, August 17, 1898) and frequently mentioned it as a model of a “civilized nation” (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 13, 1898; January 26, 1899; March 2, 1899), the latter, primarily, in the context of urging Korea's own cultural enlightenment and reforms. In other contexts, Japan was not depicted as a fully civilized nation because the writers of the *Jeguk sinmun* saw the Japanese people as not having quite reached the level of complete civilization (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 12, 1902).

The editorial team of the *Jeguk sinmun* refused to recognize Japan as a fully civilized nation primarily on religious grounds. As the newspaper, which had a strongly Protestant-centric view, included religion as a component of civilization, it did not classify Japan, which was not a Christian nation, as being fully civilized and viewed it as limited in terms of its level of civilization.

By contrast, Great Britain and the United States were considered undoubtedly fully civilized nations by the staff writers of the *Jeguk sinmun*. They described Britain as “the first country to become enlightened” and praised its “civilized politics” that have “brought on a golden age of peace and prosperity” (*Jeguk sinmun*, January 30, 1901), reporting it as the world's foremost civilized nation (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 26, 1898). Similarly, the

United States was recognized as a leading civilized nation of the world (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 26, 1898) and perceived as surpassing Britain in terms of wealth (*Jeguk sinmun*, June 9, 1900). Additionally, the newspaper highlighted the United States as the nation most committed to moving away from a survival-of-the-fittest mindset and instead aiming to civilize underdeveloped nations through education (*Jeguk sinmun*, April 22, 1902), perceiving the country as a leader in global enlightenment and reform efforts.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from these fully civilized nations stood China. The staff writers of the *Jeguk sinmun* regarded the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) as a battle between freedom and oppression (*Jeguk sinmun*, August 17, 1898), elevating Japan as a symbol of freedom and civilization while portraying China as a symbol of oppression and barbarism. They often cited China as a prime example of a nation in decline due to its failure to be civilized (*Jeguk sinmun*, April 8, 1899). The *Jeguk sinmun*'s negative perception of China extended beyond contemporary assessments, as the newspaper even predicted a negative future for China for failing to keep up with the era of civilization (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 25, 1899). The *Jeguk sinmun*'s strong Western-centric view of civilization led to a profound sense of disdain and a bleak outlook for China, which was seen as far removed from Westernization.

The newspaper's conception of civilization was fundamentally interconnected with its religious worldview. Its writers argued that the strength and advancement of the West stemmed from freedom, which, in turn, originated from religion (*Jeguk sinmun*, August 11, 1902). Their logic was that Western religion liberated people, and this freedom led the West to civilization. Because they saw religion as interconnected with civilization, they believed the rise and fall of nations was tied to religion (*Jeguk sinmun*, April 19, 1902; May 30, 1902).

Consequently, the *Jeguk sinmun* saw Western religion, specifically Christianity, as essential for Korea's enlightenment. For example, an editorial noted that in the West, Christianity promoted equality among people, abolished slavery, and facilitated the establishment of hospitals and schools (*Jeguk sinmun*, February 8, 1900). Another article also claimed that Westerners became brave because of their belief in God (*Jeguk sinmun*,

March 14, 1901), showing that the newspaper's staff writers believed that Christianity could enable the process of civilization and enlightenment and provide the necessary courage to make it happen.

However, the *Jeguk sinmun's* writers did not endorse all of Christianity. They distinguished between different denominations, favoring only Protestantism (in the original text, Yasogy 야소교, meaning the 'religion of Yaso' 야소, or Yesugyo 예수교, the 'religion of Yesu' or Jesus) while criticizing others. They argued that Catholicism (Tyeonjugyo 턴주교 in the original text) did not liberate people or firmly guarantee human rights, rendering the citizens of Catholic countries less independent (*Jeguk sinmun*, November 13, 1899). Similarly, they viewed Eastern Orthodoxy (Huirapgyo 희랍교 in the original text) as an "oppressive religion" that was "similar to Catholicism," restricting its followers from even the slightest deviations from its rules (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 13, 1899). The *Jeguk sinmun* advocated for Protestant Christianity on the grounds that it would safeguard individual liberty and thereby guide Korea toward prosperity, progress, and civilization—a standard they believed neither Catholicism nor Eastern Orthodoxy sufficiently met.

The *Jeguk sinmun's* editorials asserted that Protestantism was different from other Christian denominations. They described Protestantism as a religion whose reform was initiated by Martin Luther to restore the fundamentals of Christianity and argued that it led the people of Protestant countries to a life of greater independence (*Jeguk sinmun*, November 13, 1898). They also claimed that Protestantism was inherently based on freedom, that it helped individuals realize this freedom and promote enlightenment and progress (*Jeguk sinmun*, April 12, 1902), deeming Protestantism, rather than Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, as the suitable religion for Korea's civilizational development.<sup>8</sup>

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8. There was an instance in which the newspaper defended Christianity as a whole, including Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. However, the editorial in question was a criticism of the Buddha's Birthday celebrations, which pitted Buddhism and Confucianism with Christianity (*Jeguk sinmun*, May 22, 1901). When discussing the specifics of Christianity, there are no instances in which the *Jeguk sinmun* described the two denominations (Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy) in a favorable light.

Regarding Confucianism, the *Jeguk sinmun* was cautious in its criticism due to the religion's strong influence in Korean society. The newspaper often suggested that Confucianism and Christianity were not very different (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 14, 1898; December 6, 1902) and used Confucian logic to support their arguments for reform (*Jeguk sinmun*, November 13, 1898).<sup>9</sup>

Yet, although the newspaper seemed to endorse Confucianism outwardly, it consistently leveled criticisms at the religion. For instance, it argued that Confucianism was flawed and problematic and thus needed to be supplemented by Christianity (*Jeguk sinmun*, May 30, 1902). The *Jeguk sinmun's* writers also claimed that Buddhism, Islam, and Confucianism were in decline, along with the countries and peoples that practiced these religions (*Jeguk sinmun*, August 21, 1902). By subtly including Confucianism in the group of religions that were causing the decline of countries and their peoples, they criticized Confucianism by association and accused it of being all talk and no action (*Jeguk sinmun*, December 6, 1902; December 7, 1902; December 8, 1902).<sup>10</sup> Some *Jeguk sinmun* editorials also made logical criticisms of Confucianism, asserting that Confucianism's morality was limited to individuals or nations, unlike Christianity, which encompassed true global morality. The newspaper's Western-centric view of civilization led it to implicitly reject Confucianism.

The Protestant-centric religious view of the *Jeguk sinmun* influenced its perception of various countries. First, the newspaper's rejection of Confucianism tended to translate into a negative view of China, a Confucian state and the birthplace of Confucianism. In addition, its Protestant-centric religious view led to differing perceptions of Western countries, depending on the religions practiced by those countries. As mentioned earlier, the *Jeguk sinmun* writers believed that Korea should adopt Protestantism, the religion

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9. For instance, in discussing the issue of judicial reform, the *Jeguk sinmun* based the reform on Confucian values (*Jeguk sinmun*, April 5, 1902).

10. Meanwhile, the *Jeguk sinmun* attempted to undermine Confucianism, the ideological stronghold of the conservatives, by arguing that Confucian scholars were not properly implementing Confucianism or by claiming that Confucianism shared values with cultural enlightenment and reforms (*Jeguk sinmun*, November 30, 1898; December 16, 1898; December 17, 1898).

of freedom, and viewed Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy in a negative light. Furthermore, they believed that nations adhering to old denominations like Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy were in decline, while those embracing Protestantism were flourishing (*Jeguk sinmun*, August 21, 1902). Therefore, from their perspective, the introduction of non-Protestant Christian denominations into Korea was undesirable.

During this period, Russia and France were actively promoting Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism in Korea as instruments for extending their geopolitical influence in the region (Ji 2004, 33; *Jeguk sinmun*, September 22, 1902; September 23, 1902; September 24, 1902; November 25, 1902). The *Jeguk sinmun* believed that the Franco-Russian alliance was behind Korea's conservative faction and that the alliance's operational base was Myeongdong Cathedral, the heart of Catholicism in Korea (*Jeguk sinmun*, November 25, 1902).<sup>11</sup> Due to its negative view of Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the newspaper harbored hostility toward Russia and France, which supported the propagation of these two religions, while its high regard for Protestantism reinforced a sense of friendliness with Great Britain and the United States.

### *The Hwangseong sinmun's View of Civilization and Religion*

At the time of the Boxer Rebellion, the known members of the *Hwangseong sinmun* editorial staff included Yu Geun (1861–1921) and Jang Ji-yeon (1864–1921). Yu Geun was a scholar well-versed in Confucianism and was introduced to Western learning through books translated in China (M. Kim 2005, 87–88). Yu Geun showed a clear inclination toward restoring a Confucian-centered system, as seen in his petitions to the king advocating for the revival of *seowon* (Confucian academies) and the civil service

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11. The editorial reads: "The activities of Russia and France take place at the Catholic church in the capital...Relations between the French legation and the Catholic Church are extremely close. Since the affairs of religion and the affairs of the legation are carried out jointly, bishops and priests are treated like envoys vested with political authority. For this reason, Russia and France have such formidable powers that their activities proceed successfully without displaying their might through warships or armies."

examination system. Jang Ji-yeon was also a scholar deeply grounded in Confucian learning, and he studied under Heo Hun, who himself had raised and led a righteous army—loyal troops who rose up to defend the nation against foreign aggression (K. Noh 2007, 192). Although Jang did not directly take part in the righteous army movement, he sympathized with some of its ideals and instead chose to pursue reform within the existing system by using petitions and the press as his tools. In this way, the *Hwangseong sinmun*'s editorial staff were individuals who, while firmly rooted in Confucianism, were open to engaging with Western learning.

The *Hwangseong sinmun* maintained a certain distance from the *Jeguk sinmun*'s perspective that Western civilization was the sole universal civilization and that it was spreading globally. However, this did not imply that the *Hwangseong sinmun* disdained Western civilization. On the contrary, the newspaper recognized the transformative impact of Western civilization on the East (*Hwangseong sinmun*, September 30, 1898). This was an acknowledgment that Western civilization held a dominant position in the world at the time. In response to the question of whether there were no enlightened figures in the East, an editorial in the *Hwangseong sinmun* explained that the achievements of Fuxi, Shennong, the Yellow Emperor, and Confucius were all examples of enlightenment (*Hwangseong sinmun*, September 23, 1898), affirming the existence of civilization in the East as well. This contrasted with the *Jeguk sinmun*'s view, which acknowledged that ancient civilizations existed in the East but held a negative view of contemporary Eastern civilization.

The *Hwangseong sinmun* had a positive perception of contemporary Eastern civilization. At the time, the *Jeguk sinmun* criticized “those studying *hanmun* [Classical Chinese] texts,” essentially denouncing Confucianism and Eastern civilization by critiquing the literature written in *hanmun*, a knowledge system that encapsulated Eastern civilization. The *Hwangseong sinmun*, on the other hand, refuted the idea that *hanmun* must be discarded because it was a corrupted script, arguing that the problem lay not with the texts but with the people since the reason for Korea's current difficulties was that people were not reading the texts properly (*Hwangseong sinmun*, April 10, 1901). The newspaper's writers believed Eastern civilization still held

value and advocated for the inclusion of Confucian studies in the new education curriculum (*Hwangseong sinmun*, December 11, 1902), demonstrating their belief in the importance of preserving the value of Eastern civilization. The *Hwangseong sinmun* held a non-hierarchical view of civilization, valuing both Western and Eastern civilizations, and kept a distance from a pro-Western stance.

Given their view of civilization and, particularly, their positive view of Eastern civilization, the *Hwangseong sinmun* writers also had a favorable perception of the Joseon dynasty, during which Confucianism was the dominant religion. They described Korea as a “five-hundred-year-old civilized, ancient nation” (*Hwangseong sinmun*, September 16, 1898), affirming the entire history of the Joseon dynasty as that of civilization. Their reverence for Confucianism led to their positive view of Korea’s cultural artifacts, rites, and legal systems of the time, which were based on Confucianism, and thus they considered the Joseon dynasty in a positive light for nurturing these aspects (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 9, 1903).

The *Hwangseong sinmun*’s view of civilization had a relatively lesser impact on its view of international affairs compared to the *Jeguk sinmun*. However, the newspaper’s writers were not entirely free from the influence of Western civilization’s dichotomy of civilization and barbarism. The *Hwangseong sinmun* partially adopted this civilization versus barbarism dichotomy in its discourse, though this adoption was rather limited in scope. Instead of expressing prejudice against those considered barbaric, the newspaper tended to emphasize admiration for civilized nations. Prior to the Boxer Rebellion, the *Hwangseong sinmun* expressed admiration for Western countries as civilized nations. For instance, one editorial referred to Great Britain and the United States as “great civilized nations” (*Hwangseong sinmun*, September 9, 1898). In general, the *Hwangseong sinmun* writers held Great Britain and the United States in high regard for the level of civilization the two countries achieved and also considered Germany and France as civilized nations (*Hwangseong sinmun*, November 25, 1898; July 15, 1899). Conversely, Russia was portrayed in a negative light—the Russian people were described as foolish and uncivilized, and the country, a semi-barbaric nation (*Hwangseong sinmun*, February 4, 1899). The newspaper

viewed the country as lagging behind other great powers.

In terms of the *Hwangseong sinmun*'s stance on Japan, the newspaper's writers considered Japan as having a civilization and strength comparable to the West (*Hwangseong sinmun*, November 1, 1900). They viewed Japan as a model for Korea's potential success in reforms, which led to frequent commendations of Japan's achievements even in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion, when wariness and suspicion toward Japan had intensified. By emphasizing Japan's success, the newspaper aimed to inspire an ardent desire for reform among Koreans.

The *Hwangseong sinmun* sought to ensure that its high regard for Japan's reforms would not translate into blind admiration, an effort that intensified in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion. Central to this balancing act was the newspaper's view of civilization, which served as a crucial framework in its evaluations of Japan. The newspaper argued that Japan had received knowledge and technology from Korea since ancient times and the country had only advanced through reforms over the past 30 years since the Meiji Restoration (*Hwangseong sinmun*, January 29, 1902). Thus, it asserted that there was no hierarchy between Korea and Japan or their people. The *Hwangseong sinmun*'s writers limited Japan's perceived civilizational superiority to Korea to the brief period of 30 years following the Meiji Restoration instead of the entirety of Korean history, maintaining a positive view of Korean history, particularly the Joseon dynasty, as a period faithful to Confucian civilization. Their view of civilization and positive stance on Confucian civilization served as a shield for preserving the Korean national identity against Japan's achievements.

Regarding China, the *Hwangseong sinmun* did not express civilizational hostility, unlike the *Jeguk sinmun*. Despite leveling frequent criticisms, the newspaper's writers felt a powerful sense of camaraderie with China from a civilizational perspective. For instance, they described China as the land where the foundation of civilization was established and praised it for governing its people well during times of peace and prosperity (*Hwangseong sinmun*, April 5, 1902).<sup>12</sup> The sense of belonging to Confucian civilization

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12. The gist of this editorial was criticism of China. However, to an extent, it contained acknowl-

fostered admiration, affection, and empathy toward China. Consequently, the *Hwangseong sinmun* took China's crises seriously and deeply sympathized with the suffering of a fellow member of the East Asian community (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 13, 1899).

Similar to the previously analyzed *Jeguk sinmun*, the *Hwangseong sinmun* also viewed religion as playing a crucial role in opening the door to civilization. For instance, one article described the flourishing of Neo-Confucianism at the end of the Goryeo dynasty as opening the path to civilization (*Hwangseong sinmun*, August 23, 1902), indicating *Hwangseong sinmun* writers perceived Confucianism as a religion that paved the way to civilization.

The *Hwangseong sinmun* defined religion as the teachings each nation upholds and venerates as its foundation and stated that it was difficult to determine which religion was right or wrong because they differed by country (*Hwangseong sinmun*, August 12, 1902). This cautious approach to ranking religions highlights the newspaper's careful stance on the matter, contrasted with the *Jeguk sinmun*, which strongly criticized religions other than Protestantism.

The *Hwangseong sinmun* writers regarded Confucianism as, in effect, the state religion of Korea and the most fundamental basis of the country. A letter published in the newspaper on June 5, 1903, argued that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism had together formed the traditional religions of Korea, and that Western religion (i.e., Christianity) was attempting to eradicate the three Eastern religions, something that needed to be stopped. The letter emphasized that criticizing Buddhism and Daoism would only benefit Christianity and lead everyone to become Christians, thus it was necessary to protect Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 5, 1903).

In response to this letter, the *Hwangseong sinmun* writers clearly stated the newspaper's religious stance. They criticized the idea of rejecting Christianity as a heresy just because it was new. They argued that the teachings of Confucius and Mencius were like the sun and moon, permeating

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edgement of the prominent level of civilization that China had enjoyed in the past.

through the lives of Korean people at a fundamental level, while the “empty teachings” of Buddhism and Daoism were not, thus rejecting the claim that Daoism and Buddhism complemented Confucianism. Instead, they asserted that the Korean people should protect their own religion and that there was no need to rank other religions. The newspaper maintained that Korea’s reverence of Confucianism led to flourishing customs, religion, and culture, and that there was no precedent of the country revering Daoism and Buddhism (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 6, 1903), stating that Confucianism was the only true religion of Korea. Accordingly, the staff writers of the *Hwangseong sinmun* viewed Confucianism as Korea’s religion and considered it the de facto state religion and superior to other religions.

In particular, the same editorial reflected on how the customs, religion, and culture of the Joseon dynasty had thrived under Confucian teachings, showing that Confucianism had a positive influence on Korea (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 6, 1903). The *Hwangseong sinmun* writers maintained a highly positive view of Korea’s history intertwined with Confucianism, especially the history of the Joseon dynasty (*Hwangseong sinmun*, August 23, 1902). Because of their Confucian-centered religious perspective, they held deep affection for the Joseon dynasty, which had governed the state and edified the people based on Confucian ideals.

The Confucian-centric religious view held by the *Hwangseong sinmun* editorial team led to a critical perspective on Christianity. The newspaper’s writers regarded the forced conversion of the Korean people to Christianity as part of Western domination of the East (*Hwangseong sinmun*, September 9, 1899), and criticized Christians for not properly practicing the religion’s doctrines of universal salvation (*Hwangseong sinmun*, June 6, 1903). The *Hwangseong sinmun* continuously reported on the various harmful effects of Christianity in Korea (*Hwangseong sinmun*, October 13, 1899; *Hwangseong sinmun*, April 3, 1901).

However, the *Hwangseong sinmun*’s criticism of Christianity was by no means severe. This moderation appears to have been influenced by the recognition of the dangers associated with anti-Christian movements, especially after the Donghak Peasant Revolution.

In such ways, the two newspapers that made up Korea’s press landscape

at the time of the Boxer Rebellion demonstrated marked differences in their conceptions of civilization and religious worldviews.

## Conclusion

This study has several significant implications. First, it reveals how some Korean elements of the native Korean press demonstrated a sympathetic attitude toward the Boxer Rebellion. This finding necessitates a revision of previous studies that characterized the Korean press as universally hostile to the Boxer Movement. The *Hwangseong sinmun*, which was a major Korean press organ at the time, held a positive view of Confucianism and the Eastern civilization. This enabled Koreans to develop their own perspectives on the Boxer Rebellion, despite the deluge of negative reporting from Western media sources.

Second, the Boxer Rebellion exerted a major influence on Korea's perspective regarding Northeast Asian international politics. The *Jeguk sinmun*, through its coverage of the Boxer Rebellion, further emphasized its contemptuous view that China lagged behind Korea in terms of civilization, while simultaneously endorsing Japan's leadership role in Northeast Asia more emphatically. The *Hwangseong sinmun*, conversely, was shocked by Japan's military intervention in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion and its aggression toward China. This led to a shift away from notions of pan-Asian solidarity toward an emphasis on Korean self-preservation.<sup>13</sup> The perceptual divide among Koreans on Northeast Asian geopolitics widened considerably in the aftermath of the Boxer incident.

Third, the Boxer Rebellion transformed Korean perceptions of Western civilization, a shift particularly evident in the *Hwangseong sinmun*'s coverage. Although the paper maintained respect for different civilizations, it

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13. Immediately prior to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the *Hwangseong sinmun* advocated for Korea's neutrality from both Russia and Japan. This represented a departure from the three-nation alliance theory that positioned Japan as the leading power (Jung 2021, 399–405). The beginning of this transition can be attributed to the influence brought about by the newspaper's perception of the Boxer Rebellion.

acknowledged Western civilization's dominant position over Eastern civilization in the global order. Accordingly, the publication recognized Western nations as more advanced civilized powers than Korea. However, after witnessing the brutality exhibited during the suppression of the Boxer Movement, the *Hwangseong sinmun* went so far as to denounce Western armies as "cannibalistic beasts" (*Hwangseong sinmun*, January 30, 1901). The newspaper subsequently began questioning the legitimacy of "civilization" as a standard propagated by Western powers. The Boxer Rebellion thus became a watershed moment that catalyzed the spread of profound skepticism among Koreans regarding the alleged superiority and moral authority of Western civilization.

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