

**EXCERPTS FROM THE INDEPENDENT (TONGNIP SINMUN):
EDITORIAL ON “NATION AND CIVILIZATION”:
SEOUL’S WATER SUPPLY**

Introduction

In 1875, a Japanese naval expedition to Korean shores set into motion a series of events that resulted in the “opening” of Chosŏn to increased exchange and interaction with foreign nations. After 1876, Chosŏn signed a series of treaties first with Japan and then with the major Western and regional powers (the United States, Russia, England, France, etc.). Formally, these treaties established Chosŏn/Korea as a “nation” like any other (rather than a state with a special tributary relationship with China), but in substance they accorded foreign nations new privileges within the peninsula and set the stage for a struggle among imperial and would-be imperial powers for control or influence over Korean affairs. Chosŏn’s king and other Korean leaders were often left to try to play foreign states off against one another.

Korean intellectuals took a variety of positions with respect to these developments, from rejection of foreign intercourse to enthusiasm for alliance with and emulation of outside forces, embrace of a pan-Asian alliance to counter Western imperialism, or a nationalist emphasis on Korean identity and unity. One important group, led by Sŏ Chaep’il (1866-1951; who had studied medicine in the United States under the name Philip Jaisohn), Yun Ch’iho (1865-1945), and others, launched an important bilingual (Korean/English) newspaper in 1896, *The Independent* (*Tongnip sinmun*), that provided patriotic editorial commentary on Korean affairs while emphasizing the nation and the development of Korea along a (new) civilizational scale.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)
From *The Independent* (*Tongnip sinmun*), 30 April 1896.

***Excerpts from The Independent (Tongnip sinmun):
Editorial on “Nation and Civilization”: Seoul’s Water Supply***

One thing that should take a prominent place in the minds of those who wish well for Korea and are interested in her physical as well as moral well-being is the matter of a water supply for the city of Seoul. It is of more value than railroads for instead of saving money it saves life. A full supply of clean fresh waters is a *sine qua non* of health. You can estimate the grade of civilization of any people by the amount of water they use. Paris heads the list with seven gallons a day for each individual. It is probable that a quart a day would suffice for the average Korean while a pint would be oceans for the ordinary Chinese.

Questions:

1. How does the idea of "civilization" in this editorial differ from others that had been prevalent in Korean history? Where did the authors place Korea and China, and how had that changed?

Longer Selection with Questions

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That a good water supply for Seoul is a prime necessity the cholera report will show. The public wells here in vogue are centers of contamination and are responsible for very much of the mortality in times of pestilence.

In approaching the subject of a water-supply for Seoul two or three things must be kept in mind or we get beyond the realm of the practical; first, that it must be on such a scale that the people can pay for it and will be willing to pay for it. We can roughly estimate the size of Seoul at 40,000 houses. It is said that on an average five hundred cash a month is paid, per house, for the bringing of water. Supposing we add a half on account of the superior advantages to be enjoyed and reckon that each house will pay 750 cash or thirty cents a month. It will then amount to \$3.60 a year, per house. The whole would then yield a revenue of \$144,000 a year. If the work should cost a million dollars we would here have enough to pay interest on the investment at 7 per cent and have \$74,010 left for running expenses and repairs.

There are two ways by which Seoul could be supplied with water; one by bringing it a long distance through pipes from some point up the Han river, and the other by building a reservoir in some such place as the valley outside the north-west gate where the powder mill was. Either of these methods would require expert surveys to prove their feasibility. The former would probably secure a steadier supply but at a very high cost while the other probably could be accomplished for half the money but at a risk of occasional shortage of water in specially dry

seasons, because fed by a comparatively small stream. However, it will be necessary to consult the paying capabilities of the people and choice must be made of that method which while promising to be fairly successful, will come within the means of the metropolis.

Questions:

1. How does the idea of "civilization" in this editorial differ from others that had been prevalent in Korean history? Where did the authors place Korea and China, and how had that changed?
2. What is the significance of water in this editorial?
3. What did the authors hope to accomplish?
4. How did they view the common people of Korea?
5. How did they see their relationship as educated Koreans familiar with the outside world to these common people?
6. Can you imagine what other variables they might have seen as indices of "civilization"?