

## Special Discussion on the March First Movement's Centennial

### ◁ The March First Movement in East Asian History ▷

The year 2019 marks the one-hundredth year since the March First Movement occurred. The movement involved a nationwide demonstration in Korea to resist Japanese colonial rule. It was the first large-scale independence movement to occur in a victor nation's colony since World War I. The March First Movement brought about various changes in the course of East Asian history, such as the establishment of the Korean Provisional Government, Japan's cultural assimilation efforts, and other independence movements in weak nations nearby. Hence, the Northeast Asian History Foundation arranged a special discussion to celebrate the movement's centennial. Through a review of the movement's background, meaning, impact, and remaining research challenges, the discussants sought to determine which messages from the March First Movement are still valid for those studying East Asian history and politics today both inside and outside Korea.

- **Discussants:** Sang-gyu Kang (Professor, Korea National Open University), Chan-seung Park (Professor, Hanyang University), Kyoung-han Bae (Research Professor, Busan National University)
- **Moderator:** Hyun-chul Kim (Research Fellow, Northeast Asian History Foundation)



1. In a few months, Korea will be celebrating the March First Movement's centennial. Many Koreans mention the movement, but often without a detailed understanding of its nature or significance. To learn more about the movement's historical significance, we now turn to experts, such as yourselves, with extensive experience in studying the histories of Korea, China, and Japan as well as international politics.

**Kyoung-han Bae:** In the histories of Korea and China, not to mention Europe, the year 1919 is understood as the starting point of contemporary history. This is because social, cultural, and global change substantial enough to be referred to as a “civilizational transformation” took place around 1919. That year was when the March First Movement and May Fourth Movement occurred in Korea and China, respectively. Overall, the March First Movement was an anti-imperialist movement to resist Japanese rule and aggression and is sometimes described as the “people’s emergence to the forefront” since it was the people who took initiative. It can also be considered an occasion through which ideas of democracy and republicanism, initially raised in the Xinhai Revolution, picked up steam in Korea. Thus, anti-imperialism and democracy would be two key words to repre-

sent the March First Movement.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** The March First Movement's significance may seem almost too profound to summarize. The extent of the movement's significance may be made more apparent if we consider what might have happened to history from the twentieth century onward if the movement had not occurred. In that sense, the movement could be described as "the Milky Way that flowed through a pitch-dark night sky." The March First Movement was a major milestone in Korean history that demonstrated how very much alive the Korean nation and spirit remained under Japan's imperialist rule. It played a particularly pivotal role in twentieth century Korean history by serving as a domestic and international reminder that Koreans continued to hold on to their national identity and desire to regain independence.

**Chan-seung Park:** The March First Movement is the only incident in twentieth century Korean history that managed to bring Koreans together as one. As a result, it served as an occasion for Korea to become reborn as a modern nation. During the Joseon dynasty, the rigid social hierarchy that distinguished nobility from commoners made it difficult for Koreans to act as one, which is what makes the movement special for having overcome such a divide. The hierarchy had already been legally abolished through the 1894 Gabo Reforms, but it was the March First Movement that actually helped people become considerably less conscious of class. For instance, in one village I surveyed, noblemen were the ones who planned how the villagers would participate in the movement, but the ones who actually stood in front and struck the gong to lead the protest were commoners. Therefore, when those commoners returned after being arrested and serving time in prison, no nobleman in the village was able to look down on them ever again. That experience of leading demonstrations for independence was what later allowed commoners to step forward and take charge as agents of history.

Furthermore, the March First Movement served as a source of inspiration for other independence movements and social movements that ensued. The movement put in motion the establishment of the Korean Provi-

sional Government, armed struggles against Japan in Manchuria, and diplomatic efforts for independence. It also indirectly affected socialist, peasant, and feminist movements in Korea. The March First Movement is therefore meaningful as the starting point and source of inspiration for national social movements that took place in Korea under Japanese rule.

2. Why did such a significant, nationwide movement occur in 1919, ten years after Japan's forced annexation of Korea? This might be a question that requires an explanation about how international circumstances changed around the time the movement took place.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** The first thing that comes to mind about the 1910s would be World War I. The war that took place from July 28, 1914 to November 11, 1918 completely changed the grammar of war and engendered reflections on the modern Western order and Western civilization. World War I launched an overall review of discussions on the so-called "rule of civilization" or building a "civilization-centered world." Considering the context of the period in which it occurred, the March First Movement is therefore deeply significant for having occurred at a time when Japan was also compelled to reconsider imitating Western ways and to discuss new imperialist modes of operation. Socialist arguments for revolution and President Wilson's idea of national self-determination criticized the violence and lack of morality in international politics, and following that trend, Koreans must have detected an opportunity to carry out an independence movement.

**Kyoung-han Bae:** After World War I, a catastrophe brought on by competition between European powers came to an end, the Paris Peace Conference was held, the United States replaced Europe in playing a central role in the international order and Japan gained hegemony in Asia. The Paris Peace Conference imbued Korean independence activists and Chinese reformers with optimistic views that relied on international morality and justice. Some in China even believed that a common good could overpower force. They most likely fantasized about the statement President Wilson had made on national self-determination in January 1918. However, the March



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First Movement revealed that such views had been based on false pretenses. China also experienced betrayal from the United States when German rights in Shandong Province were awarded to Japan instead of being returned to China, which gave rise to the May Fourth Movement. The socialist revolutionaries' argument for national self-determination raised prior to the Russian Revolution is also known to have contributed to the outbreak of both the March First Movement and the May Fourth Movement. Thus, the March First Movement can ultimately be regarded as resistance fueled by the idea of national

self-determination to break free from imperialist rule by a country that had gained hegemony in Asia.

**Chan-seung Park:** In the 1910s, Korean independence activists were sensitive to developments in international affairs. Once World War I broke out in 1914, the Shanghai-based Sinhan hyeongmyeongdang [New Korean Revolutionary Party], in which activist Yi Sang-seol (李相嵩) played a central role, appointed the Korean Emperor Gojong as the party's leader. The move seems to have taken into consideration the fact that there was an emperor in Germany, a country that appeared to be on its way to winning the war. When the United States' participation in the war in July 1917 changed the situation, Shin Kyu-sik (申圭植) and his fellow independence activists drafted the Daedongdangyeol seoneon [Declaration of Great Unity and Solidarity], which practically leaned toward American republicanism. Once Germany lost the war in November 1918, Korean youths in Shanghai organized the Sinhan cheongnyeondang [New Korean Young Men's Association] to prepare Korea for the upcoming Paris Peace Conference, and

new organizations were subsequently formed according to developments in international affairs.

The March First Movement's connection to the Paris Peace Conference is a matter that needs to be more carefully examined. Through the conference in January 1919, several countries previously ruled by Germany, Russia, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire were granted independence. This made Korean activists feel the urge to take advantage of the situation by carrying out independence activities, which resulted in the March First Movement. After the movement, Son Byeong-hui (孫秉熙), one of the thirty-three representatives who signed the Korean Declaration of Independence, testified during a preliminary hearing at Seoul District Court that "there were expectations that the Paris Peace Conference might discuss the matter of Joseon if Joseon made its desire for independence known." Jang Gi-wuk (張基郁), a fourth grade student from Jungang High School who distributed leaflets for the independence movement, also once stated that "the people of Joseon believed declaring their independence and publicly cheering for it in unison would win the League of Nations' endorsement for Korea's independence." Such statements indicate that Koreans must have acknowledged the Paris Peace Conference as a fairly significant opportunity to gain independence.

3. What were the circumstances in Korea that led to the March First Movement? At the time, what specific acts of resistance did the Koreans domestically engage in against Japanese rule?

**Chan-seung Park:** People from all walks of life took part in the March First Movement because they shared the understanding that they could no longer live under Japanese rule. The very first line of the Korean Declaration of Independence—"We hereby declare the independence of Korea and that Koreans are a self-governing people"—resonated greatly with Koreans who found Japan's forced annexation of Korea in 1910 utterly unacceptable.

Frustration about the Japanese Government General of Korea's arbitrary rule also played a huge role in prompting Koreans to join the inde-



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pendence movement. For example, the nobility resented the regulation on burial grounds, which forced them to bury their deceased family members at the public cemetery instead of at private family gravesites. Farmers were frustrated about being banned from cutting trees

on mountains for firewood, being mobilized for road construction during the farming season, and being forced to grow mulberry trees to support silkworm breeding. Students were embittered about being forced to study in the Japanese language and within an education system that was deficient compared to that for Japanese students. Additionally, capitalists were stymied by financial institutions, such as banks that made it difficult to take out loans. What Koreans found particularly mortifying and unbearable under Japanese rule were things such as being sentenced to flogging or getting fined by the military police without trial according to a law about the immediate conviction of criminal offenses or being addressed in derogatory terms such as “yobo” by the Japanese in Korea.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** Like Professor Park said, Koreans must have been acutely aware from experience that Japanese colonial rule under the pretext of achieving “civilized rule” and “Oriental peace” was extremely mortifying. Such a realization and pent-up indignation led Koreans to identify themselves as a community of pain, which gave birth to a democracy that resisted being ruled by a foreign civilization, and that is what must have inspired Koreans to take part in a nationwide movement for independence.

**Kyoung-han Bae:** In addition to the two domestic circumstances that were just mentioned, I would like to point out the fact that Koreans were also influenced by witnessing exactly how various independence movements

since 1895, especially armed struggles, ended up being fruitless. They continued to witness failure after failure up until 1919. Of course, suppression, discrimination, and mortification must have caused many Koreans to rise, but commoners would have also been affected by a sense of resistance that was triggered as their nation's independence grew distant over time. Therefore, vivid memories of the Japanese military brutally suppressing righteous Korean soldiers could have also contributed to making the March First Movement possible.

4. At the time, what were the characteristics of and problems with Japan's imperialist colonial rule? Compared to colonies ruled by other imperial powers, what was different about Korea?

**Sang-gyu Kang:** Imperialism at the time inevitably led to some form of exploitation, and as with any other colony, force was used to exploit Korea. However, whereas countries in the Christian cultural sphere of Europe used force to subdue countries in non-Christian spheres, Japan did the same to neighboring countries in the same cultural sphere. This caused the subdued countries to experience a greater sense of betrayal and indignation that left them traumatized for a long time.

The pain Korea went through is aptly described in the preface of *Hanguk tongsa* [The Painful History of Korea] Park Eun-sik (朴殷植) published in 1915: "Korea is a civilized country, a land of noble men that gave birth to the Japanese civilization. After Korea had served as its teacher, Japan is now trying to turn Korea into its slave." Korea ended up falling prey to imperialism in its vicinity, which severely damaged its pride. That was what set its



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experience apart from other countries that suffered due to Western imperialism.

**Kyoung-han Bae:** Considering changes in the East Asian international order, Japan's invasion of East Asia was different from that of Western powers. For instance, since the Meiji Restoration, an argument for Japan's conquest of Korea, called Seikanron (征韓論), emerged. At the base of the argument was the intent to invade mainland China, an idea Japan had been harboring since the traditional era. Therefore, Japan had had the desire to advance into continental Asia since the late nineteenth century. Between the outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and the end of the Pacific War in 1945, Japan's invasion of East Asia was carried out swiftly and intensively over a relatively short period of time. This is probably why Japanese imperialism exhibited a greater degree of oppressive exploitation.

Japan's colonial rule of Taiwan is often compared with its colonial rule of Korea. Taiwan's resistance against Japan was weaker than Korea's even though Taiwan was colonized fifteen years ahead of Korea. The reason for that had to do with Taiwan's historical identity. Taiwan only became incorporated as Chinese territory in the seventeenth century and was afterwards invaded and ruled by a number of European powers, such as the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal. Then, Japan took over. Therefore, Taiwan's situation was very different from Korea, which is why it is inappropriate to make a direct comparison between the two. Moreover, Japan's colonial rule of Taiwan was strategically successful in many ways. Its colonial rule of Korea was more atrocious because it regarded Korea as a military base for its advance into continental Asia. This, I believe, is what caused full-blown resistance in Korea.

**Chan-seung Park:** In the case of Taiwan that Professor Bae mentioned, Japan's colonial rule was practically aimed at demonstrating to Western imperial powers its capability of running a colony of its own. This is why Japan invested considerably in building railroads or schools in Taiwan.

What stands out the most about Japan's rule of Korea is that Japan sought to transform Korea, not into a colony, but into an extension of Japa-

nese territory. Japan ultimately intended to turn Korea into a place no different from Japan, which is where the assimilation policy comes in. To put it simply, Japan's assimilation policy was to transform the customs and mindset of Koreans so that they resembled those of the Japanese. However, the chance of such a policy succeeding was low because Korea had a larger population and a longer history as an independent nation and was culturally sophisticated. Nevertheless, Japan was determined to realize its dream of advancing into continental Asia, which is why it sought to turn Korea into an extension of Japan.

What I mentioned earlier about the regulations on burial grounds or teaching Koreans the Japanese language and history all resulted from Japan's assimilation policy. However, Koreans became greatly frustrated because policies that purported to be about assimilation were, in fact, closer to being about discrimination. The mass migration of the Japanese to Korea and the appointment of Japanese candidates to major positions in charge of controlling Koreans were other policies that likely triggered resistance.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** When discussing the differences between Taiwan and Korea in terms of their experience as former Japanese colonies and how they respectively remember the experience, I believe we should be careful not to approach them based on today's perspective without an understanding of the context of the time when each country experienced colonial rule. Back then, Taiwan and Korea had historical experiences and levels of national pride that were entirely different from one another. Unlike the civilized country of Korea, which had a strong, unique sense of national pride and identity, Taiwan had not formed an independent national identity, nor had it firmly established a unique culture of its own. Moreover, China to which Taiwan belonged, was struggling with an internal division of its own. That is why we should bear in mind that the Taiwanese had reason to have relatively positive memories about Japan's showy colonial rule.

5. Would there be any historical incidents or figures related to the March First Movement worth shedding new light on? If so, please briefly introduce them.

**Chan-seung Park:** It is hard to introduce just one, since it was a nationwide movement, but I would have to go with student participation, which I found most impressive. Students at vocational schools or middle schools in Korea were influenced by the February Eighth Declaration of Independence made in Tokyo and began preparing a demonstration of their own in mid-February. Yonhi College student Kim Won-byeok, Bosung College student Gang Gi-deok, and Gyeongseong Medical College student Han Wi-geon had originally planned to launch a demonstration on March 5 but decided to act in tandem with the thirty-three Korean representatives at the request of one named Yi Gap-seong.

That is how, among the people gathered at Pagoda Park on March 1, there were hundreds of students who were associated with the Young Men's Christian Association or a student group called the Seobuk haksaeng chinmokhoe. The crowd led the demonstration that day as well as the one on March 5 in front of Seoul Station. Most of the demonstrators were arrested. Students who were later arrested for producing and distributing newspapers underground were sentenced to anywhere from one to three years of imprisonment, which was similar to what the thirty-three representatives were sentenced to. That was an indication of how much the Japanese Government General of Korea feared and was wary of student participation in the independence movement. Nevertheless, students continued to take part in other demonstrations that occurred after March 20, and such activities had a ripple effect throughout Gyeonggi Province that eventually spread all over the country. Examining the March First Movement's overall process makes it obvious that the movement was orchestrated by the thirty-three representatives and Catholic and Protestant organizations, but the students seem to have made an equally important contribution.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** I would like to focus on what the slogan "Daehan dongnip manse" [Long Live Korean Independence] symbolized. The slogan, along with the Korean flag (Taegukgi), turned into major symbols of Korea because the experience of shouting the slogan and waving the flag especially awakened the frustration and patriotism in people's hearts at the time. While modern states were formed and started to become integrated into a

modern international order, Korea had been deprived of its right to join the newly evolving trend. Therefore, shouting the slogan and waving the flag turned out to be a prime chance for people to express the sorrow of having lost their national sovereignty.

One more thing to point out is the rumor that spread after the Korean Emperor Gojong's death on January 21, 1919. The rumor that the emperor had been poisoned after continuing to resist Japan's pillaging of Korea's national sovereignty played quite a critical role in triggering a nationwide uprising two days ahead of the emperor's funeral on March 3. Such circumstances seem to affirm that a modern civilized mindset does not become introduced instantly but instead progressively in a zigzag-like pattern as it meshes with previously established traditions and ideas. I think the movement is a specific instance proving that the meeting of the traditional and the foreign does not involve discarding all things from the past and replacing them with newly accepted things but rather has to do with creating room among things from the past so that new possibilities may unfold.

**Kyoung-han Bae:** I've been considering two points in relation to the thirty-three Korean representatives who actually played a fairly limited role in the movement. There are still many issues to look into regarding their whereabouts and acts of betrayal after the movement. Nevertheless, I think it was deeply meaningful that among those representatives were religious leaders from Cheondoism, Protestantism, and Buddhism. In particular, once Cheondosim and Protestantism joined forces, religious circles surged to the forefront of the March First Movement. This seems worth exploring in terms of the role religion has played in modern Korean society. It would also be worth positively reviewing the process through which harmony was created among different religions at the time. There should be new aspects to study when we think about the interreligious conflicts and the insufficient role religion is playing in Korean society today.

6. Now that we have touched upon multiple aspects of the March First Movement, perhaps it is time to discuss the impact the movement had upon neighboring countries. How did Japan and China view the movement?

**Kyoung-han Bae:** In Korea, the May Fourth Movement that took place in China is often pointed out as an overseas reaction to the March First Movement, but scholars in Korea and China have different opinions about such an interpretation. The Peking University students who led the May Fourth Movement did, in fact, express admiration for the March First Movement, so the movement in Korea does seem to have had a direct impact upon the movement in China. However, a closer look at the May Fourth Movement's eruption shows that discouragement from the Paris Peace Conference and the sense of betrayal the Chinese felt toward the United States were what directly led to China's refusal to sign the Treaty of Versailles and to demonstrations demanding that several Chinese officials resign for allegedly collaborating with the Japanese. The May Fourth Movement was therefore along the line of the March First Movement, but it would be misleading to claim that the movement in China was a direct result of the movement in Korea. Meanwhile, regarding the two movements as incidents that occurred around the same period does rationally help to explain the international solidarity activities against imperialism that ensued.

What is more worth taking note of is the way the March First Movement changed how the Chinese viewed Korea. Renowned liberal scholars in China, such as Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀), used to disregard Korea as an "incompetent, impolite nation incapable of acting in solidarity." Only after the March First Movement did their attitude toward and understanding of Korea turn positive, enough for some to even claim that China should learn from Korea.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** As Professor Bae described, Chinese people such as Kang Youwei (康有為) and Chen Duxiu regarded Joseon as an instance of a failed, ruined country prior to the March First Movement. Therefore, the movement should be considered an occasion that made the international solidarity of resistance possible in Asia. In other words, it is necessary to examine the movement as an occasion that formed Asian solidarity in resisting imperialism, which should be distinguished from the Japanese argument that "Asia is one."

Looking into how Japan viewed and reported the March First Move-

ment at the time reveals that the Japanese were not seriously or fundamentally concerned about the movement's ramifications. Yoshino Sakuzo (吉野作造), a famous political scientist who taught at the University of Tokyo during the Taisho Democracy period, argued that "the people of Joseon regard themselves as having become civilized earlier than the Japanese, which makes it inappropriate to adopt an assimilation policy toward them" and suggested that "the people of Joseon should be awarded some sort of right." However, except from a few intellectuals, such a suggestion failed to gain much sympathy in Japan.

7. Having been established as a result of the March First Movement, how did the Republic of Korea's provisional government manage to uphold the movement's spirit and what was the historical and political significance of the government's establishment?

**Chan-seung Park:** The March 3 and 5 editions of the newspaper *Joseon Dongnip Sinmun*, published and distributed by followers of Cheondoism, reported that "a national convention will soon be held in Seoul to establish a temporary government." The temporary government mentioned in those editions was referring to a provisional government. This hints that followers of Cheondoism had been made aware of plans for the provisional government's establishment while preparing for the March First Movement. In fact, a leaflet handed out on April 9 under the title "The Republic of Joseon's Provisional Government" included a list of cabinet members that included the name of Cheondoism's leader, Son Byeong-hui.

Meanwhile, Protestants consulted followers of Cheondoism and Confucianism to separately organize a cabinet. The establishment of a provisional government, known as the Hansung Government, was subsequently proclaimed at a national convention held on April 23. Throughout that process, members of the Seobukpa [Northwestern Faction] managed to secure a list of the Hansung Government's cabinet members and made corrections to the list before passing it on to Shanghai—a move that is now referred to as the proposal for the Sinhanminguk Government. However, Koreans in Shanghai dropped the administrative system headed by a consul governor

from the proposal and recommended Rhee Syngman as prime minister of the Shanghai Provisional Government. In any case, moves to form a provisional government were continuously made during the March First Movement, and once such news reached Shanghai, a provisional government was established there between April 10 and 11. Therefore, I personally think there is enough reason to collectively refer to the March First Movement and the establishment of provisional governments as the “Gimi-year Revolution” (己未革命).

**Sang-gyu Kang:** If the March First Movement signifies the birth of Korean democracy, provisional governments signify the birth of a political space for direct tasks for Korea’s independence—a pivot for Korean independence activities.

However, there is one thing that cannot be left out when discussing the connection between the March First Movement and provisional governments. That would be the Korean Empire’s connection to the Shanghai Provisional Government. Article 1 of Daehakguk gukje, the constitution King Gojong promulgated after establishing the Korean Empire, stated that “Korea is recognized all over the world as an independent empire.” The article thereby proclaimed that the Korean Empire was an independent country, a sovereign state according to international law. Another thing we should note is what Shin Seok-wu (申錫雨) said as a member of the provisional assembly when the assembly was considering a new name for Korea in September 1919. “We are now trying to establish a new country based on cries for independence that began in front of Gyeongungung Palace’s Daehanmun Gate.... Since the country we are now trying to establish will be a republic to succeed the Korean Empire, it should be named the Republic of Korea.” Shin Seok-wu’s suggestion gained support from the absolute majority and led the provisional government to choose the name Republic of Korea.

In other words, the Shanghai Provisional Government decided to succeed the Korean Empire, as it dreamt of moving into new territory as a democratic republic. Therefore, in a way, the March First Movement and the Shanghai Provisional Government served as a bridge for an indepen-

dent, constitutional monarchy called the Korean Empire to transition into a democratic republic called the Republic of Korea.

**Kyong-han Bae:** Considering the aforementioned notions of anti-imperialism and democracy within the broader context of East Asia might make it easier to recognize where the Korean Provisional Government stands. After the Xinhai Revolution, Asia's first republican revolution, democracy spread to areas surrounding China, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Mongolia, as they embraced republicanism. In Korea's case, the early independence activists who came to China immediately after the Xinhai Revolution responded enthusiastically toward the terms "gonghwa" (共和) and "minguk" (民國). At the time, the term gonghwaguk (共和國), meaning a republic, was commonly translated into Korean-Chinese characters as *minguk*, which allowed for *minguk* to be recognized as a synonym for republic. Therefore, Daehan (Korea) was taken from the name Daehan jeguk (Korean Empire) to be combined with *minguk* to form Daehan minguk (大韓民國), the Republic of Korea. Therefore, the Korean Provisional Government's choice to advocate a democratic republic represents the process through which the republicanism introduced by the Xinhai Revolution spread and settled down all over East Asia.

In terms of anti-imperialism, the March First Movement changed the Chinese view of Koreans and prompted the need to build international solidarity. As Comintern came to play a central role in supporting democratic movements in colonized areas, widespread anti-imperialist solidarity emerged after 1920. Therefore, the Korean Provisional Government's establishment was a starting point for embracing democratic republicanism that formed a pivot for anti-imperialist solidarity in East Asia.

8. As we celebrate the March First Movement's centennial, what aspects of the movement should we focus on and learn from? Please point out any relevant challenges that may be lying ahead.

**Chan-seung Park:** I believe the very first line of the Korean Declaration of Independence wholly embodies the March First Movement's spirit: "We

hereby declare the independence of Korea and that Koreans are a self-governing people.” After Japan deprived them of their position as citizens of an independent country in 1910, Koreans came to acutely realize the importance of that position. When President Wilson advocated the idea of national self-determination, they recognized the opportunity to regain their national sovereignty and carried out the March First Movement. In addition, twenty-first century Korea is still in need of that same spirit of independence, particularly as a guide for establishing peaceful relations between the two Koreas on their way to achieving unification in the future.

Other terms to carefully take note of in the Korean Declaration of Independence are justice and humanitarianism. The word justice was mentioned several times in President Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech, where he emphasized that “It is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak.” Humanitarianism is also something President Wilson repeatedly highlighted in speeches he made prior to the United States’ participation in the war. An editorial published in the November 10, 1918 edition of the Korean newspaper *Maeil sinbo* described President Wilson as a personification of justice and humanitarianism and expected the United States and Britain to abide by such principles in taking the lead in reforming the world. Therefore, mentioning justice and humanitarianism suggests that the Korean Declaration of Independence must have been heavily influenced by the mood at the time both inside and outside Korea. The terms represented the spirit of the times back then, and I believe they are still values commonly embraced by humanity today.

**Kyoung-han Bae:** Independence from imperialism or positive expectations for an international order based on justice, humanitarianism, and peace can appear somewhat unrealistic, but they can also be effective in the long run. Since anti-imperialism and democracy were previously suggested as key words representing the March First Movement’s significance, I would like to add the “argument for building a peaceful international order” as a key phrase. Although such an argument was no more than an expression of

wishful thinking around the time the movement occurred, it later turned into and still remains an earnest goal for East Asia. National independence, autonomy, democracy, and building an international framework of peace are still valid



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topics in matters involving unification on the Korean peninsula or complex international conflicts between powerful countries. Therefore, today, we are still facing the message the March First Movement tried to communicate a hundred years ago.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** In the end, the March First Movement should be regarded as the occasion that allowed Korea to break away from a Sino-centric order and establish itself as a principal agent upon a new stage. The fact that universal values of nonviolence, mutual growth, and peace were employed to explain that Korea was an independent country signifies that the March First Movement is linked to the trend in world history of severely criticizing the twentieth century as an age of extremes that strived only for national prosperity and military power.

Considering what the March First Movement means to Koreans, we need to comprehensively analyze and reflect on the Korean peninsula's geopolitical position and the experiences it went through during times of transition. The Korean peninsula is still surrounded by world powers. After experiencing war during the nineteenth century Western occupation of the East and the twentieth century Cold War era, the Korean peninsula has remained under the threat of war in the twenty-first century post-Cold War era due to North Korean nuclear issues. Under such circumstances, the March First Movement offers vivid implications for how Korea can concentrate its efforts while trying to harmonize but not homogenize. In that

sense, the movement is a valuable historical source we can draw upon time and again in regard to discussing the present state of Korea.

9. Finally, we would appreciate it if you could each introduce notable findings made so far in researching the March First Movement or any relevant topics that require further research in the future.

**Kyung-han Bae:** I think it is a pity that the March First Movement and Korean provisional governments are only being studied as part of a history of independence activities. The Chinese also tend to approach the May Fourth Movement as an act of patriotism, but that only produces outcome-based interpretations that fail to view history comprehensively. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to study the March First Movement or the May Fourth Movement from more diverse angles.

For example, focusing on the actual lives of Koreans around the time that the March First Movement occurred might broaden the spectrum of research. Instead of simply pitting Japan against Korean independence activities, I would like to see more studies about people who lived on middle ground back then. In the Manchurian areas, there were Koreans devoted to independence activities and Koreans who cooperated or even collaborated with the Japanese. Featuring the period as if only activities for independence took place would make it difficult to gain a truly comprehensive overview of Korean history. In terms of the situation in Korea at the time, we need to delve more deeply into the negative aspects of what happened after the March First Movement, such as the reality of Japan's cultural rule or what became of independence activists as the Japanese Government General and army headquarters tried to placate such activists and convince them to cross over to the other side of the conflict.

I recently heard talk of building a memorial hall to celebrate the March First Movement's centennial. In addition to exhibitions that can effectively pass on the movement's spirit, I sincerely hope that a proper space and database for conducting basic research on the movement can be established there as well.

**Sang-gyu Kang:** I agree with Professor Bae about breaking away from fixed frames in research and diversifying perspectives to view history because it is an important aspect of modern historical reflection. What I have been interested in lately is how the wars Japan caused over the course of half of a century impacted Asia. Japan intermittently caused wars between the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and the end of the Pacific War in 1945, warranting a more macroscopic—yet detailed—approach to be able to properly research the impact of such wars. Additionally, it is such a shame that we have not yet seen any superb publications focused on covering with the Pacific War or the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal.

Finally, I would like to point out two things related to the significance of the March First Movement. One is how paradoxical history can be. The movement and the establishment of provisional governments prompted Koreans to come together to resist Japanese imperialist aggression, but they also turned out to be deeply tragic, frustrating experiences. Nevertheless, such tribulations served as opportunities for Korea to make the transition from constitutional monarchy to republicanism and confirmed that the Korean spirit was alive. Japan, on the other hand, managed to successfully move forward after the Meiji Restoration until the country lost the war while still under imperial rule by a bloodline that had yet to be broken.

Another point of interest is that, considering the paradox of history within the present context, the judgements and choices we make now will be the making of our history over time. East Asian countries each took a very different track in the twentieth century. However, from a macroscopic viewpoint, we cannot ignore the fact that they share the same experiences and *Zeitgeist* in terms of striving to catch up to modernity and the West. We must also pay attention to the fact that negative aspects of modern grammar from the past are connected to the insecurities and crises East Asia is currently experiencing. Therefore, we in Korea need to clearly acknowledge that the choices we make now will be entirely passed on as history to our future generations.

**Chan-seung Park:** Frankly, Korean historical research on the March First Movement has not made much progress, and there have been very few doc-

toral dissertations covering the topic. It would have helped a lot if enough testimonies had been collected from survivors after Korea's liberation, but the failure to do so has made it difficult to conduct research today. Moreover, Korea's division into north and south has made research even more challenging. For instance, there is no way to confirm whether records still exist on the trials held in North Korean regions in relation to the March First Movement. Therefore, compared to how much the movement's significance has been highlighted, not enough research has been done to support discussions about such significance. Additionally, scarce research has been conducted on the history of the Japanese Government General of Korea's governing policies. With a majority of researchers focusing on the history of independence movements, there has not been enough energy left to spend on comparing the policies Japan adopted to govern Korea with those other countries adopted to govern their own colonies.

What I find more of a shame is that there is a serious lack of research on the March First Movement's relation to other international developments. The movement is sometimes described as if only domestic factors in Korea caused it to occur, to the point that the thirty-three Korean representatives are even criticized for having misunderstood the idea of national self-determination as well as the Paris Peace Conference's agenda. This is evidence that not enough research has been done on how the Korean understanding of international developments was tied to the motivation behind carrying out a nationwide demonstration in Korea.

The last thing I would like to mention is that when we consider the March First Movement, we should think highly of the fact that Koreans attempted to actively take advantage of changes in international developments. From an objective viewpoint, the principle of national self-determination could not be applied to Korea back then. Even leading Korean independence activists, including the thirty-three representatives, must have had some doubts as to the possibility of Korea achieving independence according to the principle of self-determination. Nevertheless, taking advantage of the principle as an opportunity to overthrow reality was a proactive attitude that deserves to be highly regarded. I believe that Koreans are in need of such an attitude today. Compared to rumors of war from a year

ago, an international event such as the Winter Olympics has served as a turning point for forming a mood of peace lately between the two Koreas. The fact that Korea took advantage of a situation to create opportunities for itself reminds me of how Korea responded to circumstances around the time of the March First Movement. Countries such as the United States, China, and Russia are still putting their own interests first in regard to issues involving the Korean peninsula, so Korea needs to maintain a proactive attitude to overcome the reality it now faces. This is the very spirit of the March First Movement that Koreans need to uphold at they welcome the movement's centennial.