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The March First Movement in America:
The Campaign to Win American Support

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Abstract

In the wake of the March First Independence Movement of 1919, expatriate Koreans in the United States, as part of a global campaign, carried on the peaceful struggle for the liberation of Korea. This essay analyzes the public relations campaign in the United States from March 1919 to February 1922 between Koreans who advocated for national independence and Japanese who defended colonial rule. Koreans presented the colonial regime in Korea as illegitimate and brutal, they cautioned Americans that Japan's territorial ambitions threatened the balance of power in Asia, and they criticized the colonial regime's mistreatment of Christians. The Korean media efforts won support from average Americans who joined the League of the Friends of Korea, churches that condemned the persecution of Christians, and congressmen who voiced concern over Japanese aggression in Asia. However, the Japanese state responded with a propaganda effort that maintained Japan had acted legally to colonize Korea, portrayed Koreans as incapable of self-rule, and asserted that Koreans were content with colonial governance. Despite the failure of the March First Movement to secure recognition from the United States, it succeeded in solidifying the identity of Koreans in America and improving American public opinion of Koreans.

Keywords: March First Movement, Philip Jaisohn, Henry Chung, Syngman Rhee, Korean Congress, Japanese Colonialism, United States, Koreans in America

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Introduction

The March First Independence Movement of 1919 erupted in response to a decade of oppressive Japanese rule. The global dimensions of this movement proved critical to altering how Americans viewed Koreans. The Korean community in America, with limited resources, embarked on a public relations campaign to reinvent the Korean nation's image in Americans' minds and to win support for their cause. Koreans claimed that Japan's colonization of Korea was illegitimate; they voiced outrage at the colonial regime's brutal military rule; they warned the United States that Japan's presence in China would upset the balance of power in Asia; and they cautioned that the colonial regime purposefully persecuted Christians and missionaries. Korean public relations efforts secured the backing of Americans who took action: some joined the League of the Friends of Korea; churches protested the mistreatment of Christians in Korea; and members of Congress correlated Japan's actions in Korea with its aggressive policies in China.

In response to the Korean efforts, Japanese mouthpieces responded that Korea was colonized through mutual consent and that the Korean people were incapable of self-rule and satisfied with Japan's colonial rule. The March First Movement's public relations melee between Koreans and Japanese ended in failure for the Koreans when Japan successfully positioned itself as a world citizen by participating in the Washington Naval Conference (November 1921-February 1922); furthermore, American society predominately accepted that Japan's reforms in Korea had corrected the defects of colonial rule there. Nevertheless, Koreans in America succeeded in restoring a positive image of the Korean nation in America, even if they failed to secure official backing for Korean independence.

Background

Koreans first arrived in Hawaii, an American territory, between 1903 and 1905, when Korea was an independent nation; in 1905, Japan established protectorate status over Korea, and in 1910 made Korea a colony. By 1919

there were approximately 7,000 Koreans living in the United States and its territories. Koreans in America were a stateless people living in exile who had no meaningful political or social influence with which to protect themselves. Furthermore, expatriate Koreans refused to recognize Japan's legitimacy in Korea, and they rejected Japanese consulate services, so they established the Korean National Association (KNA) to represent and safeguard the Korean community's interests.

In the early 1900s, American society envisioned Korea as a backward and uncivilized nation that was incapable of self-government. This negative discourse was "informed by ideologies of Western imperialism" as well as unfavorable newspaper coverage of Korea, some of which was influenced by "Japanese information channels" that supported Japan's colonization of Korea (Johnson 2011, 125). Thus, when Japan made Korea a protectorate in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt, who believed Koreans to be "unenlightened and recalcitrant," supported the move. Koreans protested American inaction by claiming that the United States was bound by the 1882 Treaty of Amity and Commerce to protect Korean sovereignty, but Roosevelt ignored their pleas. He believed Japanese colonial rule in Korea would bring peace and stability to the region (Johnson 2011, 130). Americans continued to hold Koreans in low regard throughout the 1910s.

At the end of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson attempted to create a new international order to secure long-term peace. Foundational to this was a Fourteen-Point Plan, including the League of Nations and self-determination for subjugated and colonized peoples (Savage 1996, 190). Koreans believed that they could win Wilson's endorsement for Korea's liberation if they took decisive action; they still believed the United States had a moral obligation—based on the 1882 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Korea and the United States—to restore Korea's independence (Oliver 1973, 132; R. Kim 2011, 56). In America, the KNA dispatched Syngman Rhee (Yi Seung-man) and Henry Chung (Jeong Han-gyeong)[1] in December 1918 to represent Korea's interests at the Paris Peace Conference.

1. This essay will use Syngman Rhee, Philip Jaisohn, and Henry Chung since these were the Romanized names used by them in their own writings.

However, the State Department refused to issue travel documents because Korea's independence was not related to World War I. Furthermore, the Allied powers considered disputes between colonial peoples and their imperial rulers a domestic issue to be resolved internally. Imperial powers took caution not to fuel the flames of national liberation within their colonies or those of an ally (Ku 2002, 221; J. Kim 2011, 133).

In Korea, the March First Movement erupted on March 1, 1919 on the eve of the deposed King Gojong's funeral. Koreans protested the Japanese Government-General on the grounds it had suppressed Korean culture, provided Koreans no legitimate economic opportunities, administered an unjust legal system, and offered Koreans no positive future. Koreans believed President Wilson's principle of ethnic self-determination included their nation, and they hoped a nationwide demonstration might spark an American intervention, but their hope was in vain. The peaceful demonstrations were suppressed by the Japanese colonial regime and the movement was effectively ended within Korea by the end of April 1919; up to 7,500 people were killed and another 46,000 people were arrested (J. Kim 2011, 88).

Overseas Koreans continued the struggle for national liberation. The March First Movement boosted the morale and brought a unity of purpose to the overseas Korean community. In April 1919, Korean nationalists organized the Korean Provisional Government (KOPOGO) in Shanghai, which they felt "signified the creation of a 'new Korea,' a new sovereign nation-state that legitimately represented the national will of all Koreans" (*Philadelphia Record*, April 15, 1919). In June 1919, the KOPOGO merged with other governments in exile and named Rhee as the executive officer. This gave Rhee a "quasi-official basis for his diplomatic" efforts in the United States. Rhee was a strategic choice because he was a student of Wilson's while they were at Princeton. Conversely, he was also a problematic choice because he was a "stormy petrel of Korean independence" whose rigid and domineering leadership style contributed to the factionalization of the Korean community (Allen 1960, 50–51).

The goals of the March First Movement in America were first outlined by Koreans in Hawaii, who, upon hearing about the demonstrations, held

an impromptu meeting that was attended by six hundred patriots. They resolved to request "American cooperation in Korea's attempts to free itself from Japanese rule" (Kim and Ch'oe 2007, 127). These goals were further clarified at the Korean Congress which was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in April 1919. Philip Jaisohn (Seo Jae-pil)[2] decided upon the city as a symbolic gesture since it was the "cradle of liberty" for America and the world (*Public Ledger*, March 24, 1919). Jaisohn officiated the Congress, which was attended by 200 to 300 nationalist Koreans and sympathetic Americans. The Congress drafted a petition to President Wilson that focused on the "very deplorable condition" among the Koreans that resulted from the "consistently barbarous, inhuman, and unbearable" treatment at the hands of the Japanese under military rule. Resolution I from the Korean Congress called for the restoration of Koreans' inalienable rights and promised to "present for the world's information the true facts of our just grievances and Japan's outrageous conduct against our people" (*Public Ledger*, April 14, 1919).

The Korean Congress released a number of tracts that outlined the Korean message to the world. The Congress circulated "An Appeal to America" that outlined the history of Japan's aggression toward Korea and announced to the American public that "Our aim is freedom from militaristic autocracy; our object is democracy for Asia; our hope is universal Christianity" (Korean Congress 1919, 29). The appeal to Christianity was strategic because many Koreans in America were Christian and had close relations with religious organizations in America. Nationalist leaders understood that Americans were more likely to be sympathetic toward a Christian movement. As will be discussed below, Koreans attacked the Japanese colonial regime for its poor treatment of Christians in Korea. The appeal claimed that Americans had outstanding obligations under the 1882 Treaty which stated, "If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either government, the other will exert their good offices…to bring about an

2. Philip Jaisohn was a longtime Korean nationalist who fled to the United States after participating in the failed Gapsin Coup (1884). He became an American citizenship in 1890 and earned a medical degree in 1892.

amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings." Koreans asserted that treaty remained in effect. Newspapers throughout America quoted segments of this article. The implication was that Koreans lost sovereignty through Japanese duplicity, not an inability to govern themselves.

The Congress outlined the March First Movement in America as an effort to "present for the world's information the true facts of our just grievances and Japan's outrageous conduct against our people" (*Public Ledger*, April 15, 1919). This was the driving force and focus of the Korean American effort—to rouse the American public and lawmakers in favor of Korean independence. After Wilson failed to respond to the demonstrations, Korean nationalists recognized that American policymakers subordinated Korea's independence to other geopolitical priorities; given the realpolitik of global affairs, liberating Korea from Japan's imperial rule was nearly impossible at that time. Yet, that did not deter Korean nationalists from acting on their patriotism. Koreans in America hoped to keep alive the spirit of independence.

The Korean Message to the American Public

The March First Movement in America was largely an effort to win support for Korean independence. Their goal was to inform the American public of Japan's oppressive policies and to change Americans' perception of the Korean people. The Korean community focused their message on the United States because they believed that America, as a former colony, would be sympathetic to currently colonies, such as Korea, seeking independence from imperial powers (J. Kim 2011, 123; Oliver 1973, 158). Koreans believed that Wilson's statement of ethnic self-determination meant that the United States was not married to colonialism like other great powers (J. Kim 2015, 317).

Advocates for the Korean cause focused on three themes in their publicity efforts. One was that Japan had gained control over Korea through duplicity and illegal methods and that the United States had a moral, if not legal, obligation to intervene on behalf of Korean sovereignty. Newspapers

frequently quoted Henry Chung, Homer B. Hulbert, and Syngman Rhee, who said that King Gojong signed a treaty with the Japanese in 1904 that allowed Japanese troops to travel through Korea to fight the Russians. The treaty guaranteed Korea's sovereignty; but once the war concluded, Japan reneged on the treaty and "at the point of a sword" made Korea a protectorate in 1905. The United States, despite the 1882 Treaty, did nothing to fulfill its treaty obligations; in fact, President Theodore Roosevelt facilitated the Japanese takeover of Korea in exchange for Japan's assurances to respect America's position in the Philippines. In other words, Korea lost its sovereignty due to Japanese aggression, not Korean ineptitude. Rhee wrote that if Korea regained independence, it could rule itself as a "naturally peace-loving people" who could "produce a new model of Christian civilization in Asia" (*Public Ledger*, April 5, 1919). Korean nationalists presented the KOPOGO as a government in exile and asked for recognition from foreign governments (*New York Times*, September 1, 1919).

Henry Chung emerged in the American press as a leading voice for Korean independence. Chung earned a Bachelors and Masters in Economics from the University of Nebraska and entered a doctoral program at Northwestern in 1918 but left to devote his time to the Korean independence movement. He gave numerous speeches, attended countless social events, and wrote several books that were well received by the American public (*Kearny Daily Hub*, December 27, 1919). His central message was that Japan mistreated the Korean people and that the time had come for America to assist Korea (*San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 1919). Chung published *The Case for Korea* in 1921, a 367-page argument for Korean independence. It offers a brief history of the Korean people, including the dastardly actions of Japan to colonize Korea. Most of the book presents a grim picture of Korea under Japanese control: judicial heavy-handedness, economic exploitation, and persecution of Christians. Missouri Senator Selden P. Spencer, wrote the forward for one of Chung's book, saying, "It deserves and demands attention." And the *New York Times* stated in a long review that it offered the reader "a correct understanding of the case of Korea against Japan" (June 26, 1921).

Chung's prestige skyrocketed in the early months of the March First

Movement. The *Kearny Daily Hub* noted that he "hob nobs with New York high-brows, and holds private conferences with Washington potentates, thus demonstrating the romance of the revolutionist" (July 23, 1919). During one book tour he gave twenty speeches (*Kearny Daily Hub*, December 27, 1919), and on one occasion, he filled the room at the Pompelian Club of San Francisco—which was the second time in seven years that it filled; the other time was when President William Howard Taft spoke at the club.

Another theme conveyed by Koreans was that Japan's aggression in China threatened peace in Asia. American mistrust of Japan peaked in 1919 after Japan's infamous 21 Demands in China became public. These *demands* were treaty concessions that enhanced Japan's position in China at the expense of Western powers; these, coupled with Japan's effort to acquire Germany's Shandong concessions after World War I, worried Americans that the balance of power in East Asia might swing too far in Japan's favor. Americans distrusted Japan's aggressive foreign policy because it threatened America's informal Open Door policy which provided for equal access to Chinese markets. Thus, Japan's efforts to acquire Chinese territory sparked anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States. Koreans capitalized on this distrust and labeled Japan "the Prussia of the East," which, in light of the recently concluded World War, was critical because the Prussians (an ethnic group in Germany), were synonymous with militarism and aggression (*Public Ledger*, April 15, 1919). Koreans also linked Japanese belligerence in China with the colonization of Korea, thusly painting Japan a historic aggressor against her neighbors.

Koreans propagated the theory that the Japanese were on a path of conquest in Asia. Rhee predicted that Japan would "step by step" move into Manchuria and Siberia, and become a "menace to America." Koreans warned America not to allow "Japanese Prussianism" in Asia (*The Antelope*, January 17, 1919). Henry Chung stated that Japan's growing power in Asia was a threat to America's economic and moral interests. He wrote, "Japan will ultimately succeed in absorbing the entire continent of Asia with its vast natural resources and limitless manpower" if the Western nations did not prevent Japanese imperialism. He also cautioned that Japan, if unchecked, would use its power to alter American foreign policy as well as domestic

immigration policies (Chung 1921a, 100). He predicted another conflict was on the horizon unless the Western powers acted to curb Japanese expansion (*Columbus Evening Dispatch*, June 26, 1919; *Ohio State Journal*, July 13, 1919). These sensationalist claims fed into the anti-Japanese sentiments prevalent at the time.

A final theme that Koreans conveyed to the American public was that the colonial regime persecuted Christians with the intention of driving them out of Korea. They noted that, 17 percent of arrests made during the March First Movement were Christian even though they were less than one percent of the population (R. Kim 2011, 57). Homer B. Hulbert wrote that Christianity and American missionaries were an obstacle to Japanese efforts to dominate Korea, and that is why Japan targeted them for oppression (Hulbert 1920, 272). This issue generated considerable negative publicity for the Japanese government because Americans were protective of Christians in Asia. Koreans in America reasoned that the Japanese colonial oppression of Christians was a moral issue that transcended politics.

Rhee noted that the mistreatment of Christians in Korea was a longstanding policy of the colonial regime in its efforts to drive Christianity out of Korea. As a precedent, he pointed to the arrest of 122 Christians on trumped up charges in 1911 for a supposed assassination attempt on Governor-General Terauchi Masatake. Rhee also cited the worsening legal strictures against Christianity that hurt missionary schools; he claimed the Japanese were trying to force the Bible out of Korea (*Public Ledger*, March 30, 1919). The outrage peaked when the Japanese military police burned to death thirty Christians inside a church at Jeam-ri. An Changho (Ahn Chang-ho), founder of the first Korean political organization in America, wrote that "Christians have been made to bear the crosses in mockery of their religion, while the name of Christ has been subjected to infamy" and that "the fate of Christ's kingdom in our country hangs in the balance" (Ahn 1919, 638–639). And, Henry Chung stated that the "situation in Korea is simply the thin edge of the wedge and the challenge of Buddha to Christ" (Chung 1921a, 100).

Most appalling to Americans was the mistreatment of Western missionaries and expatriates in Korea. News reports stated that, "American

homes were searched by the police without warrant" and that two American women "were beaten by the Japanese soldiers for no other reason than they were sympathetic with the Koreans" (League of the Friends of Korea 1919, 12). Furthermore, American missionary Eli M. Mowry was arrested and sentenced to hard labor for allegedly harboring participants in the demonstrations; his trial was covered in detail in American newspapers.[3] Americans took affront at the mistreatment of fellow citizens, which further fueled anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States.

The heavy-handed military rule of the Japanese colonial regime was foundational to each of the above themes. Koreans explained their economic opportunities had vanished, their land had been appropriated by Japanese landlords, their culture had been suppressed by officials, and their quality of life had worsened under Japanese rule. The March First Movement exposed to the international community Korean discontent with Japanese rule. Imperial Japan, sensitive to its reputation as a modern global power, implemented reforms; the colonial regime replaced the military police with civilian police, relaxed censorship, and improved economic opportunities for Koreans. The Japanese government claimed that reforms to the system of rule had been planned prior to the demonstrations, and that the public had not been informed of them in time to prevent the March First Movement (Saito 1920, 167). Critics of Japan's colonial regime claimed these reforms were too superficial. Rhee called the reforms an effort to "mislead the western world" because nothing had changed (*Bisbee Daily Review*, September 9, 1920). *The Evening Star* said the reforms were "merely one of those face-saving diplomatic schemes of Japan" that sounded good to the West (August 22, 1919). And Henry Chung stated that the Japanese government and her agents aimed to "misinform the outside world" about post-demonstration conditions with its multifarious publications (Chung 1921a, 144).

Koreans in the United States believed that Americans misunderstood the Korean nation because Japanese puppeteers had manipulated the American public. Dr. Philip Jaisohn emphasized the need for Koreans to

3. See for example, *New York Times*, April 11, 1919.

bring to light the "true state of affairs of the new republic" because Korea "had been misrepresented in America by the very clever Japanese press bureau, composed of highly educated men and backed by the government" (*Public Ledger*, April 16, 1919). American perceptions of Korea around 1900 had been "mediated by Japanese information channels" to believe that Koreans were resistant to modernity, the Korean government was corrupt and inept, and that Koreans needed Japan to correct these defects (Johnson 2011, 129). In 1917, Montaville Flowers wrote *The Japanese Conquest of American Opinion*, in which he revealed how the Japanese had organized pro-Japanese Americans to influence American public opinion through leaders at "churches, public schools, colleges, the public press, press bureaus and clubs and societies" (55). For example, the Japanese government attempted to frame the March First Movement as a blight for Koreans because if the "riots" were not suppressed, Koreans Bolsheviks might lead Koreans toward communism (*Great Falls Daily Tribune*, April 15, 1919). Koreans understood the importance of getting their message out to the public to challenge negative Japanese portrayals of Korea; it was a David versus Goliath crusade, and it was one of the most important elements of the March First Movement in America.

The American Response

It should be noted that the overwhelming response of the American public to the plight of Korea was apathy. In the aftermath of World War I, Americans were more concerned with European affairs than Korean independence. Thus, American newspapers only sporadically printed the Korean message, and when they did, the articles rarely made the front page. Notwithstanding this, Americans responded to the Korean message in disparate ways and support for Koreans came from disparate quarters of the American public. Some joined the League of the Friends of Korea in support of Korean independence; some expressed moral outrage at the mistreatment of Christians; and some congressmen parleyed Japanese brutality in Korea into an attack on Japan for its actions in China.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* was one of the first newspapers to support

the Korean independence activities in America. In its April 18, 1919 edition it opined that "it would be a mistake to regard the [Korean Congress] at Independence Hall as a futility, or to suppose that the adoption of the declaration which has been published will have no influence on the course of events." The newspaper argued that the Korean Congress could create an "adverse opinion to which Japan cannot be insensible and will elicit a demand for the redress of Korea's grievances," which could create enough pressure to bring about self-government that would be better than the current oppressive regime.

The Korean cause gained support from other American journalists. As a sampling, William Elliot Griffis, a long-time resident and educator in Japan, wrote that Japan "reverts…to medievalism" with its "militaristic and bureaucratic parasites" when "soldiers from…places notably backward in civilization are allowed to handle unarmed mobs in Korea, the result is that both religious rancor and primitive brutality have sway" (Griffis 1919, 830). Similarly, Frazier Hunt of the Chicago *Tribune-Omaha Daily Bee* wrote that "no power of the Japanese bayonets or no amount of Japanese promises can kill" the revolutionary spirit of Koreans. Hunt thought that Japan had wasted its first ten years in Korea because she "practiced Turkish cruelty with German efficiency" (*Omaha Daily Bee*, April 5, 1920). Hunt's articles were carried by multiple newspapers and reached a significant audience. And Dr. Lucy L. W. Wilson, principal of a Philadelphia school and newspaper contributor, opined that Japan made three blunders after the annexation of Korea: Japan used militarized rule, it denationalization the Koreans, and it officially sanctioned Shintoism in Korea (*Century Magazine* 1920, 546).

Homer B. Hulbert and Philip Jaisohn organized the League of the Friends of Korea to inform the American public about Korea's hardship under Japan. Americans joined this organization in support of the Korean cause. Jaisohn, director of the Bureau of Information for the KOPOGO, gave speeches along the eastern seaboard to promote Korean independence and to publicize the League.[4] This organization, established in April 1919, eventually had branches in 19 cities, including London, and had upwards

4. See for example, *Washington Times*, January 27, 1920.

of 10,000 members. In fact, Nebraska Senator George W. Norris served as the organization's vice-president. Hulbert, a former personal envoy of King Gojong, also actively recruited Americans to join the League. A favorite recruitment method of Hulbert's was to organize mass meetings at which he gave the keynote speech. On one occasion, 1,200 people attended a speech in Ohio, and on the two-year anniversary of the March First Movement 1,300 people attended a town hall commemoration in New York City—which is significant because only 100 Koreans lived in New York at the time (Hong 2016, 66). Another member, Dr. Floyd W. Tomkins, Rector of the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, organized a luncheon that was attended by "prominent citizens…from Philadelphia and other cities" in response to the sympathy "roused by the Korean Congress"; those in attendance "felt that the American people must do something to help the Koreans" and to "perfect an organization to inform the American public of the truth" of Korea's plight (*Philadelphia Record*, May 3, 1919).

American Christians responded to the Korean clarion call of Christian brotherhood with moral outrage at the treatment of Korean Christians. Numerous Christian congregations condemned Japan's oppression of Christians in Korea and offered manifestos of support for Korean Christians (*Korea Review*, June 1919, July 1919). A number of American newspaper outlets expressed distrust of the Japanese due to the mistreatment of Korean Christians. One Minneapolis paper wrote that Koreans were "slaughtered, imprisoned, scourged in the public streets, and driven into the mountain" much like "the stories of Roman martyrdom" (*Irish Standard*, October 25, 1919). Literary *Digest* also followed the arrests of missionaries and innocent bystanders as well as carrying picturxes of Koreans tied to crosses—which Americans interpreted as mocking the crucifixion of Jesus. The May 31, 1919 edition of the *Digest* posited that Japan "seems to have no policy or plan other than that of savage repression." Some newspapers argued that the mistreatment of Korean Christians meant that Japan and its militaristic culture stood in opposition to Western civilization.

While churches remained politically neutral, some felt morally compelled to speak against Japanese atrocities. An example of this was the Commission on Relations with the Orient of the Federal Council of the

Churches of Christ, which privately pressured Japan to alter its militarized rule in Korea, but did not speak publically about its concerns. The Commission conducted a three-month study that substantiated the abuse and killing of Korean demonstrators as well as the mistreatment of foreign missionaries (*South Bend News-Times*, July 16, 1919). It published a 125-page report that upheld Korean claims of atrocities.

The Council stated that "the Japanese colonial system…is thoroughly Prussian in its military severity and its treatment of the native population" and that "bands of armed Japanese thugs were turned loose upon the Korean crowds" (*Weekly Journal-Miner*, July 16, 1919). This report included eyewitness accounts of police brutality against demonstrators, mistreatment of women, forcible removal of injured demonstrators from hospitals, and hostility toward western missionaries. Many Koreans to this day view this book as a triumph in publicizing the demonstrations and Japan's brutal oppression of Korean nationalism, but, as discussed below, it actually supports Japan's colonial administration in Korea.

The Korean efforts to publicize Japan's underhanded diplomacy and brutal rule in Korea also garnered support from American politicians. Missouri Senator Selden P. Spencer and Nebraska Senator George W. Norris entered reports of abuse into the July 1919 and August 1919 Congressional Senate Record; Spencer and Norris proved to be allies of the Korean cause in a number of other areas as well. While these national congressmen advocated for the recognition of Korean suffering, they were but a handful of the 535 senators and representatives in America, and were unable to change the direction of American policy in favor of Korea. Yet, their support was enough to cause concern to Imperial Japan.

Most congressional support was less about sympathy for Korean suffering, than it was about criticism of Japan's actions in China or opposition to Wilson's League of Nations. Congressmen pointed to Japan's secret agreements and treaties that became public during the Paris Peace Conference; specifically, the British and French ceding to Japan Germany's concessions on the Shandong Peninsula. Some congressmen denounced the 21 Demands that Japan extorted from China in 1915; the 21 Demands strengthened Japan's economic and political presence in China at the

expense of Western nations. Japan's avarice sparked anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States, which snowballed into a backlash against Japanese immigration to the United States.

Korea was often used as political ammunition to attack Japan's actions in China. Senator Norris and other congressmen publicly stated that the atrocities in Korea proved that Japan was unworthy of ruling Shandong (Ku 2002, 254; Baldwin 1969, 152). Norris referred to Japan's actions on the Shandong Peninsula as an international crime; going so far as to call it a rape of China. Senator Medill McCormick (Illinois) opposed Japan's acquisition of Shandong because Japan, in his opinion, had violated treaties with Korea and China (*New York Times*, August 21, 1919). Congressmen felt that the hypocrisy of Japan, France, and Britain did not bode well for the longevity and integrity of the League of Nations. Norris said allying with Japan in the League of Nations would be "planting the seeds of future wars" (US Congress 1919, 58.3: 2595).

The Korean media efforts in the United States did not sway American public opinion in any significant way, and they failed to win support from either the Wilson or Harding administrations. The United States government deemed amicable relations with Japan more important than assisting Korean nationalists. Underlying the American apathy for Korean independence was America's lack of moral authority on colonial violence. Just twenty years previously the United States had brutally suppressed a rebellion in the Philippines; in the process of quelling the uprising, the United States military killed 16,000 rebels and, through mismanagement, caused the deaths of another 250,000 by disease and starvation (Kramer 2006, 210). What could America say to Japan without being a hypocrite? Furthermore, assuming America had backed the Korean cause, it is unlikely the United States alone could have liberated Korea.

The Pro-Japanese Response to the March First Movement

The Japanese government was sensitive to criticisms that impugned its reputation as a respectable world citizen. Thus, it could not allow the

negative coverage to go unanswered. As noted above, the Japanese had a history of influencing American public opinion in its favor and set out on a public relations campaign. To stymie the March First Movement in America, Japan enlisted Japanese statesmen and pro-Japanese Americans to reshape the narrative to one that showed Japan in a positive light. The pro-Japanese message reinforced the legitimacy of Japan's colonization of Korea, painted Koreans as unfit for self-rule, claimed that Koreans were happy with Japanese rule, and reassured Americans that Koreans exaggerated the violence committed by Japanese authorities in Korea.

Pro-Japanese advocates moved quickly to defend Japan's establishment of a protectorate over Korea in 1905. In April 1919, Baron Goto Shinpei (Home Minister, 1916–1918) addressed a luncheon attended by US Treasurer John Burke. Goto contended that Japan did not act duplicitously in 1905, but instead, "with the full cognizance of the United States government." Drawing international parallels, he claimed that what Japan was doing in Korea "does not differ from what the United States did in Puerto Rico and the Philippines." Goto told his audience that Japan "is unfortunately disturbed by family brawls and incompetent… disorderly neighbors" (*Albuquerque Morning Journal*, April 16, 1919). Korean Governor-General Saitō Makoto published a presser that stated, "The annexation was peacefully accomplished by mutual consent of the governments of the two nations." He added, "under the efficient government of Japan, the Korean people rapidly advanced in civilization and enjoyed the blessings resulting from the development of productive industry, as well as the spread of education." He claimed that he and his predecessors had only wanted to "improve the condition of the Korean people." Saitō assured the American reader that Japan's goals in Korea were noble; he blamed tactless petty officials for the abuse mentioned by Koreans (*Norwich Bulletin*, February 14, 1920).

In a blatant propaganda piece, Saitō wrote a four-page article in the Congregationalist weekly magazine, *The Independent*, under the heading, "A Message from the Imperial Japanese Government to the American People." Saitō insisted that Japan had "been grossly and unjustly misrepresented" by "exaggerations and even fictitious stories" released by Koreans and their

allies. He defended the Government-General's actions since 1910 as having "no other desire than to improve the condition of the Korean people" (Saito 1920, 167). He assured the American public that he had ordered colonial bureaucrats to treat Koreans as equals, and he also boasted that he intended to create a government so good that Koreans would abandon their identity in order to become Japanese. Saitō declared that East Asia was better off with Japan in control of the peninsular nation because "Korea ceased to be the storm center of the Far East" after annexation (Saito 1920, 169). The Saitō administration also published a series of books in English that presented in a positive light the reforms and progress of Japanese colonialism in Korea. *Pictorial Korea*, *Educational Korea*, *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen* [Korea], and *The New Administration in Korea* all outlined the post-March First Movement efforts of the colonial regime to win over the Korean people.[5]

Professor Nitobe Inazo of Tokyo Imperial University toured the United States to assuage American distrust of Japan and to downplay the brutality of the military police in Korea. Nitobe condemned the extremes of Japanese militarists in Korea, but reaffirmed the overall benevolence of Japan's colonial rule. Nitobe claimed that Japan is "misjudged" by Americans because of anti-Japanese propaganda produced by hostile Koreans (*Ogden Standard*, August 15, 1919). He was so sure that Koreans were incapable of self-government that he stated "Japan is willing to grant Korea six months independence, because Japan is confident that the Koreans would return to them for guidance after the test period is ended" (*Richmond Palladium*, June 24, 1919).

The Japanese also had a cadre of well-placed mouthpieces in the United States who claimed that the average Korean living in Korea was content with Japanese governmentality and had not expressed discontent before the uprising. Accordingly, agitation for the March First Movement came from forces outside Korea, some blamed Korean Bolsheviks and others accused

5. Some of these publications were annual reports released by the Japanese Government-General of Korea prior to 1919. However, the reports post-1919 tended to be significantly longer and more focused on the benefits of the reforms.

American missionaries in Korea (Chung 1921b, 251–254). George Trumbull Ladd, retired professor of philosophy at Yale and former diplomatic advisor to the Japanese government, wrote a half-page diatribe in the May 11, 1919 *New York Times* blaming Korean secret societies, radicals, and Christian missionaries for inciting the March First Movement; he claimed the movement lacked widespread support because the Korean economy was improving under the Japanese. He added, for good measure, that Koreans were unfit for self-government. Henry Chung responded (May 21, 1919) by questioning Ladd's knowledge of Korean affairs; Ladd retorted that the demonstrations were organized by "unscrupulous scoundrels" who were leading a "deluded people" (*New York Times*, May 25, 1919).

Sidney L. Gulick, an apologist for Japanese immigration to America, was another mouthpiece for the Japanese. He regularly defended Japanese immigration to the United States by challenging anti-Japanese legislation at the state and national level.[6] Gulick ranked among Japan's most reliable allies in the United States. He wrote that Japan's administration in Korea and "her development of [Korean] resources were admirable" (Gulick 1921, 8–9). Partially defending Japan's actions, Gulick argued that during the March First Movement, the Koreans were "not without blame." He opined that Japan had been scapegoated for America's failures in Asia, and that Japan was not an aggressor state in China.

Gulick was exasperated with the Japanese efforts to minimize, if not cover up, the atrocities committed in Korea. However, he nevertheless helped to mitigate the damage done to Japan's reputation in America. Gulick, as the secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, influenced the writing of *The Korean Situation: Authentic Accounts of Recent Events by Eye Witnesses*. It should be noted that this book is pro-Japanese. Granted, it includes eyewitness accounts that present the violence committed by the Japanese, yet, it was not designed to support Korean independence. Rather, it attempted to salvage the reputation of Imperial Japan. The atrocities in Korea, the authors claimed, were committed by a

6. See Gulick's *The New Anti-Japanese Agitation* (1920) as an example of his defense of Japan's position.

small number of reactionary militarists who needed to be condemned and controlled. William I. Haven and Gulick called on Americans to "give the strongest possible moral support to the progressive and anti-militaristic movements" in Japan. They cautioned against engaging in "wholesale condemnation of the Japanese Government and people," but instead urged Americans to support the liberal elements in Japan (Haven and Gulick 1919, 7).

The Forward of this book included a letter from Japanese Premier Hara Takashi who stated that positive reforms were planned before the "disturbances" but had to be delayed because of the March First Movement. He claimed to be "endeavoring to promote the lasting welfare" of Koreans (Haven and Gulick 1919, 3). Haven and Gulick wrote in the Forward that the Council believed that "Premier Hara and his colleagues will exert their fullest power to rectify the wrongs and inaugurate a new era in Korea" (Haven and Gulick 1919, 4). Given these factors, the book aimed to undermine the Korean independence movement.

In a follow-up booklet to the *Korea Situation*, the Commission on Relations with the Orient pushed the pro-Japanese agenda even further by calling on friends of Korea to support Japan's reforms because Koreans were not ready for independence. It claimed that the proposed reforms, if wisely instituted, would allow Korean culture to survive, while teaching the Korean people much needed self-control and providing them an education in preparation for independence—which Japan *might* offer in the distant future. The booklet also reassured Americans that the Japanese colonial regime was not hostile to Christianity (Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America and Commission on Relations with the Orient 1920, 25–27).

Another public relations coup for Japan came in August 1920 when an unofficial delegation of congressmen and businessmen visited China, Korea, and Japan to examine Asian affairs. The delegation traveled throughout China before spending three days in Korea. The colonial regime orchestrated an itinerary that focused on the colonial regime's industrialization and modernization efforts. The schedule limited the delegation's contact with Koreans to a handful of individuals who were pro-Japanese. Only California Representative Hugh S. Hersman made an effort to visit regular Koreans;

one evening he deviated from the schedule to visit Koreans at a YMCA. The delegation then spent two weeks in Japan where they met distinguished Japanese politicians, traveled to historic sites, and enjoyed famed scenery. The efforts of the Japanese government to win support and peddle influence for a favorable report from the delegation were successful. The United States Congress acknowledged the wrongs committed during suppression of the March First Movement, but stated America could not interfere in Japan's internal affairs because Korea was "as fixedly a part of [Japan] as California, Arizona, and New Mexico are a part of the United States" (US Congress 1921, 60.1: 719–720).

The Legacy of March First in America

Korean public relations efforts remained active into the early 1920s, but with reduced output. Korean nationalists made one final push for recognition of Korean independence at the Washington Naval Conference (November 1921–February 1922). However, the Japanese government successfully excluded Koreans from the negotiations, and in turn used the conference to bolster Japan's international image as a world citizen. Japan relinquished the Shandong concessions acquired from Germany, offered support for the Open Door policy in China, and agreed to participate in the naval arms limitations treaties. The resulting treaties quieted American criticism of Japan's expansion in China for the time being. The Japanese government parlayed their participation in these conferences as a public relations coup that undermined the Korean nationalist movement in America. Furthermore, American public opinion was placated by the reforms instituted in Korea after the March First Movement.

Koreans were also stymied by an ambivalent American public and a well-financed Japanese publicity machine; they failed to gain the support of the Wilson or Harding administrations—both of which were careful to take no action in relation to Korea that might alienate Japan (Savage 1996, 197). The reality was that the independence of Korea was subordinated to global politics. Yet, the March First Movement in the United States left a legacy

that is worthy of examination. Koreans in America determinedly publicized Japan's historical duplicity and broadcast the violent oppression of the peaceful demonstrations. In doing so, they won support for their cause from an array of Americans. More impressively, they did it all in a foreign country and in an inhospitable social environment.

Nevertheless, the March First Movement brought a new resolve and reinforced nationalist identity among Koreans in America, even if the community continued to be plagued with factionalism. The unification of the KNA and the Korean National Independence League lasted only two months, and later the KNA in Hawaii and the KNA of North America schismatized (Kim and Ch'oe 2007, 146). This enervated the Korean community and hindered their ability to advance the gains of the March First Movement as energy and finances were wasted on infighting which alienated the average Korean (Patterson 2000, 109). Despite this, Koreans in America grew more unified in purpose and in their ethnicity; Koreans cooperated in the boycott of Japanese businesses, and every first of March the Korean community celebrated the independence movement. Further, families joined together in sacrificing personal financial security to support political leaders. These activities solidified the Korean culture in America (D. Kim 2009, 98).

One of the more important outcomes of the March First Movement was that it transformed American public opinion of the Korean nation. The adherence to nonviolence throughout the demonstrations, even after the Japanese resorted to brutality, left a lasting impression on Americans that resulted in a more positive and sympathetic image of Koreans. Articulate and educated Koreans, such as Henry Chung, Syngman Rhee, and Philip Jaisohn, helped to reframe the Korean national character within American public opinion to include one of moral strength and patriotism. Their efforts paid dividends more than two decades later when Koreans were rewarded with national independence after World War II, albeit divided and a bit delayed.

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