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Anna Cooper
Illinois Wesleyan University, cooperanna830@gmail.com

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Korea's Explosive Declaration of Independence: Complex Influences Leading Up to the March
First Movement of 1919

Anna Cooper

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Introduction

On March 1, 1919, thirty-three religious Korean leaders gathered in the T'aehwagwan restaurant in Seoul to officially promulgate a Declaration of Independence with their signatures. Korea had been formally annexed by Japan in 1910 but had held a colonial status under Japanese rule since 1905. The declaration signers intentionally chose the date of March 1st in order to capitalize on the masses of citizens coming to Seoul to observe the scheduled funeral rites of King Kojong, the last reigning monarch of Korea, which were to take place on March 3, 1919. With the announcement of the declaration, they proclaimed Korea an independent nation, authoritatively free from Japanese rule. Simultaneously, students had congregated in Pagoda Park to hear their own reading of the declaration. Shortly after the reading, the students marched through the streets in a peaceful movement, yelling "Tongnip manse!" (Long live Korean independence!)¹ With these actions, the March First Movement, "the greatest mass movement of the Korean people in all their history,"² officially began.

Drafted in a couple days by twenty-nine year old Ch'oe Namsön (1890-1957), the Korean Declaration of Independence professed the right of the Korean people to determine their own national existence.³ The opening paragraph of the Declaration states,

We hereby declare that Korea is an independent state and that Koreans are a self-governing people. We proclaim it to the nations of the world in affirmation of the principle of the equality of all nations, and we proclaim it to our posterity, preserving in perpetuity the right of national survival. We make this declaration on the strength of five thousand years of history, as an expression of the devotion and loyalty of twenty million people. We claim independence in the interest of the eternal and free development of our people, and in accordance with the great movement for world reform based upon the awakening conscience of mankind. This is a clear command of Heaven, the course of our times, and the legitimate manifestation of the right of all nations to coexist and live in harmony. Nothing in the world can suppress or block it.⁴

The opening lines of the Declaration reveal the intentions behind the March First Movement. The signers wanted self-determined independence of Korea to be immediately implemented. Because of the Movement leaders' urgency, the Declaration did not blame Japan for any grievances or past transgressions against the Korean people. However, it did briefly acknowledge the treatment of Koreans by the Japanese. The Declaration describes its perspective as follows:

We do not intend to accuse Japan of infidelity for its violation of various solemn treaty obligations since the Treaty of Amity in 1876. Japan's scholars and officials, including indulging in a conqueror's exuberance, have denigrated the accomplishments of our ancestors and treated our civilized people like barbarians. Despite their disregard for the ancient origin of our society and for the brilliance of the spirit of our people, we shall not blame Japan; we must first blame ourselves before finding fault with others. Because of

¹ Ki-baek Lee, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Published for the Harvard-Yenching Institute by Harvard University Press, 1984), 341.

² Ibid.

³ Han-Kyo Kim, "The Declaration of Independence, March 1, 1919: A New Translation," *Korean Studies* 13 (1989): 1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23717805>.

⁴ Kim, 2.

the urgent need for remedies for the problems of today, we cannot afford the time for recrimination over past wrongs.⁵

Thus, immediate remedies to the oppressive colonization were deemed more important than inciting revenge or violence against Japan. In other words, the declaration was intended to incite a peaceful Movement for independence by the Korean people.⁶

Promptly after reading the Declaration of Independence in the T'aehwagwan, the thirty-three signers informed Japanese authorities of their actions and were arrested. They had planned on turning themselves in, under the belief that the "independence movement they had launched [would] be carried forward first of all by the students and then be spread by the entire people."⁷ The planned gathering of students in Pagoda Park had started the demonstrations, and by March 5th, "shopkeepers, farmers, laborers, and other citizens [had] joined in."⁸ The leaders' plan had come to fruition. The demonstrations for independence rapidly reached outside of Seoul, moving "south to Pusan by March 11, and north to Chientao by March 13."⁹ The independence demonstrations also spread overseas to Manchuria, the Russia Maritime Territory, and Hawaii.¹⁰ In total, the Movement amassed over two million Korean participants who demonstrated in 1500 protests throughout 211 of the 218 county administrations.¹¹

This independence movement came from a combination of various influences: the harsh and structured colonization that Korea had been enduring under Japan since 1910, the spread of anti-imperialist global ideology after World War I, and the prior establishment of Protestant missionaries and schools throughout Korea. Before the March First Movement, there had been two non-violent attempts by Koreans to connect with the international community and appeal for Korea's independence.¹² These failed attempts will be discussed to frame Korea's position in the international community prior to the Movement, and demonstrate how they also may have motivated the Movement to occur when it did. After World War I, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points speech was going to guide negotiations in Paris. At the Paris Peace Conference, three Korean representatives' petitions for independence were ignored. This was Korea's last attempt to appeal for independence. Because of this last rejection from the international community and the masses of people coming to Seoul for national mourning, Korean leaders were compelled to use this opportune moment to showcase their discontentment.

The other aspect of the anti-imperial ideology that will be a focus for examination is the presence and role of Protestant missionaries in Korea prior to and during the March First Movement. Missionaries primarily distributed Westernized education and ideas throughout Korea. In doing so, a national anti-Japanese consciousness was formed, and the March First Movement leaders capitalized on that sentiment. While some missionaries outwardly opposed Japanese colonization practices and directly aided the Movement, missionary organizations

⁵ Kim, 2.

⁶ Lee, 342.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Frank Balwin, "Participatory Anti-Imperialism: The 1919 Independence Movement," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 1 (1979): 125, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41490143>.

¹⁰ Lee, 344.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hope Elizabeth May, "The March 1st Movement and the Red Thread of International Peace History," *Korea Observer* 50 (2): 217, doi:10.29152/KOIKS.2019.50.2.207.

demonstrated a reluctance to address or engage in the political issues the Movement raised.¹³ However, it is clear that this Movement would not have been as widespread or inclusive without the vital influence of these missionaries, and that will be highlighted in this paper.

The huge scale of this independence movement shocked Japanese authorities, who quickly worked to suppress the effort. The suppression of the Movement was brutal and utilized Japanese police forces, gendarmerie, and even troops of the army and navy.¹⁴ Reports from Japanese authorities recorded “46,948 demonstrators arrested, 7,509 killed, and 15,961 injured” during the Movement.¹⁵ Additionally, “715 houses were destroyed or burned,” along with 47 churches, and two schools.¹⁶ It is likely that these reports from Japanese authorities do not fully reflect the reality and cruelty of the suppression efforts by the Japanese colonial government. The true numbers are probably much higher. Ultimately, though, the Japanese suppressed the Movement and Korea did not receive enough support from the international community. While the March First Movement had demonstrated Korean anger over the realities of colonizations and aspirations for independence, it failed to achieve or implement its goal of independence for the Korean people. Colonial control was not lifted under Japan’s defeat at the end of WWII in 1945.

This paper intends to demonstrate that Korea’s March First Movement of 1919 was evoked by an amalgamation of factors; specifically, Japan’s influence was never accepted by Korea, so the combination of harsh Japanese colonization practices, anti-imperial global ideology after WWI, and the establishment of Protestant missionaries and education in Korea all pushed Korean leaders to create an independence movement which quickly spread throughout the entire country. An overview of Japan’s relations with Korea leading to colonization is provided to help contextualize how these factors emerged and conjoined together to incite the Movement.

Literature Review

There are a growing number of scholarly works that present compelling arguments about the origins of the March First Movement. However, not many comprehensive Korean histories had been written until the 1960s, when scholar Ki-baek Lee released his work *Han’guska Sillon* (A New History of Korea) in 1961, with major revisions in 1967 and 1976. In 1984, Edward W. Wagner translated the work into English. This translation has offered English readers an extensive work about Korean history and culture from the earliest times until 1960. While this work is important and a crucial contribution to the historiography of Korean history, its analysis of the March First Movement’s origins suffers because of its attempt to cover the entirety of Korean history until its publishing year. Lee’s is not a work about the March First Movement and its inspirations; it is a work about Korean cultural history. In this way, his analysis of the Movement’s origins does not intend to be comprehensive.¹⁷

¹³ A. Hamish Ion, *The Cross and the Rising Sun : The British Protestant Movement in Japan, Korea and Taiwan, 1865-1945*, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 207, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴ Lee, 344.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Put simply, by the late 1960s, barely any English works about Korean history had been written by scholars. Other Korean historical works had been written by missionaries, but by 1961, the most recently published work was around thirty years old. This gap was filled by scholar Ki-baek Lee’s *A New History of Korea* (1961, revised in 1967 and 1976). This work was intended to be a basic text that would give a survey history of Korea. Lee’s narrative interweaves political, social and economic Korean history to provide an extensive Korean cultural history, including

Other scholarly English works that grapple with the colonization of Korea exist, but they mainly provide Japanese perspectives. While these works help shed light on Japanese colonial practices, motivations, and even the language of power used by the Japanese, the Korean voice is often lost in English scholarly works. These works also tend to focus on one aspect of the Movement's origins: Japanese harsh colonial practices. They do not provide a comprehensive study into the Movement's beginnings, inspirations, and aftereffects.¹⁸ In that respect, there seems to be a big gap in understanding the causes of the Movement in scholarly work about Korean history, especially in English works. While there are certainly dissertations and other works that focus on a single aspect of the March First Movement, such as the link between the Movement and specifically British missionaries, or the link between the Movement and Wilsonianism, there appears to be no English study that combines all of the influences of the Movement into a single piece of work.¹⁹ Although these works provide insight about a particular aspect of the Movement's causes, the Movement's complexity is better understood through a consideration of all of these forces. In that respect, the March First Movement has been neglected by scholars even though it is such an important Movement in the modern history of Korea. This study, then, serves to fill that scholarly gap and contribute to the contemporary state of scholarly work on Korea as a comprehensive but critical history into the Movement's inspirations.

A striking part of my research process was the lack of translated primary sources about the March First Movement. In that way, I must acknowledge that my work has been limited in its ability to write about the leaders of the movement, among other subjects. Despite these

the origins of the March First Movement. Lee credits Wilson's doctrine of self-determination as the sole catalyst for the Movement, briefly describes the role of missionary education in Korea, and gives an in-depth account of the Japanese colonization of Korea. Lee's book is a crucial source in any historical research surrounding the March First Movement, and Korean history in general. However, Lee's work is primarily a Korean perspective, and fails to account for the nuanced Japanese motivations behind colonization. It is also a work with comprehensive descriptions of Korean historical events, and thus, is less dedicated to analytical interpretations. This could certainly be due to the fact that Lee covers the entirety of Korean history until its publishing year, from the Paleolithic Age to the 1960. Regardless, Lee's work is crucial academic work for the study of Korean history, including the March First Movement.

¹⁸ Other notable works surrounding the March First Movement and Japanese colonization include *A History of Korea: From "Land of the Morning Calm" to States in Conflict* by Jinwung Kim (2012), and *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, edited by Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (1984). These two works address the March First Movement in varying degrees, usually limited to a chapter. Jinwung Kim's work provides an in-depth description of the Movement itself, while *The Japanese Colonial Empire* mainly analyzes the whole colonial empire of Japan, with specific sections about Korea's colonization. Both works do analyze the motivations behind the Movement. Kim's work only credits harsh Japanese rule as the catalyst for the Movement, and hardly mentions Wilson's self-determination doctrine. In contrast, Myers and Peattie's work goes more in-depth about Western missionary education but again mainly attributes harsh Japanese colonial practices as the impetus of the Movement. Another work that grapples with the colonization of Korea is Alexis Dudden's *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (2005). This work focuses on the nuanced terminology used during the colonization and industrialization of Korea, which has been largely ignored in the study of imperial Japan. While this work sheds light on the Japanese perspectives surrounding colonization in Korea and the non-violent attempts of Koreans to garner support from the international community, it is largely focused on before the Movement occurred, rather than the origins of the Movement itself.

¹⁹ For in-depth information on the March First Movement's relationship to Wilsonianism and international peace efforts, refer to Hope Elizabeth May's "The March 1st Movement and the Red Thread of International Peace History" (2019) in the *Korea Observer* Vol. 50, Issue 2: doi:10.29152/KOIKS.2019.50.2.207. For more information on the presence and influence of British Protestants in Korea, refer to A. Hamish Ion's *The Cross and the Rising Sun: The British Protestant Movement in Japan, Korea and Taiwan, 1865-1945*.

challenges, this work seeks to provide a more comprehensive study of the March First Movement by providing the original ideology behind the Movement, how those ideas were dispersed throughout colonized Korea, and an account of the Movement itself.

The Opening of Japan

Prior to the late 1850s, Japan was a feudal and self-isolated society. Japan's little Western contact was with the Dutch, who had been allowed a single trading ship annually at the port of Nagasaki since 1790.²⁰ Otherwise, Japan was a closed country, seemingly uninterested in engaging with the existing global trade network. However, during the late 1850s, various Western powers were looking to expand their trading and their colonies. This desire was demonstrated through the complex network of unequal treaties European powers had meticulously constructed for other non-European states. These treaties included privileges such as extraterritoriality, fixed tariffs, the opening of treaty ports, and the most-favored-nation clause. These treaties were extremely one sided, and worked to limit the powers of the nations they were imposed upon. They were enforced in a pattern that was applied to "Persia in 1836 and 1857, to Turkey in 1838 and 1861, to Siam in 1855, and, most importantly, to China in 1842 and 1858."²¹

In particular, the United States began to have a prominent interest in Japan, viewing the country as "a tantalizingly mysterious closed empire... an untapped potential trading partner, [and] a prospective market with a population larger than the United States."²² This resulted in American and European "warships [beginning] to arrive off Japan's coastline."²³ Under threat of war, and after some two years of negotiation, Japan finally agreed to unequal Western terms in the Treaty of Amity and Commerce (1858), which was negotiated between Japan and the United States. Also referred to as the Harris Treaty, this agreement opened five Japanese ports to U.S. trade and granted extraterritoriality to U.S. citizens.²⁴ The Harris Treaty was not only the first time Japan became involved in global trade, but also established a foundational trade agreement that guided later unequal treaties that Japan signed with other European nations.²⁵

Various Japanese responses arose during the two years of negotiation over the Harris Treaty. Japanese nationalists rallied against the treaty as an "insulting infringement of national sovereignty,"²⁶ while others saw it as an opportunity for Japan to advance globally. Etō Shinpei, a Saga samurai, wrote in a detailed memorandum in 1856 to document his conversion from supporting exclusion policies to embracing opening policies.²⁷ Etō was a member of the Tokugawa *shishi*, a group of samurai who saw themselves as men of action and whose assassination squads were destabilizing the Tokugawa shogunate. In the memorandum, Etō compared the feasibility of exclusion by Japan during the seventeenth century to the growing power of the contemporary West. Ultimately, he concluded that Japan could not stay closed

²⁰ Peter D. Eicher, "Shimoda and the Shogun: Townsend Harris and the Opening of Japan." In *Raising the Flag: America's First Envoys in Faraway Lands*, 293–340. University of Nebraska Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6p4gt.14>. 293.

²¹ Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds. *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10crf6c>.

²² Eicher, 293.

²³ Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2005. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wr01f.6>. 28.

²⁴ Eicher, 332.

²⁵ Myers and Peattie, 63.

²⁶ Myers and Peattie, 62.

²⁷ Myers and Peattie, 63.

because of the strength Western nations were showing, but had to be cautious when opening. He argued that Japan required a plan to not only utilize the talent and knowledge of the Japanese, but to also seek out knowledge and talent worldwide. According to Etō, whatever excellence that might be found in “tools, in arms, in medicine, in land development, in astronomy” should be used by Japan to develop national strength and wealth. By creating and enforcing policies that utilized this new knowledge, Japan would develop into a powerful country that could “defeat any enemy and [be] strong enough to expand.”²⁸

Therefore, the growing strength of Western nations had prompted Japanese thoughts about competition and protection. This kind of thinking was present among Tokugawa *shishi* like Etō, and many similar notes and thoughts were written throughout the late Tokugawa period.²⁹ Etō’s memorandum then demonstrates two main ideas held by Japanese citizens at the time: that Japan would benefit greatly from opening itself as many Western nations had, and that by emulating Western techniques, Japan could become just as wealthy and powerful as other Western nations. Emulation had been perceived by the Japanese as the “remaining option” after “[direct] resistance to the West was quickly seen to be futile and dangerous.”³⁰ Etō’s memorandum is just one example of the many Japanese citizens and leaders who considered the vast benefits Japan would experience through emulation.³¹

The Opening of Korea

Similar to Japan, Korea was a feudal and isolated state for centuries. However, during the seventh century the Korean kingdom of Silla entered into an alliance with the T’ang dynasty of China. Afterwards, Korea became “skilled at adapting Chinese institutions to their own needs.”³² After the Mongol conquest of Korea in 1270, Korea was under more direct imperial control of China because Goryeo princes began marrying Mongol princesses. When the Joseon (Chosŏn) dynasty (1392-1897) was established, however, Korea became a nominal tributary state of China from 1401 until 1882.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which overthrew the last of the shoguns, the new Japanese government immediately declared its intention to “conduct itself with all nations ‘according to international law.’”³³ The Meiji Council of State began issuing instructions concerning foreign relations to the young emperor. Subsequently, the Charter Oath was drafted in April of 1868, which contained five principles to be upheld. Most notably, the fifth principle stated, “We shall seek knowledge throughout the world and thus invigorate the foundations of this imperial nation.”³⁴ Thus, the new Meiji government was focused on improving Japan’s global position and becoming an imperialist nation.

During the Meiji period, Japan made efforts to open new and direct dealings with Korea. Specifically, in 1876, Japan secured the Treaty of Kanghwa with Korea’s Joseon government.³⁵

²⁸ Myers and Peattie, 63.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Donald N. Clark, Denis C. Twitchett, and Frederick W. Mote, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming,” In *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 272, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521243339.007.

³³ Dudden, 31.

³⁴ John Breen, “The Imperial Oath of April 1868: Ritual, Politics, and Power in the Restoration,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 51, no. 4 (1996): 410, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2385417>.

³⁵ Dudden, 9.

This treaty resulted from a series of events that emulated the Western pattern of forcibly opening countries to trade. Known as the *Unyō* Incident, in 1875, the Japanese sent the navy ship *Unyō* to the waters off Kanghwa Island. This ship was promptly fired upon by the Korean defenders stationed at the Ch'ojjin barriers.³⁶ While the Japanese government claimed the incident was provoked by Korea and the *Unyō* was on a peaceful mission, it was later revealed that the ship's commander had been given orders to "create some sort of incident."³⁷

Shortly after, Japan appointed Kuroda Kiyotaka as a minister spokesperson and sent him to Korea. Kuroda arrived at the Kapkot promontory, located on the east coast of Kanghwa, with a squadron of two warships and three troop transports consisting of around four hundred soldiers.³⁸ When he arrived, Kuroda demanded Korea enter into treaty negotiations with Japan. While a majority of Korean high officials urged that there should be no discussions with the Japanese, Third State Councilor Pak Kyu-su was convinced by Japanese translator-interpreter O Kyōng-sōk to "adopt a policy of trade and amicable relations."³⁹ Korea then negotiated a treaty with Minister Kuroda, now known as the Treaty of Kanghwa.

The Treaty of Kanghwa included twelve articles. Most notably, one of the articles proclaimed that Korea, as an autonomous nation, "possessed equal sovereign rights with Japan."⁴⁰ This article assured that Japan was not going to be aggressive towards Korea's sovereignty, but this acknowledgement of Korea as an autonomous nation was strategic. The underlying Japanese motive behind this article was to deter interference from China, whose suzerainty claims over Korea the treaty had then rejected.⁴¹ Another article stipulated that Korea would open a total of three ports to Japan, including Pusan, within twenty months after signing. This became the most important feature of the treaty because Japan was able to choose specific ports to open that would be the most beneficial. This discretion and control allowed Japan to choose the Bay of Wōnsan to open, precisely selected to "block Russia's southward advance."⁴² Additionally, the treaty allowed the Japanese to "survey Korean coastal waters at will" and permitted extraterritoriality to Japanese citizens, "authorizing the establishment of Japanese settlements on land to be leased in the opened ports, with their Japanese residents subject to Japanese law as applied by Japanese courts."⁴³ These special privileges allowed Japanese residents in Korean sovereign territory to be governed by Japan's laws. As a result of this treaty, Japanese diplomats and merchants began moving into extraterritorial settlements in Korea. Again, emulating a Western practice, Japanese troops were stationed to protect these compounds.⁴⁴

Thus, the *Unyō* Incident was a designed scenario by the Japanese which forced Korea into treaty negotiations and effectively opened Korea. The Treaty of Kanghwa was an unequal treaty, and closely emulated the Harris Treaty that had been imposed on Japan. Japan's aggressive intent was clear through its use of warships to provoke the *Unyō* Incident, and the treaty demonstrates how Japan approached its relations with Korea from the perspective of

³⁶ Lee, 268.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lee, 268.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 269.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Dudden, 9.

advancing its intentions of military, political, and economic aggression.⁴⁵ The Treaty of Kanghwa also held great historical significance for Korea because it was the first time Korea was brought onto the international stage. The opening of Korea led to the beginning of gradual trade with Western powers and the introduction of Western civilization to Korean society. More significantly, Japan and China began competing over the newly opened nation.

Competition Between China and Japan Over Influence in Korea

I. The Military Mutiny of 1882

Two specific situations highlight the competition between China and Japan over influence in Korea and demonstrate Korea's resistance towards solely Japanese influence. Because of Korea's history as a tributary state of China, Korea looked to China for support during these two instances. The first incident was the Military Mutiny (Imo Mutiny) of 1882, which resulted in the strengthening of China's position in Korea. After the Treaty of Kanghwa was finalized in 1876, Korea sent Kim Koeng-jip that same year on a mission to investigate progress in Japan. For four years, Kim observed the developments ensuing in Japan and worldwide, cultivating a desire in him to enlighten Korea. When he left Japan in 1880, Kim acquired a copy of a treaty titled "A Policy for Korea," written by Huang Tsun-hsien, a Chinese legation counselor in Tokyo.⁴⁶ Similar to Etō Shinpei's memorandum regarding Tokugawa Japan, Huang argued that Korea would become a stronger nation by adopting Western institutions and technology. "A Policy for Korea" became a significant factor that contributed to the later mutiny.

Other Koreans were sent to Japan in a gentlemen's sightseeing group on an inspection mission.⁴⁷ This group traveled throughout Japan for over seventy days with the purpose of surveying a multitude of Japan's modernized facilities. In Japan, the group inspected a wide range of facilities including administrative agencies, military facilities, educational complexes, and industrial facilities as well.⁴⁸ Simultaneously, at the urging of the Qing government, Korea sent a large group of students from *yangban* families (the highest social class in the Joseon dynasty) and artisans to Tientsin on a mission. While in China, the group was taken to the Chinese government arsenal where they studied military applications of basic science and modern weapon manufacture.⁴⁹ Korea was making a conscious and discernible effort to become familiar with modern advances. With all of this new knowledge, Korea began enacting enlightened governmental reforms. While King Kojong became specifically interested in military reforms, other administrative reforms that dealt with foreign relations and affairs were enacted. New agencies were created, such as foreign trade, production, shipbuilding, military munitions, and machinery.⁵⁰

However, when Kim Koeng-jip had brought back "A Policy for Korea," King Kojong had the treatise copied and distributed to the public. This was an effort to open the eyes of the Confucian literati who opposed the enlightenment policy. After the distribution, opposing memorials began streaming into the government. Defenders of Joseon's traditional ways were so outraged that they turned to the Taewŏn'gun, the father of King Kojong. The Taewŏn'gun took advantage of this situation and began to make plans to bring himself back into power.

⁴⁵ Lee, 269.

⁴⁶ Lee, 270.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 271.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

King Kojong had invited an elite unit of Japanese military officers to Korea to train a unit of Korean soldiers. These Japanese forces were to be treated favorably, with the best food and provisions being provided for them. Simultaneously, regular Korean troops received rice, which were bags of rice mixed with sand to make the rations seem more plentiful. This difference in provisions created an anti-Japanese sentiment among Korean troops, and further exacerbated the situation. The anti-Japanese attitudes held by the traditional Korean troops, Taewŏn'gun's efforts to take over, and the tension between conservative and enlightenment advocates, were enough to bring about the mutiny. Because of the new military reforms, traditional military units were going to be completely eliminated from Korea's forces. Consequently, old line units had not been given their pay or ration for around thirteen months.⁵¹ When several transports carrying rice taxes from Chŏlla were in route to Seoul, it was decided that these funds were going to be used to first pay the soldiers. When the transports arrived at the *Sŏnhyench'ŏng* (the office created to administer the Uniform Land Tax Law), the depot clerks took the rations for their own profit. The superintendent of operations of the *Sŏnhyench'ŏng* and Queen Min's nephew, Min Kyŏm-ho, had also taken the rice for his own use. Infuriated, the cheated soldiers fought the ration clerks, causing Min Kyŏm-ho to arrest and sentence the ringleaders of the soldiers to death.⁵² In light of this news, the soldiers stormed Min Kyŏm-ho's house, consequently forcing him to flee to the palace for protection.⁵³

The soldiers sought out the support of the Taewŏn'gun, who proceeded to meet in secret with the leaders of the mutiny. He had his own trusted subordinates instruct the soldiers' actions.⁵⁴ Under this direction, the soldiers began gathering weapons and attacked the prison where their leaders were being held, effectively freeing them. In the chaos, they killed Horimoto Reizō, a Japanese training officer who had been invited to Korea by Queen Min to aid military modernization efforts. After the Japanese legation that had been established in Seoul was attacked by the soldiers, Japanese Minister Hanabusa Yoshitada escaped back to Japan. The soldiers invaded the palace quarters the following day and killed Min Kyŏm-ho. Because of the intensity of this perilous situation, King Kojong brought the Taewŏn'gun back to the palace, and he was restored to power.⁵⁵ The Taewŏn'gun reinstated the old military structure, effectively ending the pursuit of the enlightenment policy in Korea. However, as a result of the Military Mutiny, both Japan and China began intervening in Korea's affairs.

This situation exacerbated Korea's precarious global position. Minister Hanabusa returned to Korea with army and navy forces and instructions from Tokyo to initiate negotiations with the Korean government. Deeply disturbed by this show of military force, Qing China agreed with Korean envoy Kim Yun-sik, who was in Tientsin at that time, to send troops to Korea to confront the Japanese. A superior force of 4,500 men was dispatched to Korea under the command of Wu Ch'ang-ch'ing. Under the justification that it was Korea's suzerain power, China argued that it must help its client state during such internal disorder.⁵⁶ The Qing dynasty also recommended that the Joseon government conclude a treaty with the United States later in

⁵¹ Lee, 272.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 273.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 274.

1882, in order to preserve Korea's tributary relationship with China.⁵⁷ This was an opportunity for China to restore its position of dominance in Korea which had been seized by Japan. General Wu began stationing Chinese soldiers throughout Seoul. Wu then captured the Taewŏn'gun, and sent him to Tientsin where he was placed under protective custody.

With the Taewŏn'gun out of power, the Japanese took advantage of the situation. Treaty negotiations immediately resumed and the Treaty of Chemulpo was finalized. The terms of the treaty specifically punished the leaders of the mutiny and indemnified "the families of the Japanese victims."⁵⁸ It also required a payment of 500,000 yen in reparations to the Japanese government, and "Japan was permitted to station a company of guards at the Japanese legation in Seoul."⁵⁹ While this treaty would seem to increase Japan's influence in Korea, Qing China had ultimately benefited from the Military Mutiny. China had greatly expanded its authority in Korea and reasserted its rights as the suzerain power because of its dispatch of troops.⁶⁰ Korea had also sought out China's help and high families in the Korean court became a pro-China faction that actively pursued support from China. Because of these Korean perspectives, China was able to appoint two foreign affair advisors in Korea, namely German P. G. von Möllendorff, an advisor who had served in China for many years and Chinese diplomat Ma Chien-ch'ang.⁶¹ Furthermore, in October of 1882, the Regulations for Maritime and Overland Trade Between Joseon and Qing was finalized, which effectively clarified the suzerain role of China and the vassal role of Korea.⁶² Thus, the Military Mutiny resulted in the Korean government coming under the strong influence of Qing China.

From this point, the relationship between the Joseon and Qing dynasties changed from a tributary agreement to a more traditional suzerain-vassal relation. Simultaneously, being mindful of Russia's southward expansion, Japan followed a policy of cooperation towards the Qing dynasty that avoided any mention of tributary relations issues even though Japan outwardly rejected this relationship.⁶³ However, Japan did raise the idea of a number of countries, including Japan and the Qing dynasty, becoming responsible for the protection of Korea. In this constructed notion, Japan would enjoy equal standing with Qing China. While the Joseon government was more passive, the Qing dynasty refused this idea outright, so it was never implemented in Korea.⁶⁴

II. The Tonghak Peasant Army Uprising (1894)

The other situation that demonstrates the intense competition between China and Japan for influence in Korea and Korea's opposition to Japanese influence is the Tonghak Peasant Army Uprising. After a coup attempt by Korea's Progressive Party in 1884 further complicated Chinese and Japanese relations in regards to influence, Russian minister Karl Waeber was stationed in Seoul. This was a stipulation of a treaty that had been concluded between Russia and Korea that same year. Waeber was a savvy diplomat, and began to visit Korean court often,

⁵⁷ Mayuko Mori, "The Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the Issue of Suzerain-Vassal as Viewed from the Standpoint of Chosŏn," *International Journal of Korean History* 17, no. 1 (2012): 30, <https://ijkh.khistory.org/upload/pdf/17-1-2.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Lee, 274.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Lee, 274.

⁶² Mori, 30.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

eventually “[fostering] a pro-Russian force” in the Joseon government.⁶⁵ This inclination was furthered by Advisor Möllendorff who believed Russia could balance the influence of China and Japan in Korea. The efforts of Möllendorff and Waeber came to fruition in 1888, when an Overland Trade Agreement opened Kyōnghūng, a Tumen River town near the border with Russia, to Russian trade, granted Russia full navigation rights on the Tumen River, and allowed Russians to live there in an extraterritorial settlement.⁶⁶ Concerned with the influx of Russian influence, China replaced Möllendorff with an American advisor (who also ended up advocating for ties with Russia) and returned the Taewōn’gun to Korea. England also dispatched a naval force to the southern coast of Korea in 1885, which was prepared to counter any other Russian movement.⁶⁷ Essentially, Korea found itself in a grave international position, caught between the conflicting ambitions of several countries.

In addition to Korea’s critical international situation, the country began to confront domestic issues. After the Treaty of Kanghwa, a chronic financial crisis had ensued in part due to the restitution payments to Japan, diplomatic missions, and the establishment of modern facilities.⁶⁸ Regardless, most of the financial burden had fallen on the peasantry, who were ruled by the *yangban* class. Japan’s economic position in Korea had declined after Japanese involvement in the failed coup of 1884. Despite their involvement, Japanese economic activity achieved extraordinary proportions that “no other nation could rival” during the 1890s.⁶⁹ In 1893, around 1300 merchant ships arrived in Korea, and Japanese merchants made up 210 of the 258 businesses at the open ports.⁷⁰ Overall, Japan was responsible for over 50% of imports into Korea and received more than 90% of exports out of Korea. While China was responsible for around 49% of other imports, neither Russia nor China came close to Japan’s economic aggression and involvement in Korea’s foreign trade during the 1890s.

To combat the increase of Japan’s economic influence, the Joseon government began prohibiting the exportation of rice from specific provinces. As rural Korean villages sank further into poverty, the peasantry began retaining a growing hostility towards their *yangban* rulers and foreign exploiters. These issues culminated in the Tonghak Peasant Uprising, which was a widespread revolutionary movement of the peasantry against the oppressive economic system of the Joseon dynasty.⁷¹ The Tonghak (later renamed the Ch’ōndogyo) was a new religious group that had been suppressed since its founding in 1864. However, this group had grown into a force that utilized this deep hostility the peasantry held towards the Japanese and the *yangban* rulers. In 1892, several thousand Tonghak believers gathered and demanded that the governors of the Chōlla and Ch’ungch’ōng provinces end the persecution of Tonghak believers and clear the name of their leader who had been executed for allegedly being Christian. When the governors could only pledge to end the suppression, the Tonghak traveled to Seoul in an attempt to directly petition the throne. The following year, they again went to Seoul where they were met by government authorities who forcefully dispersed the crowd. Because of the dispersion, over 20,000 assembled at Poūn in Ch’ungch’ōng province, where they “proceeded to erect defensive barricades, hoist banners, and call for a ‘crusade to expel the Japanese and Westerners.’”⁷² While

⁶⁵ Lee, 279.

⁶⁶ Lee, 280.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 281.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 282.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 287-288.

⁷² Ibid., 283.

this effort was dispersed by authorities, their show of growing numbers and strength demonstrated how their movement had become more appealing to the Korean public.

In March of 1894, the Tonghak movement “erupted into a revolutionary peasant struggle employing military operations on a large scale.”⁷³ Specifically, in Kobu county, peasants occupied the county office, under the leadership of Kobu county’s Tonghak parish leader Chŏn Pong-jun. The magistrate of the county was known to be cruel, and had taken funds from the peasantry to build a reservoir. The magistrate had also taken advantage of the peasants during the building by exploiting their labor. In response, the peasants seized weapons, dispersed the illegally collected tax rice to the destitute and then destroyed the reservoir.⁷⁴ In the aftermath of the incident, an inspector found the Tonghak members responsible for the uprising. Consequently, the inspector arrested some members, executed others, and even further, burned down other members’ homes. Because of the severe reaction, peasants began rallying around Tonghak leaders to rise again. A proclamation was released which appealed to all peasants in Korea. This proclamation mobilized peasants from the areas surrounding Kobu, and several thousands joined forces with the Tonghak army. Many only had bamboo spears or batons as weapons, but with over 10,000 men in their ranks they quickly crushed the government troops sent to stop them, and effectively occupied Kobu. The Tonghak army then quickly pushed north, soundly defeating an 800 man battalion sent from Seoul on their way to occupy Chŏnju.⁷⁵

Panicked, the Joseon government sought out help from Qing China. The Chinese immediately sent a sizable force to suppress the Tonghak. Due to the Convention of Tientsin (1885) between China and Japan, this action was “reposted to the Japanese government.”⁷⁶ In response, Japan also sent troops, creating an increasingly tense confrontation between the two nations on Korean soil. In the eyes of the Japanese and Chinese, this was an opportunity to increase influence in Korea. Specifically, Japan sought to “restore its position of political primacy but also was keenly aware of the need to ensure a Korean market for its products.”⁷⁷ With the situation quickly becoming more dangerous, the Korean government proposed to negotiate a truce with the Tonghak. The demands from the Tonghak were similar to those when the uprising initially began: first, that the government would prevent the *yangban* from illegally exploiting peasants; and secondly, that the government would stop the incursion of foreign merchants. With this, the Tonghak peasant soldiers returned to their homes.

This truce was short-lived. Japan, under the justification that its citizen residents in Korea must be protected, sent 7,000 troops and several warships to Inch’ŏn. By this time, the Tonghak army had already withdrawn from the area, so there was no real reason for sending such a large force to Korea. China recognized this discrepancy, and proposed a joint withdrawal to Japan which was approved by both the Korean government and foreign powers.⁷⁸ Japan promptly rejected this plan, and proposed that the two powers collectively reform internal administration in Korea. Because Japan and Korea had similar isolated backgrounds, the Meiji Restoration had provided almost a blueprint of reforms that the Japanese could implement in Korea. Japan argued that this reform was “absolutely essential if internal unrest were not again to flare into open rebellion, and that peace in East Asia depended on preventing such an occurrence.”⁷⁹ By arguing

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Lee, 284.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 285.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 288.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 288-289.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 289.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

this, Japan raised the unacceptable issue of interfering in Korea's internal affairs to China, and unsurprisingly, China rejected the proposal. Talks between the two countries became deadlocked, and the First Sino-Japanese War had begun.

Japan's proposal to internally reform Korea with the Qing government also clearly established Japan's intent to colonize Korea. Besides the vast economic benefits Japan understood Korea offered, there were various strategic concerns the Japanese government had about Korea. Japan held the perception that Korea was an underdeveloped nation that could not defend itself against Western powers. Because of Korea's close location, the country posed a threat to Japan's national security. A general sense of insecurity about the advance of Western power in Asia is evidenced to have been the "dominant concern in the acquisition of the component territories of the Japanese empire."⁸⁰ Idealism, pride and prestige also prompted Japan's drive to establish an empire. The Meiji liberal movement's political and social reformism had instilled in some Meiji activists' minds dreams of transforming "'corrupted' and 'decaying' Asian civilizations through reform" .⁸¹ An officially sponsored "sense of national destiny" to inspire reform and to guide East Asia "along the path of modernity pioneered by Japan" did not arise until the third decade of the Meiji empire. However, individual propagandists for imperial expansion spoke of a Japanese "mission" in Asia to bring about development and progress, comparable to how Greece and Rome had brought Western civilization to the Mediterranean.⁸²

Additionally, Japan's push for authority was based on an assumption of superiority. All colonial systems held the perspective that colonial rulers were superior over their subjects because empires were inflicted "by conquest or force by a stronger, more materially advanced race" upon a weaker, more materially deficient people.⁸³ However, this assumption for Japan was also based on uniquely Japanese beliefs in "the mythic origins of the Japanese race, the divine creation and inherent virtue of the Japanese Imperial House, and the mystical link between the emperor and his people."⁸⁴ The centuries of isolation that Japan experienced had prevented these beliefs from becoming a theory of racial superiority. However, when Japan began having success in their imperial efforts, such as the cession of Taiwan to Japan in 1895, this racial assertiveness transformed into an ideological belief held by most Japanese. This belief of superiority further empowered the Japanese to intensely pursue influence in Korea.

The Tonghak Peasant Army Uprising was then defined by the determination of the Korean people to end the oppressive rule of the *yangban* families, as well as resist the economic aggression of the Japanese. Both Japan and China capitalized on this situation to increase their influence in Korea, eventually leading to the First Sino-Japanese War. Japan's economic aggression and proposal to internally reform Korea signified Japan's intent to colonize the country, under the belief that Korea did not possess the necessary strength to resist Western powers and that Japan, a superior race, could help reform Korea. The financial burden that had been inflicted on Korean peasants as a result of Japanese economic aggression and the *yangban* rulers instilled a deep hostility that the Tonghak were able to utilize in their movement. The Korean people continued to resist Japanese influence until the March First Movement. Originally, the Tonghak's demands to expel the Japanese were made upon the Joseon government, but after the truce failed the Tonghak organized a second uprising in which they

⁸⁰ Myers and Peattie, 9.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.,13.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

fought face-to-face with the Japanese. However, with such a lack of resources, the Tonghak could not challenge the modern weaponry and training used by the Japanese troops. Therefore, caught struggling against both the *yangban* and foreign imperialism, the Tonghak's efforts were officially ended by Japanese troops in December of 1894.

Japanese Motivations Behind, and Benefits From the First Sino-Japanese War (1894)

This paper will not discuss the specifics of the First Sino-Japanese War, as there are plenty of materials that have recorded and interpreted the historical event. However, this work will engage with the motivations behind Japan's involvement in the War. On July 16, 1894, only fourteen days before declaring war on China, Japan concluded a new treaty with England which determined that England would "give up its consular jurisdiction in Japan in five years."⁸⁵ Other countries followed suit during the next year, leaving Japan with multiple new and fairly equal treaties. These treaties were significant because it was the first time Western powers formally acknowledged Japan as a civilized society in international law.

While there was no defined standard of civilization, a discourse about civilization certainly existed internationally. Found in the writings of Henry Wheaton, Theodore D. Woolsey, Robert Phillimore, and other international lawyers, international law was described as "limited to civilized states."⁸⁶ Any non-Western states "had to achieve the same degree of civilization as the West in order to obtain full subject status in international law."⁸⁷ This Western language and discourse about civilization had reached Japan by at least the late 1860s, after the Tokugawa government sent Nishi Amane (and fourteen other students) to Holland to learn about Western politics and military technologies. While at Leiden University, Nishi had encountered international law courses. After returning to Japan, he compiled his notes on international law into a book which was published in 1868 by Japan's Bureau of Translation and Foreign Affairs. Thus, the Japanese had become aware of the importance of understanding international terms and law.

More Japanese scholars began engaging with international legal terms. A turning point was reached in 1869 when Shigeno Yatsusugu was ordered by a Satsuma ruler to translate the Chinese rendering of Henry Wheaton's *Elements of International Law*. Within his translation, Shigeno "offered working definitions in Japanese of the fundamental terms of international law."⁸⁸ By making the terms workable in Japanese, the concept of a "civilized state" became comprehensible to educated Japanese citizens and leaders, who could then advise government officials. In 1875, Fukuzawa Yukichi released his *Outline of the Theory of Civilization* in which he "repeatedly urged Japanese leaders to label the country 'independent' in order to participate as a civilized state in the enlightened world."⁸⁹ The Japanese had realized how defining their country as civilized could benefit their country. The practical application of international legal terms "enabled Japan to conclude new trade treaties with England and Germany... and they confidently displayed the transformation abroad."⁹⁰

Thus, Japan's engagement with international legal terms allowed the country to improve its international position before the First Sino-Japanese War, and even during the war. However,

⁸⁵ Junnan Lai, "Sovereignty and 'Civilization': International Law and East Asia in the Nineteenth Century," *Modern China* 40, no. 3 (2014): 298. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24575657>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Dudden, 42.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

if Japan lost the war or failed to respect international law during the fighting, the treaties could have been nullified and Japan would still have been considered outside of the community of international law.⁹¹ Consequently, Japan's involvement in the war can be attributed in part to the need to prove its strength and civility, so the new treaties would be upheld and Japan would finally be an official member of the international community.

Additionally, as mentioned above, the Japanese were also motivated by pride and prestige. Just as “steel navies, constitutions, machine guns, rationalized tax structures, and steam locomotives” demonstrated modernization in the late nineteenth century, obtaining a colonial empire “was a mark of national eminence, the ultimate status symbol upon the world scene.”⁹² Consequently, after a decisive Japanese victory early in 1895, Prime Minister of Japan Itō Hirobumi demanded that the subsequent Treaty of Shimonoseki include “cession of the Liaotung peninsula and the island of Taiwan, as well as payment of a huge indemnity.”⁹³ Japan's acknowledgement of Korea's full independence was written in the first article of the treaty, not to guarantee that Korea would remain independent, but rather to repudiate China's suzerainty claim over Korea. The annexation of Korea was not even considered by the Japanese as an option in this treaty because that would have risked active opposition by Western powers. The Qing government bowed to Japanese pressure, but the Triple Intervention of Russia, Germany, and France forced the retrocession of Liaotung. As a result of that intervention, Japanese members of the House of Representatives compiled *Interventions, Arbitrations, Envoys during War and Capitulations*. Essentially, the Japanese compiled almost every aspect of the First Sino-Japanese War and “made the war a showcase of their knowledge of international law”⁹⁴ However, with the acquisition of Taiwan, Japan possessed its first colonial territory, marking its first step on the way to empire and a place among the nations of the world.⁹⁵

Effects of the Russo-Japanese War (1905)

During the decade in between the First Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War, Japan began tightening its grip on Korea. The large Japanese force that had arrived in Korea during the Tonghak Uprising occupied Kyōngbok Palace and restored the Taewōngun to power. Afterwards, Japanese “advisors” began forcing modernizing reforms, known as the Gabo Reform, on the weak Korean government.⁹⁶ Simultaneously, Japan had intensified its economic stake in Korea by constructing railways and rapidly increasing its commercial activity throughout the country.⁹⁷ On the other hand, Russia had been expanding its influence into Northeast Asia. After the forced retrocession of the Liaotung Peninsula to China in 1895, Russia had concluded a secret military agreement with the Qing and had acquired the rights to build part of the Trans-Siberian Railway down through Manchuria.⁹⁸ Russia also acquired twenty-five year leases on two ports in Manchuria, Port Arthur and Dalian. With a solidified control over Manchuria, Russia turned its attention and efforts towards Korea.

Because of Russia's efforts and the presence of more than 100,000 Russian troops in Manchuria due to the Boxer Rebellion, Japan signed into the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with

⁹¹ Lai, 299.

⁹² Myers and Peattie, 10.

⁹³ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁴ Lai, 299.

⁹⁵ Myers and Peattie, 16.

⁹⁶ Lee, 290.

⁹⁷ Myers and Peattie, 16.

⁹⁸ Lee, 306.

England in 1902. This agreement was focused on containing the Russian threat, and both sides recognized each other's interests. England's rights and interests in China were recognized by Japan, and England acknowledged Japan's special interests in Korea. This alliance greatly fortified Japan's international position, and in unanimity with England and the United States, Japan demanded that Russia withdraw its troops from Manchuria. Russia pledged to effect withdrawal in three stages, but ultimately failed to do so, even having its troops cross the Yalu River into Korea. In 1904, on the brink of war with Russia, Japan sent troops to Seoul and occupied buildings throughout the city. Under threat, Korea signed a protocol agreement with Japan which in essence provided a "legal justification for whatever political and military actions Japan might wish to take in Korea."⁹⁹ Even further, in exchange for abandoning its original demand (in the protocol agreement) to open all uncultivated Korean lands to development by Japanese colonists, Japan created another agreement which allowed for a Japanese "government of advisors" in Korea."¹⁰⁰ These actions taken by the Japanese government were highly strategic, and eventually led to Korea becoming a protectorate of Japan.

That same year, the ministers of the Japanese emperor offered a compromise with Russia, a recognition of Russian primacy in Manchuria and in exchange Japan would have a free hand in Korea."¹⁰¹ While the two countries did enter into negotiations, no ground for compromise could be found, and in February of 1904, Japan subsequently "carried out a surprise attack on the Russian installations at Port Arthur."¹⁰² Contrary to international expectations, the Russo-Japanese War was defined by a series of Japanese victories from the beginning to the end.¹⁰³ The bloody war that ensued was a measure of how Japan had risen as a military and imperial power. At a high cost to Japan, Japanese armies conquered the Liaotung peninsula and the ports of Dalian and Port Arthur, officially driving Russia from South Manchuria. Japanese troops then stormed Sakhalin to use as a bargaining chip in treaty negotiations. With Russia ready to discuss peace, President Theodore Roosevelt offered to mediate the negotiations between the two countries. In the end, the Portsmouth Treaty gave Japan its next imperial acquisitions: a long-term lease on the Liaotung peninsula; the southern half of Sakhalin; and all Russian rights and privileges in South Manchuria.¹⁰⁴

Not only did Japan gain substantial territory, but it had succeeded in removing the last major threat of influence in Korea. By the terms of the treaty, Russia pledged to not "hinder Japan from taking whatever actions it deemed necessary for the 'guidance, protection, and control' of the Korean government" and acknowledged Japan's political, military, and economic interests in Korea.¹⁰⁵ England and the U.S. also recognized Japan's interests in Korea.

Thus, Japan could now make Korea its colony and did so in two stages. The first stage established Korea as a Japanese protectorate from 1905-1910, during which civilian Resident General Itō Hirobumi tried establishing a succession of well-intentioned reforms while simultaneously liquidating Korean political institutions and replacing them with Japanese ones.¹⁰⁶ After the conclusion of the treaty, Japan immediately moved to make Korea its protectorate. Itō Hirobumi, with an escort of Japanese troops, was sent to Korea to conclude the

⁹⁹ Lee, 308.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Myers and Peattie, 17.

¹⁰² Lee, 307.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 309.

¹⁰⁴ Myers and Peattie, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Lee, 309.

¹⁰⁶ Myers and Peattie, 17.

protectorate treaty. After Korean officials and the King Kojong refused the demands by Ito to accept the treaty, Japanese gendarmes dragged the most vocal opponent, Han Kyu-söl, out of the room. The treaty was then brought to the Foreign Ministry and signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, which validated the treaty despite the illegal nature of the whole interaction. The second stage of colonization took place in 1910, in which Korea was formally annexed as a colony (Chösen) and put under the merciless rule of General Terauchi Masatake, its first Governor-General.

The Russo-Japanese War then signified the breakthrough of Japan as an international power. Korea became its official protectorate, creating a straightforward path for Japan to later colonize the country. However, Japan's new international standing had been "achieved at staggering costs with frightful burdens for the taxpayers, and more lay ahead" in contrast to Russia's rapid recovery post-war.¹⁰⁷ Tokutomi Sohō, a prominent Japanese historian, journalist, and close friend of Meiji Prime Ministers Yamagata Aritomo and Katsura Tarō, argued these sacrifices were necessary to achieve national greatness. Sohō had defined that for Japan, two courses of action were open, either self-reliance or dependency. Self-reliance entailed imperialism, while dependency would have meant Japan had to "accept the fate of annexation."¹⁰⁸ Sohō's arguments provide insight into the motivations behind Japan's aggressive imperialism. The clear and categorical delineations between self-reliance and dependency meant the Japanese perceived imperialism as Sohō described: "a policy born out of necessity if [Japan was] to exist as a nation and survive as a race."¹⁰⁹

The Hague Mission (1907)

In 1906, a royal letter from King Kojong was published in the newspaper, *Taehan Maeil Sinbo* (*Korean Daily News*). In the letter, he expressed that he had not consented to the protectorate treaty and appealed for a joint protection of the powers.¹¹⁰ In hopes of appealing to the international community, King Kojong sent three representatives, Yi Sang-söl, Yi Chun, and Yi Wi-jong, on his behalf to the Second International Conference on Peace at The Hague in 1907. They arrived during the second week of the conference with a letter from King Kojong that detailed "the invalidity of the protectorate and [demanded] international condemnation of Japan."¹¹¹ However, even as the three young representatives called upon diplomats from countries that had "long-standing relations with Korea, none except the Russian envoy gave them more than a passing notice."¹¹² The young men protested that the protectorate treaty was invalid without the seal of the king, but their request to be seated was ultimately denied.

This dismissal resulted from two concepts, Korea being an official protectorate of Japan, and the Conference's own agenda. Because Korea was now a protectorate of Japan, which gave international legal precedent to Japan's control over Korea's foreign affairs, international law prevented Koreans from legally attending the forum. Therefore, Koreans could not conduct their own foreign relations, and the president of the Conference ruled that Korea could not be permitted to participate.¹¹³ Secondly, the three men's appeal was discarded by delegates from

¹⁰⁷ Myers and Peattie, 66.

¹⁰⁸ John D. Pierson, *Tokutomi Soho 1863-1957: A Journalist for Modern Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 264.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 318.

¹¹⁰ Lee, 311.

¹¹¹ Dudden 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Lee, 311.

forty-three countries that were there to discuss world peace. The representatives' attempt to appeal and protest interfered with the world order that the delegates wanted to legitimate.¹¹⁴ If the Conference had recognized their assertion of invalidity, this would have destroyed the worldview which determined Korea's dependence on Japan. It would have also rejected the Conference's claim to define the meaning of international peace, which allowed certain countries to legally colonize and control other states. Accordingly, Korea's first non-violent effort to appeal to the international community was dismissed.

Japan used the fallout from this effort to further intervene in Korea. The lack of acknowledgement of Korea by the international community enabled Japanese officials to broaden their control. The Japanese had King Kojong relinquish his throne to his son, Sunjong, who became emperor in July 1907. After announcing King Kojong's abdication, massive protest demonstrations arose in Seoul which were quickly met with Japanese military force and ended. Immediately after, on July 24, 1907, Japan and Korea signed the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1907 which gave the Japanese Resident-General formal authority to intervene in any and all matters of internal administration. This treaty also made the appointment of Japanese in official positions mandatory, and transferred "all judicial powers in Korea to Japan's command"¹¹⁵ While very few countries noticed when Korea became a protectorate of Japan, in 1907 there was a much larger audience who watched and applauded Japan's effort to dissolve Korea's internal state.

Japan also dissolved what was left of the Korean army, which had already been greatly reduced. This action was described as a "temporary measure" until a new conscription system could be established. The day the army was disbanded, the troops of the Second Infantry Guards regiment "engaged the Japanese army of occupation in battle in the streets of Seoul."¹¹⁶ Forms of domestic resistance had been demonstrated earlier, with the Tonghak Peasant Uprising, but were already beginning to surface again against the Japanese. Without any structured means for self-defense, however, Korea was only a few short years away from becoming a Japanese colony.

The Annexation Treaty

In 1907, the Japanese colonial regime began "publishing English-language reports detailing its Korean policies."¹¹⁷ Itō, or "His Imperial Japanese Majesty's Residency General," was the first to publish a report, titled *Annual Report for 1907 on Reforms and Progress in Korea*.¹¹⁸ This project lasted until the collapse of the Japanese empire in 1945, and each report offers a detailed account of the policies enacted in Korea during a year period. The 1907 *Report*, which was distributed in early 1908, describes the lengths that Japan took to help Korea achieve its own international recognition: "With the hope of making Korea's independence a reality, Japan employed all the resources of friendly suggestion to induce the former to adopt modern civilized methods... In consequence, however, of jealousy between political parties, nothing resulted but plots and counterplots."¹¹⁹ The *Report* also clarified that Koreans were not capable of ruling themselves and consequently could not "participate as subjects in international terms."¹²⁰ It states,

¹¹⁴ Dudden, 8.

¹¹⁵ Lee, 312, and Dudden, 10.

¹¹⁶ Lee, 312.

¹¹⁷ Dudden, 20.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ *Annual Report for 1907*, 2-3.

¹²⁰ Dudden, 21.

[After 1905] Japan had now realized that Korea was not capable of governing herself, and that the policy of maintaining her independence could not be pursued without making certain modifications... Thus Japan took the responsibility of intervention in Korean affairs, after having given the Koreans ample opportunity to prove their fitness for self-government, and after having found them wholly unprepared for the task.¹²¹

From 1907 to 1910, the Japanese government also made a showcase of its growing control over Korea. The Meiji government took the Korean crown prince, Yi Yun, from the palace and displayed the young man throughout tours of Japan to “educate him in an enlightened manner.”¹²² For the Japanese government this was significant because it was able to show Japanese leaders, reporters, and citizens that Japan had progressed enough internationally that they now had foreign royalty coming to their country for enlightenment.

On July 13, 1910, about a month before the annexation of Korea, U.S. Ambassador O’Brien at the American Embassy in Tokyo, wrote a correspondence to the Acting Secretary of State Philander C. Knox. The letter described the Japanese Imperial Government’s intention to abolish the Korean policing system and create a single department run by the Japanese gendarmerie. Ambassador O’Brien wrote, “Under the new arrangement—the regulations relating to which are inclosed herewith—these heterogeneous organizations are abolished and a single police department subject to the residency general is organized, with the Japanese gendarmerie as a nucleus... the larger part of the force will consist of Japanese gendarmerie”¹²³ The letter came with an enclosed English translation of a memorandum exchanged between Resident General Terauchi and Korean Acting Prime Minister Pak Che Soon, which declared that Korea’s government would entrust its police affair to Japan. The civil police, consisting of Koreans and Japanese, were merged with the Japanese military police. Additionally, an inspectorate general in charge of police affairs would be positioned at Seoul and would be subject to the control of the Resident General.

This letter demonstrates a specific, but powerful change made by the Japanese even before official annexation. By this time, Koreans had already begun establishing a pattern of resistance against Japan with the Tonghak Peasant Uprising, the Hague Mission, and the confrontation in Seoul after the Korean army’s dissolution. At the same time, the Japanese had created their own pattern of responding to any resistance with force. This change was then an extension of that Japanese pattern, a measure taken by the Japanese government to prepare for unrest they anticipated from Koreans in response to the annexation. The unification of the police system under the Resident-General also put the Japanese in an ideal position for the easy enforcement of colonial policies after annexation. This memorandum was significant, because it put Japanese police in complete control of Korean citizens.

This memorandum signified a final preventative measure the Japanese took before annexation. On August 10, 1910 the treaty annexing Korea to Japan was concluded, signed by Prime Minister of Korea, Ye Wan Yeng, and future first Japanese Governor-General of Korea, Terauchi Masatake. The preamble declared that Japan’s annexation of Korea was intended to

¹²¹ *Annual Report for 1907*, 3.

¹²² Dudden, 21.

¹²³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, With the Annual Message of the President Transmitted to Congress*, December 6, 1910, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), Document 703.

“promote the common weal of the two nations and assure permanent peace” in Asia.¹²⁴ In thirteen articles, the treaty finalized Japanese control of Korea, now to be called Chōsen.

The First Decade of the Japanese Colonization of Korea

I. The Annexation

On September 17, 1910, Assistant Secretary of State Huntington Wilson sent a correspondence to the Japanese Ambassador. The letter detailed the U.S. government’s acknowledgement of the 1910 annexation of Korea after receiving a notice from Japan on August 24th. Assistant Secretary Wilson states, “While I am constrained by the great importance of the interests of American citizens in Korea to make all necessary reservations as to their rights and privileges, I beg to inform your excellency that the Government of the United States is gratified to note the assurances already given by the Imperial Japanese Government concerning matters relating to foreigners and foreign trade in Korea.”¹²⁵ While the U.S. government did recognize the annexation, there were concerns about the changes the Japanese would make regarding not only trade with Korea, but extraterritoriality and other privileges foreign citizens had possessed when Korea was independent. Regardless, Assistant Secretary Wilson did describe that the U.S. government, and surely other countries who had agreements with Korea, had received reassurances from the Japanese government during this period of change. This correspondence demonstrates not only Japan’s preparedness for the annexation, as they sent out a notice only two weeks after the treaty signing, but also their eagerness to start off relations amicably with Korea’s foreign partners.

Terauchi Masatake, now the new Governor-General of Korea (replacing the Resident-General position), compiled and released an *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea)* for the time period of 1910-1911 that totalled over 260 pages and described the vast structural changes made during the official colonization of Korea. The introduction of this specific *Report* provides some insight into the Japanese perspectives of the annexation process. For example, it states, “...under the new *regime* steady progress is expected in every branch of administration, central and local, with a view to improving the conditions of the Peninsula and meeting the actual needs of the people.”¹²⁶ In declaring the intent of “meeting the actual needs of the people,” the Japanese were insinuating Korean inferiority and establishing their colonization as beneficial. The *Report* continues, describing that the “vital object of annexation” was mainly to “secure stability of peace and tranquility for the Peninsula.”¹²⁷ This simple explanation ignored the almost thirty-five years of colonial politics that Korea had endured because of Japan, and reduced that history to a single, justifiable explanation behind the annexation. Again, Japan capitalized on the recent tumultuous situations Korea had experienced by writing this statement, situations that had been largely prompted because of foreign interference.

The Korean reaction to the annexation is briefly addressed. The *Report* explains, “Contrary to the expectation that carrying out the annexation would create suspicion on the part of certain classes of the people and cause a disturbance of the general peace and order, it was quietly and calmly carried into effect, the police measures already taken having proved sufficient

¹²⁴ “Treaty Annexing Korea to Japan,” *The American Journal of International Law* 4, no. 4 (1910): 282. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2212066>.

¹²⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, With the Annual Message of the President Transmitted to Congress*, December 6, 1910, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), Document 707.

¹²⁶ *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea) 1910-11* by the Governor General of Chosen (Terauchi Masatake, Japanese), 1, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009039952>.

¹²⁷ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 1.

for every emergency.”¹²⁸ Surely biased and generalized, the Japanese described the implementation of the annexation as easy, and in doing so, insinuated that Korea was then a docile country because of the colonization practices Japan enforced. Additionally, the *Report* discussed that imperial donations, exempted land taxes, and criminal pardoning had taken place during the annexation, resulting in the “people of Korea [putting] away their suspicions and anxieties” and becoming “appreciative” of the “new regime.”¹²⁹ Not only did Koreans become less resistant to the change, according to the Japanese Governor-General, but they even “gradually became trustful toward the officials appointed by the Imperial Government.”¹³⁰ The tone of this section is reassuring, as the Japanese wanted to encourage the belief that Koreans were accepting and easily adapting to the changes they were facing. This biased report of Korean perceptions was meant not only to justify every calculated action taken by the Japanese government’s actions, but also to create the perception that Japan was greatly benefiting its new colony. Even the unification of the police system Japan had enforced prior to annexation was addressed, characterized as a successful maneuver that had allowed annexation to be implemented smoothly.

This *Report* did as it was intended, informing imperial countries worldwide of its successes. In 1914, the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* reviewed the 1910-1911 report, describing that in the short year of colonization “a great deal [had] been accomplished” and that the “ill-feeling which the natives at first felt towards their conquerors” was already “becoming a thing of the past.”¹³¹ The rest of the world perceived the Japanese as successful in their efforts and believed that “faith in the impartiality of Japanese justice” was bringing the two nations and peoples together.¹³² In short, international countries were taking the Japanese at their word.

In reality, however, the Japanese were facing “[scattered] guerrilla resistance against [their] presence from 1907 to 1911.”¹³³ The *Report* described those who attempted to resist the changes as “insurgents” and provided statistics on the suppression of the “insurgent” efforts. According to the Japanese, 1593 “insurgents” were captured, 240 were killed, and 115 were wounded. In comparison, only seven Japanese gendarmes were killed and twenty were wounded.¹³⁴ Other accounts describe the fighters as guerrilla soldiers, comprising the Righteous Armies for Korean Independence, and peaking at 69,832 members who had 1451 clashes with the Japanese in 1908.¹³⁵ The resistance from Koreans resulted in an increase in Japanese military police and civil police presence which crushed the insurgent effort, remaining in Korea during the first decade of colonization. In 1911, there was relative peace but the military police continued to be in complete control of the Korean people. According to Governor-General Terauchi, it was “easier to use the gendarmes than police to control a primitive people.”¹³⁶ This sentiment reflected the Japanese perception of empire, which was not motivated by wanting to improve native Koreans’ lives. Instead, this viewpoint held that Japan and its colonies were distinct and separate entities that had correspondingly distinct and separate futures. This theory

¹²⁸ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 1-2.

¹²⁹ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 2.

¹³⁰ *Annual Report of 1910-1911*, 2.

¹³¹ “Notes on Books,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 62, no. 32 (1914): 562, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41341590>.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Myers and Peattie, 221.

¹³⁴ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 85.

¹³⁵ Lee, 317.

¹³⁶ Tōsakum Fukuda, *A Memorial History of the Annexation of Korea*, (Tokyo 1911), 276.

of colonial rule was certainly shaped by the effort to prove that Japan was civilized, based on apparent racial and cultural differences between the Japanese and their colonial subjects.¹³⁷

II. Japanese Colonial Practices

After annexation, the thirty-five year period of Japanese colonial rule that profoundly affected the development of modern Korea began. The rule was harsh, discriminatory, destructive, and structured in a systemic way that was inescapable for Koreans. Huge bureaucracies, oversized by colonial standards, were built in Korea in highly centralized locations.¹³⁸ After suppressing initial insurgencies, Japanese colonial administrators “with unlimited zeal, naturally applied the hierarchical standards of their own society to the Koreans.”¹³⁹ These standards treated Koreans as a secondary people.

Japanese rule was exercised through the Governor-General who possessed all legislative, executive and judicial powers and was appointed from the ranks of Japanese generals or admirals on active duty.¹⁴⁰ Governor-General Terauchi was known for his outright discrimination and employed the gendarmerie police system that had been used for the annexation. After the Japanese enacting laws that legalized racial discrimination against the Koreans, Koreans faced the Japanese monopolization of all management and supervisory positions in the government, factories, and the police force. Essentially, Koreans were limited to clerical positions and could not advance their position. Korean workers would labor for longer hours and get paid half the wages a Japanese worker would earn.¹⁴¹

Landholding was also hugely “reformed” due to the fact that the Japanese seized large agricultural plots for themselves. A cadastral survey was conducted and required Korean citizens to report their landholdings to the new Land Survey Bureau. Those who failed to report and register their land in the short period of time provided had it confiscated by the Governor-General.¹⁴² Subsequently, Governor-Generals sold the land at much less than it was worth to Japanese companies who produced huge profits off the land. The cadastral survey and land survey law then enabled Japanese companies and Governor-Generals to become great and powerful landowners who provided profits for Japan, while Korean citizens were forced off their land.¹⁴³

Industrial and agricultural production in Korea was designated to only serve Japan’s needs. Japanese companies exploited the natural resources of Korea with the generous backing of the Governor-General. In 1910, Governor-General Terauchi enacted a company ordinance which stipulated that his approval was needed to establish a company.¹⁴⁴ He operated all transportation facilities such as railways, harbors, and airports, and created monopolies on products like opium, salt, tobacco, and ginseng.¹⁴⁵ Operating under such favorable conditions, Japanese companies were able to monopolize Korea’s natural resources, industries, and finances for their benefit.

¹³⁷ Myers and Peattie, 14.

¹³⁸ Jinwung Kim, *A History of Korea: From “Land of the Morning Calm” to States in Conflict* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 321. For scale, during the mid-1930s, some 12,000 British governed 340 million Indians (a ratio of 1 to 28,000), whereas in Korea around 52,000 Japanese ruled 22 million Korean (1 to 420).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Lee, 314.

¹⁴¹ Kim, *A History*, 323.

¹⁴² Lee, 319. According to Lee, the Governor-General held over 40% of the total land area in Korea by 1930.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Kim, *A History*, 326.

¹⁴⁵ Lee, 321.

Combined with currency reform that replaced Korean currency with Japanese coins, Korean businesses struggled to obtain enough capital to survive. This was reflected in 1917 factory statistics of Korea, which show that in total there were 605 Korean factories that had about 1.8 million yen in capital and 8.2 million yen of production that year. In contrast, there were 736 Japanese factories in 1917 that had around 33 million yen in capital and 84 million yen of production. The discrepancies between Korean and Japanese factories are apparent, as Korean businesses were forced to compete against the firm control Japan had established during the first decade of colonization.

As mentioned before, the Japanese had increased their military police presence due to resistance, so during the first decade of colonial rule there was a prominent military policy. The colony was divided into thirteen provinces which were locally administered, and each province was subdivided into cities and counties (made up of townships). The dispersal goal for police in Korea was one substation in every township.¹⁴⁶ Essentially, the Japanese had formed a police state, in which officers exercised vast powers, even in civil administration and judicial affairs. Anyone who did not cooperate with the rule of the Governor-General became subject to arrest. The military presence and influence was intense, resulting in even school teachers carrying swords and wearing uniforms in Korean classes.¹⁴⁷ Floggings and fines were administered often, with no judicial recourse, and newspapers that published any nationalist thought or idea were closed down to prevent an unfavorable public opinion from forming. Education was also drastically changed during the first decade of colonization, which will be further discussed in the missionary section of this paper. The political suppression of Koreans was exhaustive and widespread, creating a society where free speech, free press, suffrage, and representative government were completely nonexistent.

The Japanese colonization of Korea was meant to rule and exploit the colony for Japanese interests, and the Governor-General was the spearhead of this rule. Enjoying nearly complete freedom in colonial administration, Governor-General Terauchi created a highly authoritarian, centralized government structure that was enforced by an abundant military police presence that abused its authority. Koreans competed for enough resources and money to maintain their businesses and survive under colonial rule. All citizens, especially laborers, felt the weight of the discriminatory policies that designated Koreans as second-class citizens. These brutal policies reinforced a national consciousness amongst all classes against Japanese rule, ultimately contributing to the development of the March First Movement.

This consciousness grew both domestically and abroad. The suppression of the 1907-1911 resistance efforts had caused many Korean nationalists to flee overseas. After settling in southeastern Manchuria and the Russian Maritime Territory, nationalists began establishing military bases within independence operations. For example, the Training School of the New Rising was established in Manchuria in 1911 and the Korean Restoration Army was established in the Russian Maritime Province in 1914.¹⁴⁸ Another independence base was established in Shanghai by 1919, creating the New Korea Youth Corps. While the Righteous Army for Korean Independence had been apprehended during its suppression, two other organizations, the Society for the Restoration of Independence and the Corps for the Restoration of Korean National Sovereignty, had formed in Korea in 1913 and 1915 respectively. Both organizations actively participated in the March First Movement. Other domestic groups, such as the Korean National

¹⁴⁶ Myers and Peattie, 223.

¹⁴⁷ Kim, *A History*, 322, and Lee, 314.

¹⁴⁸ Kim, *A History*, 329.

Society, were organized by students and Christian youth who raised funds for the independence movement. Smaller covert societies were also formed by teachers in Seoul and other cities, and advocated for education promotion and economic strength for the Korean people.¹⁴⁹ During the first decade of colonization, these nationalist groups at home and abroad only strengthened the national consciousness against the Japanese which culminated in the March First Movement of 1919.

The Presence of Protestant Missionaries in Korean Education

The presence of Protestant missionaries in Korea during the first decade of colonization also helped strengthen Korea's anti-Japanese national consciousness through education. Before colonization, Korea had two different kinds of traditional Chinese schools. First were provincial schools sponsored by the royal government in each county and were run by local county administrators. Second were private schools located throughout the country that mainly served *yangban* families and other upper-class Koreans who desired the classical Chinese education.¹⁵⁰ The first Protestant missionary, Dr. Horace Allen, arrived in Korea in April of 1885. Dr. Allen had been in Korea once before as a physician to foreigners living in Seoul, but now he worked to gain appointment as an official physician to the U.S. legation. His family arrived in Korea a month later, where together they established the first official Protestant outpost in Seoul.¹⁵¹ Korean mission work was officially established in 1892 by the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) with the appointments of three new clergymen. In 1895, the major missionary groups in Korea were the PCUSA, the United Church of Canada, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, Presbyterian Church South, and the Australian Presbyterian.

It is important to understand that Western missionaries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were believers in the supremacy of Western civilization. In this light, they became effective and committed operatives of Westernization. Early on in their work, American missionaries established a close relationship with the Korean royal family and became mentors to multiple progressive intellectuals and politicians.¹⁵² These powerful connections, in addition to treaty privileges, allowed missionaries to carry out "civilizing responsibilities" such as teaching Korean youth Western learning, importing and selling Western tools, and publishing newspapers.

A Protestant newspaper, the *Christian News*, demonstrates the efforts of missionaries to help build a modern-nation state in Korea. The missionaries employed Korean translators to translate the articles into *hangul*, the easy alphabet used by the uneducated. In its first issue in 1897, a special article described the intention of enabling Koreans to meet "the new enlightened time" by educating them about the "better ways of working and living" in "rich and powerful countries."¹⁵³ While the primary intention of the newspaper was still to "reveal the glory of Christ," the *Christian News* offered a Korean history series, gave price lists for local markets, and even ran series like "On World Affairs" and "Overseas Correspondence."¹⁵⁴ Until its dissolution in 1910, this newspaper continued to idealize Westernization while attempting to

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 331.

¹⁵⁰ Myers and Peattie, 294-295.

¹⁵¹ "A New Mission Field: The First Generation of Presbyterian Missionaries in Korea," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 93, no. 1 (2015): 24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24463373>.

¹⁵² Dae Young Ryu, "To Build a New Korea: The Political Campaign of Two Protestant Newspapers in Late Joseon Korea," *A Journal of Church and State* 57, no. 4 (2015): 732.

¹⁵³ "Knowledge," *Christian News*, April 8, 1897, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44508391>.

¹⁵⁴ Ryu, 734.

enlighten Korean readers about the Western world. However, missionaries working on these publications failed to take into account Korea's history, which had instilled a gap between "Korean's love for their country and their love for their family" in their consciousness.¹⁵⁵ At this point, Koreans had never been given the right to participate in the running of their country, resulting in a lack of understanding of a shared national identity. Thus, while this effort was meaningful, the Korean people were not given enough time to engage and implement the idea of building a new nation-state of their own. While most Koreans may have not been able to understand a shared national identity, the Tonghak Peasant Uprising, Hague Mission, and the confrontation in Seoul after the Korean army's dissolution had shown that Koreans could come together to resist the Japanese.

Even so, missionaries Westernized and impacted Korean society through education. Although missionaries were originally coming to Korea with an evangelical purpose, they soon realized that "in order to convert they had to teach."¹⁵⁶ The low literacy rate in Korea worked to the advantage of the missionaries, as Christianity became associated with the dissemination of reading. Missionaries quickly opened their mission education to every possible convert, as they originally had only taught Christian Koreans, and began establishing schools. In the early 1900s, Protestant missionaries in Korea established numerous elementary schools that offered basic literacy in a Korean script, known as *onmun*. Missionaries even began founding secondary schools and colleges, open to both young men and women. By 1905, the country-wide movement for "education for the nation" had taken over Korea, resulting in the opening of night schools, laborers' schools, and short-term training centers in urban areas. Mission work covered all of Korea, with the majority of missionaries coming from America, while Australian and Canadian Presbyterians and British Anglicans also contributed to this work.¹⁵⁷ Many Koreans who had once been politically active in movements became committed to educational pursuits with independence in mind.¹⁵⁸ The movement also led to the use of *onmun* in private schools' curricula, where Western-style subjects were beginning to be taught.¹⁵⁹ The teaching of these subjects is another example of the Westernization efforts initiated by missionaries, but also gave Koreans the opportunity to learn about subjects that had been excluded by the Japanese. The 1905 education movement then certainly increased the influence of missionaries in Korea, resulting in a huge expansion of Westernized education and Christianity in Korea until the annexation.

When Japanese advisors were sent to Seoul in 1904, they quickly became alarmed by the "education for the nation" movement. Thus, Japanese educational policies were enforced right away when Korea became a protectorate in 1905. Resident-General Itō immediately shut down many of the Korean-run private schools, and took over the numerous schools that had begun teaching Western-style subjects. He justified these actions by claiming that these schools had been refuges for anti-Japanese sentiment. All private schools, including schools that had been organized by missionaries or other religious groups, had to get approval from the Resident-General for continued operation. This requirement lasted until the annexation and greatly reduced Korean private schools. By the end of 1909, only 820 of the 1995 requests from private schools had been granted.¹⁶⁰ In contrast, missionary schools were generally left alone due

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 750.

¹⁵⁶ Myers and Peattie, 295.

¹⁵⁷ Hamish, 88.

¹⁵⁸ Lee, 331.

¹⁵⁹ Myers and Peattie, 295.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 296.

to extraterritoriality privileges. Because Korean private schools were being shut down and Japan was still in the process of building public or “ordinary” schools in Korea, enrollment in missionary schools increased.

After the annexation, Governor-General Terauchi intensified the policies against education in Korea. His position was made clear in his compiled *Report* for the year 1910-1911. When discussing private schools, he states,

Instead of participating in sober educational work, some of these schools often intermeddled in political agitation against the Japanese Protectorate and the new *regime* undertaken by the Korean Government, and used text books of a seditious nature, inimical to the peace and order of the country. After the enforcement of the Private School Regulations, most of the private schools obtained Government recognition; numbers of them, which had inadequate funds or equipments having been amalgamated with better schools or done away altogether; and the using of text books of a seditious nature was also stopped.¹⁶¹

A nationwide search for Korean geographical and historical work was conducted in 1910, in which the Japanese seized and burned 200,000 to 300,000 works.¹⁶² This hunt destroyed biographies of Korean national heroes, and translations of foreign works that described independence movements around the world. The Education Act of 1911 further allowed the Japanese to conduct these unjust changes in the Korean education system. It included designating Japanese as the national language, meaning *onmun* was replaced in schools. According to the 1910-1911 *Report*, even terms were changed in textbooks that were “inconsistent after Annexation.”¹⁶³ The education system further entrapped Koreans under colonial rule, and was used by Japan to keep their subjects “less civilized” than the Japanese.

In limiting the scope of Korean history and distorting the remaining historical works, the Japanese government intended for the education system to be a colonial tool that would gradually transform Koreans into loyal Japanese subjects. Japan focused on the slow and steady expansion of basic elementary education and worked to discourage “unnecessary” higher education in Korea.¹⁶⁴ Because the Japanese prioritized Koreans’ becoming docile Japanese subjects prepared for modern but humble work and life, basic education was the only form of education the Japanese felt was necessary in Korea.

Japanese authorities also possessed doubts about the loyalty of missionary-run schools. The *Report* states,

Certain missionaries, also, accustomed hitherto to defend their converts, were led into complaining of measures undertaken by the local authorities even in the days of reform. Although some missionaries were very careful not to intermeddle with matters which lay beyond their proper sphere, native converts were so vehement in professing anti-Japanese sentiments that they passed quite beyond the control of the former. But even under such conditions, one ought to not jump to the conclusion that missionaries are responsible for

¹⁶¹ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 230.

¹⁶² Kim, *A History*, 328.

¹⁶³ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 222.

¹⁶⁴ Myers, 294.

the fact that a certain class of Christian converts are anti-Japanese or that certain others joined the insurgents.¹⁶⁵

The Japanese then were hesitant to blame missionaries for anti-Japanese sentiments after the annexation, largely due to the fact that Western missionaries were still protected by their treaty privileges. Japan's cautious words demonstrate how wary it was of provoking any powerful Western government, even if there were suspicions of some missionaries being "too close" to their Korean converts. This hesitancy led to the blaming of Korean converts for any anti-Japanese attitudes, but the Japanese government continued to keep a close eye on missionaries. As described in *The English Church Mission in Corea*, missionaries were forced to "live much in the public eye, [seen as] a fair specimen for observation when [they walk] abroad."¹⁶⁶ And even with their special privileges, Governor-General Terauchi described that "he would afford due protection and facilities for legitimate missionary undertakings, but would be obliged to treat them according to law if they injured public peace."¹⁶⁷ The presence of missionaries was an annoyance to the Japanese, as they were witnesses to the harsh Japanese rule and often reported events from their own perspectives, rather than the perspective of the Governor-General.¹⁶⁸

As the years progressed during the first decade of colonization, missionaries were continuously viewed by the Japanese as suspicious. The 1911-1912 Annual Report explains that "the Government now trusts these foreign missionaries to confine their activities to purely religious work without any intermeddling in political affairs."¹⁶⁹ Even so, Japan accused missionaries of conspiring with nationalistic Koreans. There were reportedly 307 Christian missionaries in Korea and a total number of 281,946 Christian converts according to the report. Around 700 of the 1700 private schools were run by missionaries that year. After an assassination attempt was executed against Governor-General Terauchi in 1910, in which 123 Koreans were arrested on a falsified charge (105 were Protestant converts), Japanese authorities were accused by missionaries abroad of torturing the indicted and aiming to "[wipe] out the Christian movement in Korea."¹⁷⁰ Referred to as the "Conspiracy Case" or the "105 Incident," Governor-General Terauchi capitalized on Resident-General Itō's killing a few years earlier by a Catholic to implicate Protestant nationalists. This situation was highly criticized by American missionaries, who were accused by the Japanese as conspiring with the nationalists. As a result, the heads of the "Presbyterian North Mission, U.S.A., the Methodist Episcopal Board of Foreign Missions, and the Board of the Foreign Missions of the Methodist Church (South)" met with the Japanese Ambassador in Washington, the Secretary of State, President Taft, and the Chief of the Bureau of Foreign Affairs to discuss the situation in Korea.¹⁷¹ The pressure missionaries put on Governor-General Terauchi worked, as all who were accused and tortured were freed. However,

¹⁶⁵ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 38-39.

¹⁶⁶ *The English Church Mission in Corea: Its Faith and Practice*, London: A. R. Mowbray, 1917, ProQuest Ebook Central, 4.

¹⁶⁷ *Annual Report of 1910-11*, 39.

¹⁶⁸ Myers and Peattie, 297.

¹⁶⁹ *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea) 1911-12* by the Governor General of Chosen (Terauchi Masatake, Japanese), 52, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009039952>.

¹⁷⁰ *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea) 1912-13* by the Governor General of Chosen (Terauchi Masatake, Japanese), 58, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009039952>.

¹⁷¹ F. J. Glover, *Dispatches from the Wilderness: A History of the Canadian Missionaries and Korean Protestants in Northern Korea and Manchuria, 1893 - 1928*, (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary, 2018), 229, doi:10.11575/PRISM/32960.

the subsequent strict enforcement of the laws which prohibited freedom of speech and freedom of assembly demolished the nationalist wave that had been building until that point. Kenneth M. Wells, a historian and an expert of Korean Protestant nationalism, has described the 1910s as the “Dark Ages” for Korean independence activists who remained in Korea.¹⁷² Nevertheless, the 1912-1913 Annual Report emphatically denied any allegations of religious discrimination or torture, and again asserted that only legitimate propagation of religion would be given protection.

In 1915, Governor-General Terauchi created general regulations for religious propagation which “provided rules for the ways and means of proper religious propagation.”¹⁷³ These regulations required that any new missionaries had to report to the Governor-General, who would consider their methods of propagation and could order changes to be made in them. Revised education regulations were also imposed in private schools, regulations which required that religious teaching be excluded from curricula. However, private schools maintained by missionaries did not have to conform to these revised regulations immediately, as the enforcement of them would have caused “considerable inconvenience.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, they were allowed a ten year grace period where they could adjust to the new provisions. During this time, missionaries were able to continue teaching and running private schools.

While missionaries cannot be credited as the single driving force behind the March First Movement, their contribution to Korean education and thought cannot be ignored. Bringing their Western ideals with them to Korea, Protestant missionaries sought to educate the Korean people and achieved that throughout the first decade of colonization. They provided western education to Korean youth, which was greatly expanded during the 1905 education movement. The educational work of large Protestant missions created a loyalty to the church and Christianity, which was often expressed through various forms of patriotic sentiment. Consequently, missionaries and Japanese authorities continuously fought over education.¹⁷⁵ Missionaries also advocated for Koreans, as demonstrated through the “Conspiracy Case.” While Koreans may not have been able to fathom building their own nation-state in the early years of colonization, missionaries instilled ideas of Western liberal thought among all classes of Koreans. These Western thoughts transformed into a form of Korean nationalism based in anti-Japanese sentiment. As a result, the Protestant private schools “gave every appearance of being organs for the propagation of national thought.”¹⁷⁶

The growing anti-Japanese sentiment was evident among the steady rise of Korean publications during the first decade of colonization. Between 1910 and 1919, “the publication of books on all subjects increased, and a total of thirty-three Korean language magazines received permits” to publish from the colonial government.¹⁷⁷ While magazines were required to restrict their subject matter to non-political topics only, three magazines in particular became prominent public forums for the growing nationalist movement in Korea. These three magazines, *Ch’ōndogyo Monthly* (*Ch’ōndogyo wōlbo*, 1910-1913), *Boys* (*Sonyōn*, 1908-1911), *Youth*

¹⁷² Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation, Protestants and Self – Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896 – 1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 71.

¹⁷³ *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea) 1915-16* by the Governor General of Chosen (Terauchi Masatake, Japanese), 28, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009039952>.

¹⁷⁴ *Annual Report of 1915-16*, 157.

¹⁷⁵ Hamish, 175.

¹⁷⁶ Lee, 334.

¹⁷⁷ Myers and Peattie, 324.

(*Ch'ongch'un*, 1914-1918) began encountering censorship issues, but still reached many Koreans during printing.¹⁷⁸

The Japanese paranoia about missionaries in Korea began before the March First Movement and was apparent after its suppression. On January 7, 1919, the *Japan Advertiser* published an interview with Dr. Ramakichi Nakajima, a professor at the Imperial University, in which Dr. Nakajima stated,

“There can be little doubt that the American missionaries are behind the independence movement of the Koreans.”¹⁷⁹ This excerpt was sent from the Consul General at Seoul to the secretaries of the American Mission Stations in Korea. Even before the Movement began, the Japanese were suspicious of missionary involvement in an independence movement. Concerned, the Consul General enclosed a circular letter by the American Minister Resident and Consul General at Seoul, on May 11, 1897, to all Americans in Korea, which implored them to not participate in the domestic affairs of Korea.¹⁸⁰ Clearly, the Consul General was concerned with the accusation made in the *Japan Advertiser* and wanted missionaries to be reminded not to involve themselves in any political issues. Despite Japanese suspicions about missionaries and oppressive educational practices, missionary private schools that had survived the colonial transition became key instruments of a Korean national education that helped create the March First Movement.

Post-WWII International Ideology

As Korea reached its first decade under Japanese colonial rule, President Woodrow Wilson gave his Fourteen Points speech to Congress on January 18, 1918. During his speech, he articulated the principle of self-determination. Wilson’s speech is significant in terms of the March First Movement, not only because of its content but also because of the timing of the Movement itself.

Wilson’s speech detailed the need for a “free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined”¹⁸¹ This idea was going to be guiding the deliberations of the Paris Peace Conference, which took place only a few months prior to the March First Movement. This was certainly not the first self-determination had been discussed in an international context, as in 1915, “numerous peace organizations [had] recognized the right to self-determination.”¹⁸² These organizations included the International Peace Bureau, the World Peace Foundation and the Dutch Anti-War Council. Additionally, Vladimir Lenin had published his *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* in 1914. However, Wilson’s speech had brought this concept onto the international stage, and even further, had recognized that without self-determination, sustainable world peace could not be achieved. In his speech, he explained, “An evident principle runs through the whole program I have outlined. 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. Unless

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1919, Volume II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), Document 412.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Mario R. DiNunzio, ed., *Woodrow Wilson : Essential Writings and Speeches of the Scholar-President* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 404, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁸² May, 217.

this principle be made its foundation no part of the structure of international justice can stand.”¹⁸³ Thus, Wilson’s position as U.S. President had allowed him to make it clear internationally that a world without war required self-determination.

Additionally, Wilson’s speech famously recognized a need for “a general association of nations.”¹⁸⁴ The right of self-determination needed an organization that would ensure its recognition and enforcement. The Korean delegates’ experience at the Hague in 1907 demonstrated this need for a new international tribunal that could rectify the resentment Korea had towards Japan. After Wilson’s address to Congress, Korea submitted petitions to both President Wilson, specifically, and the organized international community in Paris, just as it had attempted to do in 1907.¹⁸⁵ Rhee Syngman, Henry Chung, and Min Chan-ho, representatives of the Korean National Association (founded in San Francisco in 1909), submitted a plea to President Wilson. In February 1919, Rhee and Chung petitioned the Paris Peace Conference, also via the Korean National Association. In China, nationalists had formed the New Korea Youth Corps and sent member Kim Kyu-sik to Paris to appeal for the self-determination of Korea. Kim submitted two petitions “protesting the injustice of Japanese colonialism in Korea and asking for help to achieve independence,” but all three petitions were ignored.¹⁸⁶ This last rejection from the international community ended Korea’s hopes of international support and pushed the March First Movement forward.

The March First Movement

As mentioned before, the March First Movement was strategically timed with the national mourning of King Kojong, and now coincided with the negotiations of the Paris Peace Conference. This was the opportune time for Korea to make itself known.

Immediately prior to the March First Movement, a Korean detective from Seoul, Shin Seung Hee, visited the Ch’öndogyo printing house. The Ch’öndogyo, or Religion of Heavenly Way, had developed out of the crushed Tonghak followers and was now a organized religion with an extensive cultural program that included the publishing of the national newspaper *Independence News*.¹⁸⁷ When visiting the printing house, Shin discovered that it had received the newly written Declaration of Independence on February 27th, and had been tasked with printing 21,000 copies. Surprisingly, Shin did not report this discovery to his Japanese superiors and subsequently fled with money the Ch’öndogyo provided him for travel. Not much else is known about him, other than he was captured and killed by the Japanese.¹⁸⁸

One can only speculate about the motivations behind Detective Shin’s staying quiet, whether it was because of a bribe or a change of heart. Regardless, his story is an example of trust and individual agreement that surely countless other individuals involved in the March First Movement experienced, which further enabled the Movement to even happen. The lack of trust in international relations at this time, and “most notably in the fact that agreements with Korea were neither honored by Japan nor by many other nations,” could have contributed to the trust the organizers of the Movement had to place in one another, and in Wilson’s principle of self-determination.¹⁸⁹ While Korean petitioners were ignored at the Paris Peace Conference,

¹⁸³ DiNunzio, 407.

¹⁸⁴ DiNunzio, 406.

¹⁸⁵ May, 218. Document: http://www.forwardintomemory.com/Nov_1918_Wilson_KNA.PDF.

¹⁸⁶ Kim, *A History*, 329.

¹⁸⁷ Lee, 335.

¹⁸⁸ May, 220.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 224.

Wilson's Fourteen Points had raised the standards of international morality and set the stage for Korea to incite an independence movement.¹⁹⁰

The independence movement began on March 1, 1919 in Seoul with the proclamation of the Declaration of Independence and street demonstrations. The Declaration of Independence was signed by thirty-three Korean religious figures, comprised of fifteen Ch'ondogyo, fifteen Christians, and three Buddhists.¹⁹¹ Religious groups took on the full responsibility of the planning because only churches were prepared with enough infrastructure for mobilization and communication. As described at the outset, the signers met at the T'aehwagwan restaurant in Seoul to promulgate the Declaration they had signed prior, and the Declaration was also read aloud to a crowd mainly of students in Pagoda Park nearby. The crowd subsequently marched through the streets, waving Korean flags and shouting "Tongnip manse!" (Long live Korean independence!)¹⁹² This Movement quickly spread worldwide, amassing over two million Korean participants who demonstrated in 1500 protests.¹⁹³ After the signers voluntarily surrendered to authorities, the March First Movement was left without any official leaders. Activists began asserting that "Korea had declared its independence, representatives were in Paris to argue for self-determination at the peace conference, and their efforts must be supported by demonstrations in Korea to repudiate Japanese rule."¹⁹⁴ In demanding this, the activists had capitalized on the educated's existing mass consciousness against the oppressive Governor-General, and large masses of Koreans clearly immediately responded to this appeal. As the demonstrations spread, what once was a peaceful effort quickly turned violent. Not only was the Movement suppressed brutally by the Japanese Governor-General, but in multiple areas peaceful demonstrations were suppressed by authorities who used force, and resulted in violent counterattacks on Japanese gendarmes and police.¹⁹⁵ Some protests even turned violent without impetus from Japanese authorities. By late March and early April of 1919, the end of the first stage of the Movement, areas of Korea were in open, bloody rebellion.¹⁹⁶ This initial period was defined by the hundreds of thousands of Korean participants whose actions ranged from peaceful protest to violent assaults in their open political effort for independence.

An official report from the Japanese Foreign Office on March 7th stated that "most of the rioters are Christian students, ignorant malcontents, and lower class laborers and behind them is understood to have been standing missionaries of a certain country."¹⁹⁷ Protestant missionaries, specifically American missionaries, were quickly accused by the Japanese as conspirators in the March First Movement. On April 6, 1919, Japanese Ambassador Morris sent a correspondence to the Acting Secretary of State describing that "Eli Miller Mowry, American of Presbyterian mission [at] Pyengyang, [was] arrested for permitting Koreans to use his premises for printing propaganda."¹⁹⁸ While Ambassador Morris continued by asserting that American missionaries could not have inspired the Movement because they were "wholly ignorant of the population

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Kim, *A History*, 332.

¹⁹² Ibid., 333.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Frank Baldwin, "Participatory Anti-Imperialism: The 1919 Independence Movement," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 1 (1979): 125, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41490143>.

¹⁹⁵ Baldwin, 126.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Timothy L. Savage, "The American Response to the Korean Independence Movement, 1910—1945," *Korean Studies* 20 (1996): 195, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719607>.

¹⁹⁸ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1919, Volume II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), Document 414.

[sic] to inaugurate it,¹⁹⁹ he nevertheless described that the majority of unrest were in cities with mission stations, and that American missionaries, who had the “closest possible relations with their native converts,” had expressed antagonism about the methods used by the military government in Korea.²⁰⁰ This exchange demonstrates some of the concerns the American government had regarding the role of missionaries in the Movement. It also confirms that the Japanese had believed some missionaries directly aided the Movement, through the printing and distribution of Korean independence propaganda. About a week later, on April 14th, the Acting Secretary of State replied to Ambassador Morris and cautioned the Consulate at Seoul to act with great precaution and restraint “with specific cases involving Americans as they may arise.” to assure the Japanese that the American government was not involved and did not sympathize with Korean nationalist actions.²⁰¹ The American government was clearly very hesitant in its actions and response, as it did not want to offend the Japanese, nor assume any responsibility for the events that occurred. The rest of the international community followed suit, and no official support from any country was given to the Movement.

The large scale and coordination of the Movement stunned the Governor-General, who quickly responded to the effort with harsh repression. This violent period resulted in over 7,500 demonstrators being killed, 16,000 wounded, and 46,000 arrested. On April 15th, the cruelest incident occurred just south of Seoul, where Japanese authorities locked worshipers gathered inside a church and burned them alive.²⁰² The brutality of the Movement and the massive Korean struggle was communicated to the world primarily through Western missionary channels. Specifically, reports from American missionaries poured into the U.S. government. While strong international criticism was incited, no official response was given by the international community.²⁰³

In 1920, the Commission on Relations with the Orient of the Federal Council of the Church of Christ in America released two volumes of *The Korean Situation: Authentic Accounts of Recent Events*. These books contained eyewitness accounts from both American and British missionaries that described the horrors Koreans endured during the March First Movement and provided new insights into the Movement. In the foreword of Volume I, it states,

The Commission wishes to state with utmost clearness that as a Commission it is not concerning itself with the political questions involved in the Korean Independence Movement. Whether or not Korea should be granted political independence is not a question upon which it is called to express judgment. The Commission is, however, concerned with all right-minded men that brutality, torture, inhuman treatment, religious persecution, and massacre shall cease everywhere. The evidence of the wide prevalence of such deeds in Korea has become convincing.²⁰⁴

Similar to the American government, the Commission was reluctant to even address the question of Korea’s independence that the Movement raised. The Commission would not even wholly

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ *Papers Relating*, Document 414.

²⁰¹ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1919, Volume II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), Document 416.

²⁰² Baldwin, 333.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America and Commission on Relations with the Orient. *The Korean Situation: Authentic Accounts of Recent Events*. New York: The Commission, 1919-1920, 6-7.

condemn the Japanese government. The Commission, however, did criticize the methods of colonization the Japanese government used and called upon Americans to “give the strongest possible moral support to the progressive and anti-militaristic movements” in Korea, and states that hope for Korea “and indeed for China and the whole world lies in the overthrow of militarism in Japan.”²⁰⁵ This demonstrates the kind of thinking about self-determination that had developed, and the Commission illustrated the March First Movement almost as an example of Wilson’s principle in their report.

Comparing the “Japanese military system” used to stop demonstrators to the “Prussian machine which was recently smashed in Europe,” the Commission reported on March 21, 1919 that one newspaper had described that six thousand Koreans were in jail. The Commission explained that the Movement at this date was countrywide and included Christians, the Ch’ondogyo, and Buddhists. Students of the public schools Japan had established in Korea were “equally involved with those of Mission schools,” and “countless offenses against humanity” were being committed daily.²⁰⁶ After giving a brief history of the Japanese colonial system and reform tendencies, the Commission had a section dedicated to the “Genesis of the Korean Independence Movement.”²⁰⁷ This section goes into detail of the growing independence movement in Korea, beginning with the Paris Peace Conference.

According to the first volume, a group of missionaries had met with the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Governor-General, during which they were informed that “a Korean had interviewed President Wilson before he had left for Paris, and asked the President if he would bring up the question of Korea at the Conference.”²⁰⁸ Wilson allegedly responded that the Conference was only for countries that were affected by the war, and consequently the question of “a country at peace as Korea” could not be properly raised. The interviewer then asked if Korea would be discussed at the Conference if Koreans showed their unmistakable dissatisfaction, to which Wilson responded that “he would not say that it could not be.”²⁰⁹ This account contradicts what many scholars have written about Korea’s failed appeal at the Paris Peace Conference. Scholars tend to only describe how the petitions at the Conference were ignored and do not mention an interview with Wilson. Additionally, the report describes that Korean students who were attending various colleges in Japan started a movement for the self-determination of Korea during February. This resulted in many of the students being arrested. Because of this, principals of schools “were called before the Prefect at the City Hall” and told to warn their students not to be “led away by the actions of the Korean students in Japan.”²¹⁰ While the Japanese had their suspicions about a movement occurring, the size and organization of the Movement was actually what shocked them.

The accounts of the major events from March 1st are generally consistent, that the signers had gathered and then turned themselves in, and a crowd in Pagoda Park began a demonstration through the streets of Seoul. After the signers of the Declaration were arrested, the Japanese police “published in the newspapers that they had surrounded the ring leaders in an eating house as they were drinking success to their plot.”²¹¹ As the crowd walked through Seoul, the Commission described that not a “single act of violence was done. At one point mounted

²⁰⁵ Federal Council, 7.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

gendarmes charged the crowd and inflicted some sabre cuts.”²¹² That evening and the next day, Japanese police were making as many arrests as possible, with official press reports releasing that missionaries were responsible for inciting the Movement because of the number of Christian demonstrators. Allegedly, Japanese “police reporters played up the Christian schools and glossed over the facts in regard to the participation of the government school students and the Buddhists.” The American Consul eventually demanded that the Japanese government discredit the accusations against missionaries, but the police reports and press still continued to print them.²¹³

The Commission also described that missionaries were attacked during the Movement, and their homes were often searched by Japanese police immediately after the demonstrations began. For example, on March 20th, “Rev. John Thomas, a missionary of the Oriental Missionary Society, was attacked by soldiers at Kokei, and severely beaten. When he produced his British passpower, it was thrown on the ground and stamped on, as was also a preaching permit which had been given to him by the authorities.”²¹⁴ Detailed accounts also were given about protestors, describing that on March 22nd, another street demonstration took place in Seoul where it was quickly dispersed by authorities. That evening, demonstrations began in several different parts of the city, and “bayonets were freely used and many were wounded.”²¹⁵ According to the Commission, Seoul was under martial law from March 1st to at least the 22nd, with the city being patrolled by soldiers. With missionaries reporting these stories worldwide, the the Seoul Press ran a couple of editorial articles alleging that Koreans were “atrocious liars” and that prison authorities had assured them that no tortures were taking place. A missionary purportedly showed an article to a Japanese civilian who replied that the report meant there had been no tortures since demonstrators arrived in prison. Another foreigner discussed “the editorial with the editor of the paper” who described that while he knew there were cruelties taking place, the articles were “speaking officially.”²¹⁶

These compilation of these firsthand accounts provide the missionary perspective on the March First Movement. While at the time of publishing, the Commission was clearly unsure of how the Movement would ensue, the public reporting of the harsh Japanese suppression was intended to ensure that “every possible influence may be brought to bear for the protection of Koreans from inhuman treatment and injustice” and that an enlightened public opinion would be developed that would “strengthen the progressive, anti-militaristic forces in Japan in their efforts to secure justice and fair dealing in Korea.”²¹⁷ Regardless, the Commission admired the genuine resistance of the Korean people, and described Japan’s colonial system as an effort to exploit a people and benefit them... [and] impose ‘culture’ against the desires of a people with a culture of its own.²¹⁸ The Commission assured that regardless of the outcome of the Movement, the publicity these compilations would bring would help “both Korea and Japan in their ascent to a higher plane of civilization,” still viewing both Korea and Japan as inferior states.²¹⁹

Despite missionaries’ disseminating information about the Movement and its brutal suppression, the efforts of the March First Movement had clearly failed to achieve enough

²¹² Ibid., 13.

²¹³ Federal Council, 16.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

support for Korea from the international community. Without that support, the Japanese were able to maintain their colonial grip on Korea until the end of World War II. Independence for Korea was not achieved until that time.

Immediate Effects in Korea: The Cultural Reform

The March First Movement nevertheless resulted in a few immediate effects in Korea. The Movement had forced the Japanese to reassess and modify their colonial policies in Korea. World War I had also brought a more liberal current in Japanese politics, with the inauguration of the Hara Kei cabinet in 1918. Hara was a civilian party politician in Japan who “revealed his distaste for military-oriented colonial rule in Korea.”²²⁰ In August 1919, Japan announced that Governor-General Hasegawa Yoshimichi (whose harsh rule had taken over in 1916) would be replaced by the “softer appearance” of Admiral Saito Makoto’s rule. Saito instilled policy changes known as the “Cultural Policy.”²²¹

Similar to Terauchi Masatake, Governor-General Hasegawa was known to have an extremely discriminatory and harsh view of Korean people in general. When he was replaced, it was customary for the outgoing governor to leave a personally written report for the incoming successor. His report included his recommendations, and reflected the Japanese authorities’ perspectives regarding colonial policy after the Movement.

In the report, Hasegawa assured that Japan had not “willfully adopted policies that [were] unfair to the Koreans.”²²² However, he described the need to change to a more gradual assimilation policy in order to have a smoother governance in the future. His statements almost blame the local Japanese who were in charge of enforcing the colonial policies, describing, “those people charged with the actual work of implementing assimilation [were] apt to seek hasty results” despite the gradualist colonial approach being “abundantly clear.”²²³ Hasegawa went on to explain the importance of naturally unifying thought between Japanese and Koreans, and argued that the immediate steps taken should be to “(1) strengthen the economic ties linking Koreans and Japanese, making them indissoluble, and (2) promote schools and social education, further opportunities for Koreans and Japanese to study together and the spread of the Japanese language, encourage immigration from the home islands, and open the door to mixed marriages.”²²⁴ He then addresses the motivations behind the Japanese colonization stating that “this union” was for the “survival of both peoples” and that anyone criticizing the “protective actions” of the government was misunderstanding Japan’s intentions.²²⁵

Hasegawa further explained that the unequal treatment between Japanese and Koreans had been a concern for Japan since the annexation, and was repeatedly discussed with Japanese administrators. He contended that as a result of this repeated discussion, Japanese attitudes toward Koreans had recently greatly improved, but that “many still show contempt for Koreans.”²²⁶ Again, he deflected the blame to the local Japanese and disregarded the discrimination that had been systematically built in to the colonial system. Hasegawa also addressed the education system in colonial Korea, because so many students had participated in

²²⁰ Kim, *A History*, 335.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Richard Devine, “Japanese Rule in Korea after the March First Uprising. Governor General Hasegawa’s Recommendations,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 52, no. 4 (1997): 529, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2385698>.

²²³ Devine, 530.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid., 532.

²²⁶ Ibid., 537.

the Movement. Education was a “key foundation for the gradual Japanization of this presently unstable society,” and Hasegawa stressed the importance of increasing educational opportunities for Koreans. To him, people who thought the spread of education would stimulate political thought in Koreans were ignoring the fact that leaving Koreans on their own would encourage “moral decay.”²²⁷

When Governor-General Saito’s new Cultural Policy was put into place, some reforms followed Hasegawa’s “Recommendations.” This new policy had six major changes: the Governor-General would now be appointed from admirals or active-duty generals; freedom of speech, assembly, press, and association was allowed with limitations; the gendarmerie police system was replaced by the ordinary police system; and government officials and school teachers were no longer required to wear uniforms or carry swords; educational opportunities for Koreans were expanded; and Korean cultural self-expression was allowed more freedom. These changes were significant because they demonstrate how the Movement had forced the Japanese to respond by easing restrictions on the Korean people. While some scholars believe these changes were superficial, Hasegawa’s insights shed some light on what Japanese colonial rulers were thinking and planning during this tumultuous period.

In December of 1921, Governor-General Saito released his *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen 1918-1921*. Totalling over 270 pages, the Report detailed the structural changes of the Cultural Policy and the Movement. The language of the Report is more significant though, as Korean demonstrators were described throughout the report as “malcontents” who often organized violent crimes. In the Public Peace and Order section for example, Saito explains that since the Movement, rumors of Korean malcontents “abroad would send many men secretly into the country and blow up government building and railways in hope of thus gathering strength for their Movement.”²²⁸ While the report describes that nothing came of these rumors, they demonstrate the Korean discrimination that continued to exist after the March First Movement.

Conclusion

The March First Movement was instilled by a combination of various influences: the harsh and structured colonization that Korea had been enduring under Japan since 1910, the spread of anti-imperialist global ideology after World War I, and the prior establishment of Protestant missionaries and education throughout Korea. There is not a single driving force behind the March First Movement as without one of these components, the Movement may have not occurred when it did.

After a history of unequal treaties being forced on Japan, the Japanese in turn targeted Korea shortly following the Meiji Restoration. Emulating Western techniques, Japan opened Korea through the *Unyō* Incident, which resulted in the Treaty of Kanghwa. Even though Japan’s influence was never welcomed into Korea, from that year on, Japan and China competed over influence. The Military Mutiny of 1882 and the Tonghak Peasant Uprising highlighted the competition over Korea between these two countries and eventually led to the First Sino-Japanese War. This war was the first time Japan was acknowledged as a civilized society in international law, and the need to prove that title motivated the Japanese during the war. Ultimately, Japan was awarded Taiwan after defeating the Japanese.

²²⁷ Devine, 536.

²²⁸ *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen 1918-1921* by the Governor General of Chosen (Saito Makoto, Japanese), 156, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009039952>.

The Russo-Japanese War followed, and during the time in between the two wars, Japan focused on increasing influence in Korea. After a decisive victory, Japan had removed its last major threat to its dominant power position in Korea and acquired Korea as a protectorate. In response, Korea sent three representatives to the Hague in hopes of appealing to the international community. This was the first of three non-violent attempts Korea set forth to request help from the international community. When that appeal failed, Korea became an official Japanese colony.

The first decade of Japanese colonization was defined by the harsh rule of Governor-General Terauchi Masatake. The policies were discriminatory, destructive, and structured in a systemic way that was inescapable for Koreans. Koreans were politically suppressed, in a society that had no free speech, free press, suffrage, or representative government. The Japanese stole large agricultural plots of land from Koreans through a cadastral survey that required Korean citizens to report their landholdings to the new Land Survey Bureau. This “reform” allowed the Governor-General to confiscate land from those who failed to report and register their land in the short period of time provided. Subsequently, Governor-Generals sold the land at much less than it was worth to Japanese companies who produced huge profits off the land. While Korean citizens were forced off their lands, Japanese companies and Governor-Generals became great and powerful landowners who provided profits for Japan. Industrial and agricultural production in Korea was designated to only serve Japan’s needs. Japanese companies exploited the natural resources of Korea with the generous backing of the Governor-General. Because of these favorable conditions, Japanese companies were able to monopolize Korea’s natural resources, industries, and finances for their benefit. As Japanese companies were profiting, Korean businesses struggled to obtain enough capital to survive. Finally, a highly authoritarian, centralized government was created and harshly enforced by an abundant military police force. The Japanese colonization of Korea was meant to rule and exploit the colony for Japanese interests, with the Governor-General spearheading this effort. These brutal policies reinforced a national consciousness, both domestically and foreignly, amongst all classes against Japanese rule, ultimately contributing to the development of the March First Movement.

The presence of Protestant missionaries in Korea further strengthened Korea’s national consciousness through Westernized education. Because Western missionaries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were believers in the supremacy of Western civilization, they became effective and committed operatives of Westernization. They taught Korean youth Western learning, imported and sold Western tools, and published newspapers. Missionaries were also able to capitalize on the low literacy rate in Korea, and Christianity became associated with the dissemination of reading. Their mission education was soon opened to every possible convert, and missionaries began establishing a substantial number of schools in Korea. By 1905, the country-wide movement for “education for the nation” had taken over Korea and mission work had effectively covered the country. Western-style subjects were taught in private missionary schools, giving Koreans the opportunity to learn about subjects that had been excluded by the Japanese. There was a huge expansion of Westernized education and Christianity in Korea until the annexation. Through this education, and the education that continued after the annexation, missionaries became a significant contributor to the national consciousness of the March First Movement despite being under the watchful eye of the Japanese.

Finally, President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech resonated with young Korean nationalists, recognizing that self-determination was needed to create a sustainable world

peace. Wilson's vision pushed Koreans to attempt two more non-violent appeals to the international community. After Wilson's speech, Rhee Syngman, Henry Chung, and Min Chan-ho, representatives of the Korean National Association, submitted a plea to President Wilson, and later petitioned the Paris Peace Conference. In China, nationalists had formed the New Korea Youth Corps and sent member Kim Kyu-sik to Paris to appeal for the self-determination of Korea. All three petitions were ignored, and this last rejection from the international community ended Korea's possibility of international support and pushed the March First Movement forward.

The March First Movement was a culmination of these factors; specifically, Japan's influence was never welcomed or accepted by Korea, so the combination of harsh Japanese colonization practices, anti-imperial global ideology after WWI, and the establishment of Protestant missionaries in Korea all contributed to the development and creation of an independence movement that quickly spread throughout the entire country. Each one of these influences helped determine when the Movement occurred, and why it occurred. This study is filled with the admirable resistance efforts of the Korean people against Japanese imperialism, starting with the Tonghak Peasant Uprising and lasting until the end of the March First Movement. The power and impact of the March First Movement cannot be overstated, because the Movement directly influenced the creation of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai. The Provisional Government was created as a republic, guaranteeing the people an elected government, "freedom of speech, assembly, press, and religion; and separation of state and religion."²²⁹ While this entity was weakened by the distance from Korea, a lack of international support, and the ideological left-right split among nationalists after the Bolshevik Revolution, this was a government that could lawfully work for Korea's independence. Without the March First Movement, that achievement may have never developed. The current government of the Republic of Korea today prides itself on successfully obtaining the legitimacy of the former Korean Provisional Government, a product of Korea's noble fight for independence in the March First Movement.

²²⁹ Kim, *A History*, 334.

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