Extended Essay in History:

Origins of the outburst of Korean nationalism in the March 1st Movement, 1919

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Under what circumstances did the March 1st Movement develop?

Word Count: 3,769

Subject: History

Name:
Session Number:
Supervisor:
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND: HOW DID JAPAN ANNEX KOREA?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS</td>
<td>5-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICIES ENACTED BY JAPAN, 1910-1919</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, 1918</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IN TOKYO, 1919</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATIONS, 1919</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEATH OF THE EMPEROR GWANGMU, 1919</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

To answer this question, sources used included books on the period of Japanese annexation as well as more specific texts on the March 1st movement. Five causes of the March 1st Movement were identified and these included: Japanese policies; the impact of World War One; the declaration of independence in Tokyo; the allied organisation formed in 1919; the death of Emperor Gwangmu and these will be analysed and examined. The focus will be on how the March 1st Movement came about and the significance of each cause.

The research question is: Under what circumstances did the March 1st Movement develop?

In 1919 March 1st Movement occurred in Korea. It was a peaceful demonstration against the Japanese government; however, it was a declaration not only to Japan but also to the world that Koreans will regain their nation. It was a declaration of war against the colonial powers.

As a Korean, March 1st is one of the most important national holidays that I must commemorate due to what happened then and its significance. Indeed, many independence movements were carried out by different individuals throughout the annexation period. However, the March 1st Movement was the moment in the annexation period, in which the entire population as one group put up a resistance movement, from Seoul to Jeju Island by March 21st.

In a period of history when colonial powers still prevailed and sought only to exploit the colonized nations for their interests but also the rise of nationalism that drove nations such as Hungary to challenge foreign rulers, Koreans shouted from the bottom of their hearts for the independence and thus facilitated the growth of worldwide nationalism.

The movement was brutally oppressed by the Japanese government; however, it became a stepping stone as it not only increased national consciousness but also forced the Japanese government to transform from militaristic to “cultural governance”. However, it meant that Korea now headed towards a period, in which the Japanese government concentrated on the elimination of the spirit of Koreans through brainwashing and forced Japanese education.

Nonetheless it isn’t an overstatement to say that the March 1st Movement was the catalyst in the history of Korean independence as it led to establishment of provisional governments in different parts of the world such as Shanghai and Russia. Furthermore, it was the event that finally informed the world that the propaganda, which claimed that Koreans conformed to Japan’s authority and rule, was fabricated by Japan.

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
6 Heegon Kim, “3.1 Undonggwaa Daeanninukkum Imshijeongbuuui Saegyesajeok Uuiuui,” in 3.1 Undonggwa 1919nyeonui Saegyejeok Uuiuui, by Heegon Kim, et al. (Seoul: Dongbookayeoksajaedan, 2010), 16-17.
Additional fact that worldwide historians should understand is that the March 1st Movement “took the leading role in preventing then dominant imperial forces from overwhelming the remaining regions of the world.” After all the movement “prompted nations attending the Paris Peace Treaty forum to deal with the issue of the colonized nations”. If anyone should question the significance of the March 1st Movement, one should remember that declaration of independence that occurred on March 1st was the declaration from colonized nation to the entire colonial powers.

Background: how did Japan annex Korea?

Due to two agreements in 1905 and 1910, Korea lost its sovereignty to Japan by force. In 1905 Japan forced the Korean Emperor to sign the Ulsa agreement; its purpose was to deprive of the nation’s diplomatic rights. Many resisted against the agreement and even went as far as to assassinate the ministers who betrayed Korea and sided with Japan: Park Je Soon, Lee Ji Yong, Li Geun Tak, Lee Gwang Yong, Gwun Joon Hyun.

The Ulsa agreement was never officially approved by the Emperor Gojong. However, by forcing the Emperor to abdicate from his throne and through numerous conspiracies between some of the ministers and Japan, the annexation treaty was officially announced on August 28th 1910. Compulsively conforming to the first article of the treaty, the Emperor now permanently yielded his right to Korea to the Japanese Emperor. Without any war, only with a piece of paper, a kingdom that has existed for 500 years now belonged to Japan.

---

7 Kim, "3.1 Undonggwa Daehanminkuk Imshijeongbuuui," in 3.1 Undonggwa 1919nyeomui Saegyejeok, 39.
8 Ibid., 40.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Policies enacted by Japan, 1910-1919

Land tenure was one of the major policies that devastated the life of Koreans, especially that of peasants. Oriental Development Company was established in Korea to acquire land tenure from Koreans and develop land for economic benefits. The local office would lend money on mortgage and if the payments were late, it would confiscate the land tenure and hand it to the company.

Furthermore, through land investigation business, land tenure was redistributed. The Japanese government-general of Korea stressed that the investigation was necessary to increase the productivity of agriculture. However, many land owning peasants were illiterate and thus unable to register their lands. In the end, the number of land that was owned by the state was 26,800. This resulted in farmers who were left with nothing but poverty. Afterwards, all lands were sold to Japanese at a cheap price. As a result, many Japanese farms were built and thus more migrants. While Koreans were living a devastated life, Japanese were enjoying their new economic opportunities.

One main reason why the March 1st Movement could have been a nationwide movement despite Japanese militaristic government was a strong antipathy. Japan's policies were the major driving force behind strong antipathy. By sharing a common objective, Koreans started to plan for resistance movements in order to fight against the imperial rule. However, through policies, Japan now had control over agriculture by confiscating lands from the Koreans. By controlling one major flow of business in Korea, people had to conform to the government since they needed lands to grow crops and ultimately to live.

Strong antipathy and humiliation that developed over 9 years of annexation resulted in nationwide rise of nationalism. It is in a way a parallel to other colonized countries' growth of nationalism such as Hungarian nationalism. It was the Austrian Emperor who ruled Hungarians who were culturally and ethically different and thus Hungarians stood up for the creation of independent state. Similarly, watching their ancestral lands being exploited by foreign invaders; watching fellow Koreans being exploited by foreigners, people started to develop national consciousness and the desire for independence.

---

14 Yi, Urh Himauro Nararaul Chaketta, 39-40.
15 Ibid., 42.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 47.
Considering the time the movement was organized and carried out, it would have taken more than courage to stand up against Japan who was more influential and powerful than Korea. It is clear from the land policy that during the 9 years prior to the movement, Japan had superiority over poor and vulnerable people, highly dependent on agriculture. Furthermore, Japan’s militaristic government only enhanced the vulnerability of people. Thus, if no strong antipathy existed within the population, certain groups of people such as youths or lower social class would have neglected as they would fear the retaliation. Therefore, since policies that affected the population’s lives were unbearable, everyone was tempted to participate in the March 1\(^{st}\) Movement and express their anger and hardship.

Indeed, all my sources on this cause were written against Japan as they were written by Koreans and thus biased. Therefore, Japanese and pro-Japanese elements may claim that Japan’s policies allowed Korea to modernize from a backward, unindustrialized nation into industrialized nation through such harsh policies. However, it is also the truth that Japan’s policies were in favor of Japanese, not Koreans because Korea was merely a colony.

**Consequence of the First World War, 1918**

Due to Japan’s compromise with China and Russia, independence fighters had to abandon plans they had, which involved establishment of quarter for independence movement and military operations.\(^{18}\) It was clear by 1917 that Japan would be one of the winners of the war. However, it also meant that Koreans would have more difficulties in fighting against Japan. Unexpectedly, the consequences of the First World War gave Koreans hope instead of despair. Woodrow Wilson introduced the principle of national self determination, which was the fifth article of the 14 statements.\(^{19}\) It was to resolve the problem associated with Central Powers’ colonies. So technically, the principle didn’t address Korea since it was annexed to Japan, which was one of the Allies. Patriots clearly realized the nature of the 5\(^{th}\) principle; however, they tried to use it for their advantage. Although the principle didn’t address Korea, it addressed the problem involving colonies. Therefore, Koreans became hopeful by the fact that the world started the problem of national self determination. Because people were ascertained that independence from Japan could be

---

\(^{18}\) Yi, Uri Himuro Nararuul Chaketta, 168.

\(^{19}\) Hankukgeunhyeondaesahakhwae, *Hanguk Tongnipundongsa Kanguui* (Paju, Korea: Hanul Akademi, 2007), 95.
achieved due to disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the First World War, they have gained courage. In a way, the news of Wilson’s 14 statements acted as like propaganda, in which people became tempted by the idea of declaring independence by following the trend of rising nationalism.

Although the consequences of the First World War have provided a background appropriate for an independence movement to be carried out, it is disputable to say Wilson’s principle of national self determination had significant impact on the development of March 1\textsuperscript{st} Movement. Except for the fact that Koreans became more determined to gain independence without any help from foreign powers and more eager to raise awareness of the situation in Korea to the world, the national self determination had no direct impact on the development. Such determination could have easily originated from other events and it was evident from the first cause, which were the policies, that Korea was experiencing rapid rise of nationalism. Thus, reasonably national self determination only enhanced the growth of nationalism in Korea by stirring up the peasant class as well as intellectuals by exemplifying how other countries under the rule of foreign powers were starting to gain independence and thereby attributing to the nationwide independence movement in 1919.

Nevertheless, it should be assumed that the consequences of the First World War had the least contribution to the development of the March 1\textsuperscript{st} Movement because only with rising nationalism, people should have had enough determination and passion to participate in the March 1\textsuperscript{st} Movement and make it into a nationwide movement.

\textbf{2.8 Declaration of Independence in Tokyo, 1919}

The declaration of independence by Korean students studying in Tokyo was the main catalyst that cut the chain of events that led to the March 1\textsuperscript{st} Movement in 1919. The cause of this declaration of independence was the news that a Korean representative was selected to participate in the Paris Peace Conference held in 1919.\textsuperscript{20} This news was sent to Shanghai, Manchuria, and Maritime province of Siberia through secret envoy.\textsuperscript{21} This news was also relayed to Korean students in Tokyo.

In the late 1918, the number of Korean students studying in Japan was 769 and in

\textsuperscript{20} Yi, \textit{Uri Himauro Nararuul Chaketta}, 168.
\textsuperscript{21} Iyagi Hankukyeoksa Pyeonjip Wewonhwae, \textit{Ilje Shikmintongchiwa Hangiltojaeng}, 75.
Tokyo alone there were 642 students. Although only compromised of students, movement for independence already began in Tokyo. During December 29th-30th in 1918, the society of oversea students and the Korean YMCA discussed vigorously about the independence of Korea. In the following year, students held an oratorical contest on January 16th and became determined to plan resistance movement even if they would sacrifice many of fellow students. The consensus was that by following the trend of the period, Korea must regain independence and young students must lead this fight for independence.

The news of students preparing declaration of independence was sent to Shanghai and Korea and the document was sent to American and English newspaper companies. On 28 February 1919, the declaration of independence was recited; however, when they were about start peaceful demonstration, Japanese police officials ambushed them and the movement failed with more than 40 students being arrested for organizing the movement.

2.8 declaration of independence was what Korean historians frequently quote as the determinant that caused the March 1st Movement. It was the immediate cause of the March 1st Movement since in less than a month, the biggest and the most significant movement in the Korean history was carried out with the help of entire population. Moreover, this was the reason why several organizations formed alliance to organize the movement because they were inspired and amazed by the passion and the firm determination of so many young patriots who were willing to fight for independence until the day they regain it. This was a wake-up call for patriots in Korea to stand up and fight for their nation’s freedom by uniting people together. Ultimately, the declaration of independence recited by Korean students in Tokyo started the development of the March 1st Movement. Along with long years of oppression and violence, nationalism in Korea exploded in the form of independence movement in 1919.

It may seem unusual for such small event in 1919 to begin the planning of the March 1st Movement. It was an event that could have disappeared from the Korean history because it was, in the end, one of failures. However, several Korean resources that I have used such as

---

22 Yi, Uri Himauro Narawul Chaiketta, 205.
23 Iyagi Hankukyeoksa Pyeongjip Wewonhwae, Ilje Shikmintonchiwa Hangiltojaeng, 76.
24 Ibid.
25 Song Sd Park et al., 3.1 Tongnipundongkwa Kim Toug-woun Uuisa (Seoul, Korea: Moshineunsaramdeul, 2013), 424.
26 Iyagi Hankukyeoksa Pyeongjip Wewonhwae, Ilje Shikmintonchiwa Hangiltojaeng, 78.
Uri Himuuro Nararuul Chatketta narrate the event in detailed manner and contribute the event as the origin of the March 1st Movement. One major reason for placing high significance is due to the feelings of shame and embarrassment that caused patriots to be more active. To make young adults declare independence in Japan must have made patriots realize that not only should resistance movements be carried out overseas but also within the nation. Also, following the declaration on February 8th, many students who were active and willing to pursue further in this activity concluded their study and went back to Korea.\(^\text{27}\) Therefore, 2.8 declaration of independence was an event that could have been buried within the history; however, its significance was that it mentally woke up patriots inside Korea.

**Organizations, 1919**

After Japan annexed Korea, it abolished every organization that was related to politics.\(^\text{28}\) The remaining organizations were either for religious purpose or for students. Among the organizations, the religious organizations were nationwide and this characteristic allowed the movement to be a nationwide movement.\(^\text{29}\) Furthermore, organizations also ultimately devised the entire plan for carrying out the March 1st Movement. Until 1919, organizations planned separate independence movements and never thought of merging their forces together. However, when 2.8 declaration of independence was recited in Tokyo by young youths, they were shocked by the patriotism of these students. This determined patriots in Korea to organize an independence movement by combing the forces.

On 25 February 1919, 33 people were decided as the main organizers of the March 1st Movement.\(^\text{30}\) This huge negotiation and planning happened in secret and thus until March 1st 1919, no Japanese government officials knew about it. This allied force, consisted of different organizations, is significant to the development of the March 1st Movement because they planned the movement so that it would meet the three principles devised during the planning: 1) it should be popularized 2) it should be a unified movement 3) it should be non-violent.\(^\text{31}\)

\(^{27}\) Iyagi Hankuyeoksa Pyeonjip Wewonhwae, *Ilje Shikmintoshchiwa Hangiltoojaeng*, 79.

\(^{28}\) Hankukgeonhyeondaesahakhhwae, *Hanguk Tongnipundongsa Kangui*, 100.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Park et al., *3.1 Tongnipundongkwa Kim Tong-woun*, 422.

It is debatable to say one cause was more significant than the other. It would be more proper to say that 2.8 declaration of independence was the main catalyst and alliance between organizations that eventually devised the plan would be the event that occurred as a consequence. It may have taken longer time for organizations to combine their forces and lead an independence movement because organizations existed for different purposes, for instance one organization was for Buddhist and another for Christians. Although people had a common goal, they were hesitant to negotiate with each other. But then 2.8 declaration of independence occurred in Tokyo, surprisingly led by young students in Tokyo. This fact that students attempted to have resistance movement by declaring independence of Korea in Japan shocked the patriots in Korea. Ultimately, in terms of significance, 2.8 declaration of independence should be more significant because without that event, the organizations wouldn’t form alliance with each other and thus plan out the March 1st Movement.

Death of the Emperor Gwangmu, 1919

The Emperor Gwangmu, previously called as Gojong, was relatively healthy despite old age. Therefore, the news of his death was unexpected and ultimately fueled anger. This was more immediate cause of the March 1st Movement than 2.8 declaration of independence since the rumor that the emperor was poisoned by the Japanese Emperor triggered the signal for the March 1st Movement.32

Although Korea was no longer ruled by a monarch, people still respected the royal family. This is clearly outlined in the Japanese research about Koreans and their cultural aspects. Although Koreans regarded the Emperor, who was deprived of his sovereignty by Japan, as incompetent and officials as corrupted, they still yearned for the old government system.33 A nation that learned Confucianism and thus valued filial piety wouldn’t be able to forget the dynasty that ruled Korea for centuries.34 Therefore, the rumor that the Emperor Gwangmu was poisoned by cunning Japanese infuriated Koreans even further. In other words, the March 1st Movement was also an expression of anger and grief felt by the population.

Interestingly, this last cause of the March 1st Movement ties the other four causes together. It was during this period that Koreans heard the news about Wilson’s 14 statements

32 Kuksapyeonchanwewonhwae, Iljaeui Mudantongchiwa 3.1 Undong, 131.
33 Yi, Uri Himauro Nararuul Chaketta, 129.
34 Ibid.
and the creation of 12 independent nations in Europe due to disintegration of Central Power such as Austro-Hungarian Empire.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, due to the funeral of the Emperor Gwangmu on March 3\textsuperscript{rd}, people were continuously arriving at Seoul.\textsuperscript{36} One of allied organizations’ principles that the independence movement they were about to carry out should be a popular movement, was decisive factor. After knowing the date of the funeral, they agreed that the independence movement should be held on March 1\textsuperscript{st}. In this way, people who were arriving at Seoul would be able to witness as well as participate in the peaceful demonstration against Japanese rule and further carry out independence movement in different regions of Korea. Therefore, due to Koreans’ unchanged respect towards the Emperor, the death of the Emperor Gwangmu contributed most to the development of nationwide independence movement on March 1\textsuperscript{st} by turning the movement into an emotional uprising of people against the Japanese government.

Compared to 2.8 declaration of independence, the death of the Emperor Gwangmu had the most impact and truly maximized the tension between Japan and Korea. It evoked the emotion of hatred, grief and antipathy inside people. If 2.8 declaration of independence in Tokyo started the planning of the March 1\textsuperscript{st} Movement by startling patriots in Korea, the death of the Emperor Gwangmu gave more meaning to the movement by making it into emotional uprising. Therefore, effectively both causes were equally significant in the development of the movement.

However, it is arguable to say that the Emperor’s funeral was only able to influence the March 1\textsuperscript{st} Movement because allied organizations used it as a part of their plan. They cleverly arranged the date to be March 1\textsuperscript{st} because they knew about the popular sentiment, which was anger towards the government and sorrow due to the Emperor’s death. By understanding the popular sentiment, allied organizations purposefully set the date two days before the funeral, which was about the time enough people from different regions should have arrived to attend the funeral. In conclusion, this cause has contributed the most to the March 1\textsuperscript{st} Movement by making the general population to join in the movement; however, on the one hand this was only possible due to allied organizations who decided to use this cause and therefore choosing March 1\textsuperscript{st} as the date.

\textsuperscript{35} Yi, Uri Himaaro Nararuul Chatketta, 221.
\textsuperscript{36} Kuksapyeonchamwewonhwae, Iljaeui Mudantongchiwa 3.1 Undong, 319.
Conclusion

Through analysis and examination of 5 causes of the March 1st Movement in 1919, it was evident that some causes were less significant than others and vice versa. Most of the causes were short or immediate causes and only one long term cause existed, which was the policies enacted by Japan. Each cause served different but at the same time similar purpose. It was essential that people had strong antipathy and the desire to be independent from Japan. Such desire and emotion derived from the policies and the death of the Emperor Gwangmu. Making sure that the movement could be continued to different regions of Korea was the duty of the allied organizations that analyzed the situation in Korea critically and thus chose the ideal date for the movement to occur. Ones that led to alliance between different organizations, which were the mastermind behind the movement, were students who declared independence of Korea in Tokyo on February 8th. The First World War enhanced the determination of patriots and gave hope by introducing the national self determination.

However, not every cause had equivalent significance. The consequences of the First World War essentially had no impact because arguably enhanced determination and hope weren’t necessary because whether or not independence was achievable, Koreans would have continued their struggles for independence. Moreover, in a nation where the rise of nationalism was taking place, patriots should have had enough determination. The policies set up a basis for any resistance movement to be carried out because people were being exploited by severe polices enacted by Japan and thus increasing antipathy. The remaining three causes were very interrelated and therefore hard to decide the most significant cause. Without even one the three causes, the March 1st Movement couldn’t have happened or at least wouldn’t have been the same movement recorded down in the history.

Some unresolved issues remain concerning this essay. The topic of origin of the March 1st Movement is dealt in significant lengths by Korean historians; however, not by world historians. Therefore, I could hardly find alternative perspectives due to lack of resources written by foreigners. In conclusion, if more world historians investigate the development of Korean nationalism during the annexation period and thereby give their perspective in this topic I chose, this essay could become more balanced essay, with alternative opinions on what contributed the most to the March 1st Movement.
Bibliography


Park, Song Su, Yong Hwa Shin, Ho Il Kim, and Byeong Suk Moon. 3.1 Tongnipundongkwa Kim Tong-woun Uuisa. Seoul, Korea: Moshineunsaramdeul, 2013.

