

## March 1st, 1919: A Day to Remember By Anne Kim

Some of the earliest information on Korea can be found in old Chinese historical records. From them, there is a particular quote that, when translated, states, “[The Koreans] avoid quarrels and love peace. However, they are brave, and when they are mistreated they would not hesitate to fight to death.” This quote summarizes some of the best and unchanging characteristics of Koreans, as well as the March 1st Movement that would come several thousand years later in 1919. The March 1st Movement was the embodiment of Korea’s undiminished spirit, even as the country experienced some of the most painful and crushing times of its long history. As millions of Koreans demonstrated together for their freedom, they proved that their country still lived, and that its people were independent in all but official name.

Korea would remain an official colony of Japan for more than 20 years after the March 1st Movement, and in 1919, had already been annexed by Japan for nine years. However, despite how bleak the odds of success seemed, the Korean people had chosen to portray their desire for freedom through peaceful demonstrations and a Declaration of Independence. In choosing to do so, they not only reconfirmed the lasting identity of Koreans as peace-loving, yet righteous, but also solidified the unity of the people. Thus, though the movement did not succeed in its intended goal of independence, I believe that this movement was a triumph for the Korean spirit.

Millions of Koreans were brought together under a common cause of independence, regardless of social class or age, and strengthened their nationalism. This would bring down the façade of a satisfied, colonized people, and reveal to the world that there were many problems in Japan’s occupation. After the March 1st Movement, Japan changed several of their ways in governing Korea in an effort to appease Koreans, such as replacing the military police force with a civilian one, and granting limited freedom to Koreans.

Furthermore, the movement was a direct and large contribution to the creation of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in April of that year. This government would not gain formal recognition by world powers, yet it would continue to coordinate resistance until 1945.

Thus the March 1st Movement became exemplary to other colonized countries for its political and social influence, though it was based on only the integration of peace and unbreakable will. The campaign would further define Korean people as enduring and determined, qualities that seem to have written Korea’s recent history.

In an unprecedented manner, South Korea’s economy was able to develop into one of the top twenty largest economies in the world in a short span of 50 years.

Beyond the loosened policies that immediately followed the movement, the Korean people achieved a lasting legacy and reinforced a national identity that would translate into a future.

Yet, as proud and nationalistic as my essay has sounded so far, who can deny that there are, indeed, faults within present Korean society? In the fervor of building back the nation, a sense of competition has overtaken the society, and seems to be present in nearly every aspect of life—in studying, in obtaining jobs, even in physical looks. Competition, in itself, is not an evil, but Korea has become very existential in reality, engulfed with pop culture, and buried in school and work. Thus it is all the more important for Koreans, and for those who are of Korean descent, to recognize our common identity again and remember the high cost of our independence.

From the March 1st Movement, there is so much wisdom and so many lessons that can be learned. It was a movement fueled by the passion and efforts of millions of people, and its purpose was both grand and selfless. That day, and continuously, the Korean people had struggled for fundamental rights and endeavored to not only better themselves, but the future generations and other Asian countries. These lessons—working in unison, focusing on the greater good, and striving to make a difference—are all lessons waiting for their application to both Korea's present society and the global community. In doing so, Koreans would not only be celebrating and honoring our heritage, but also be working to build a better future—one where we compete not against each other, but work in tireless harmony to bring international recognition of Korea and its rich culture.

Furthermore, a topic that I hesitate to mention (due to its sensitivity), but feel obligated to include is how many Koreans belonging to the older generation have maintained hard and prejudiced attitudes towards the Japanese. Many Koreans had died on that March 1st, and many more lives were taken as families were torn apart in the Korean War.

As students belonging to the younger generation, it is our duty to recognize the pain and the experience of the preceding generation. Yet, we must also work to free Korean society of the remnants of racism so that we may exemplify and uphold Korea's greatness of mind and of heart. The March 1st Movement is real proof of the power and influence of students—certain youth associations played a large role in planning the campaign, and it was a student (Chung Jae-yong) who had publicly read the Korean Declaration of Independence to a massive crowd at Pagoda Park in Seoul.

In combating prejudice, discrimination, and violence, we students must be the first to accept others. Students must act as leaders for awareness, as promoters of peace and equality, and as representatives of our heritage. There are so many ways that interest in Korean heritage could manifest, such as learning more about Korea's 5000-year history, or even starting off with the most basic and essential

step: learning the Korean language. Ultimately, we would not only be learning about Korea and writing its future, but also be upholding the power of a united and harmonious national spirit.