
The March First Declaration of Independence : An Accessible and Faithful Version

쉽고 바르게 읽는 3·1독립선언서
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The Presidential Commission on the Centennial Anniversary of the March First Independence Movement
and the Korean Provisional Government

Introduction

On March 1, 1919, Koreans declared their independence in seven cities in different parts of the country. The declaration of independence below was read aloud in front of throngs of Koreans, drawn together by a shared dream of independence.

“We hereby declare that Korea is an independent state and that Koreans are a self-governing people.” What do you think people who gathered to listen to the declaration of independence felt when they first heard this sentence?

Choe Namseon penned the March First Declaration of Independence, shining a ray of hope in the hearts of Koreans, who were going through daily sufferings.

Once the drafting, reviewing, and revising processes were complete, the declaration was signed by thirty-three faith leaders—fifteen Cheondoists, sixteen Christians, and two Buddhists—who affirmed their commitment to the nation’s independence with their personal seals.

The declaration was printed on February 27, 1919, and it was distributed nationwide on the following day. It was read out a loud on the first day of the next month in seven cities in different parts of the country.

The text was subsequently reproduced in hundreds or thousands of copies at schools and churches that were equipped with a printing press and was read at protests held daily around the nation.

Read the following declaration as you imagine yourself at one of those protest sites.

January 2019



The March First Declaration of Independence

: An Accessible and Faithful Version

We hereby declare that Korea is an independent state and that Koreans are a self-governing people. We proclaim this fact to all nations to reaffirm the great truth that all humans are equal, so that our descendants may forever enjoy their rights to live as an autonomous people.

This declaration of ours is propelled by the strength of our five thousand years of history and the shared will of twenty million Koreans. It is made so that our nation may thrive in perpetuity and be in step with the larger trend of global evolution that is being shaped by the conscience of humanity. This is the will of heaven and the spirit of our time, and it springs from the rights all humans deserve. Nothing in the world shall stand in the way of our independence.

It has been a decade since our nation was, for the first time in its millennia of existence, subjected to the ignominy of oppression by another people, having fallen victim to relics of a bygone era in the form of aggression and authoritarianism. The pain of being dispossessed of the right to lead our own lives is unfathomable, as is the sorrow of seeing every opportunity to foster our spirit wrenched from us. How deep are the wounds to our dignity, and how we lost our chance to contribute to the culture of this world through our new technology and creativity!

To relieve ourselves from being wronged thus far, to break free from our current misery, to forestall threats to come, to restore our stifled conscience and the nation's justice, to allow all to develop their own characters, and to hand down to our poor children perfect happiness instead of bitterness and shame, our foremost priority is to secure the independence of our nation.

Today, our twenty million people have steeled themselves in their resolve. The conscience of mankind and of our time fortifies us with the army of justice and the armaments of humanity. Therefore, we can defeat the mightiest foe if we take a stand and fight, and we can bring anything into being if we take the time to effect our will.

We do not accuse Japan of betrayal for not keeping its promises in the aftermath of the

Treaty of 1876. We shall not condemn the Japanese for their lack of respect because its scholars and politicians belittled our heritage as that of a colony, dismissed our culture as barbaric, and disrespected our long-established society and our good nature.

We are too focused on upbraiding ourselves to point the finger at others. We are too occupied with righting wrongs of the present and not the past. The task at hand is to build ourselves up, not to tear others down. We are compelled by our conscience to create our destiny anew, not by envy to drive out others to indulge a long-standing resentment or a moment's whim. We simply wish to set right this unjustified reality, in which we were sacrificed for the ambition of Japanese politicians for their outdated ideas and outdated forces, and to restore it to a natural and rational state.

Consider the consequences of our state's coerced annexation with Japan, which our people never desired. Japan is fomenting irreconcilable resentment between the two nations with disparate interests through oppression, discrimination, injustice, and false statistics. Is it not evident that the shortest way to mutual happiness and lack of tragedy is to boldly right the past wrongs and build upon earnest understanding to create a new world of good will!

Peace in the East cannot be brought about by coercively suppressing the deep-rooted frustration and resentment of twenty million Koreans. It will only breed even greater fear and hatred of four hundred million Chinese toward Japan. If this were the case, this will eventually lead to a tragic end of the Eastern world as the Chinese stand at the center of the the regional security. The independence of the Korean nation will make it possible for its people to flourish as they should and allow Japan to renounce its wrongheaded path and take responsibility for its role in the East. It will free China from the anxiety and fear that it may lose its land to Japan and secure a footing for peace in the region, which plays an essential role in world peace and the happiness of all humankind. How can the independence of our nation be dismissed as an emotional and trifling matter?

A new world is opening up before our eyes. The age of oppression by force is giving way to an era where principles reign. Our humane spirit, honed over thousands of years, now signals the dawn of a new civilization in the history of humankind. A new spring is enveloping our whole world, breathing new life into everything under the sun. The times of stifled breath in freezing blizzards are giving way to an age of balmy breezes, glowing light, and new life.

Now, as the way of the world is returning to life, we are at one with the spirit of the age

and have no reason to balk or waver. We will defend our innate right to liberty and bask in the joy of the bounty of life. We will give free rein to our naturally abundant creativity to let our great, brilliant culture blossom in the new spring that is warming the world.

That is why we are taking a stand. Our conscience and truth are with us. Men, women, young and old, will all burst out from this dark and antiquated shell to enjoy a new happy life along with all creation.

The souls of our forebears from thousands of years ago live in us and give us strength, while the momentum of the world protects us from without. Our beginning is our success. We are simply marching toward that bright light that beckons ahead of us.

Our Three Pledges

First, our declaration of independence today represents the wish of our people to safeguard and advance justice and human principles in their lives. Therefore, we shall only spread the spirit of freedom far and wide and avoid from being exclusive of others.

Second, everyone, down to the last of us, shall represent the voice of our people's rightful will.

Third, all actions shall be respectful of order to demonstrate our honorable cause and rightful conduct.

On the first day of March, in the four thousand two hundred fifty-second year since the founding of our nation(1919).

Representatives of the Korean people

Sohn Byeonghui	Gil Seonju	Yi Pilju Baek	Yongseong	Kim Wan-gyu
Kim Byeongjo	Kim Changjun	Gwon Dongjin	Gwon Byeongdeok	Nah Yonghwan
Nah Inhyeop	Yang Jeonbaek	Yang Hanmuk	Yu Yeodae	Yi Gapseong
Yi Myeongnyong	Yi Seunghun	Yi Jonghun	Yi Jong-il	Im Yehwan
Bak Junseung	Bak Huido	Bak Dongwan	Sin Hongsik	Sin Seokgu
Oh Sechang	Oh Hwayeong	Jeong Chunsu	Choe Seongmo	Choe Rin
Han Yong-un	Hong Byeonggi	Hong Gijo		