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March First Movement: A Turning Point for North American Protestant Missionaries in Korea

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ABSTRACT

Although frequently viewed as mere proselytizers, North American Protestant Missionaries in Korea played a crucial role during the Korean March First Independence Movement, an event that was a turning point in how they served Korean society and politics. Already doctors, teachers, and translators, these American and Canadian missionaries assumed new roles influenced by the outbreak of the independence movement on March 1, 1919. Research on the duties and achievements of North American Protestant missionaries before and after the movement is widespread but often fails to investigate and include the causes, development, and consequences of the revolutionary event on the missionaries. By gathering information from reports and letters from the time, interviews conducted with descendants of the missionaries, and previous studies by religious experts, this paper seeks to analyze the long and short–term impacts of the March First Movement on the activities of North American Protestant Missionaries in Korea. Unbeknownst to many, the missionaries who arrived in Korea during the late 19th century underwent significant changes in their mission after the independence movement, and the effects of these changes have influenced the entire Korean population unto the present day. Protestant evangelism in Korea and the nation's rise to global significance assumed notable growth thanks to the efforts of North American Protestant missionaries during and after the March First Movement.

Introduction

The Korean March First Independence Movement, known to Koreans as the *Samil Undong*, was the product of nearly a decade's worth of resistance to Japanese colonialism. In the aftermath of the Russo–Japanese War, the Japanese Empire proceeded to annex Korea as a colony in 1910 to take advantage of the human and natural resources on the peninsula (Treaty of Annexation, 1910). During this period, Koreans were often tortured and stripped of their rights to speech, assembly, and the press, sparking outrage and an underground campaign for independence. This oppression of Koreans went unnoticed in the West, and many foreign powers did not recognize Korea's pleas or requests for aid (Kendall, 1919). Yet, Koreans believed that Western powers, more specifically the United States, were on their side, and they cited President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and advocacy for nations's "self–determination" in 1918 as a catalyst for their cry for independence from Japan. Koreans had experienced the suppressive policies of the Japanese and related to Wilson's words when he stated, "Peoples are not to be handed about from one sovereignty to another by an international conference or an understanding between rivals and antagonists… peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent" (Address of the President, 1918). Wilson's intended support for the independence of colonies like India and Egypt reached Korean ears, but the United States remained hesitant to intervene in the Japanese colonization of Korea (Manela, 2009).

On March 1, 1919, the Korean people rose up and began a months–long protest for independence from the Japanese Empire. The Protestant Christian missions in Korea raised Korean Christians who were well–versed in Western ideologies and values of freedom, causing Christians to be the predominant architects of the March First Independence Movement. As a result of this popular resistance, the Japanese military responded with unjust brutality,

killing around 7,500 and arresting more than 46,000 Koreans, a majority of whom were Christians (3·1 Undong, n.d.). While Korean Christians were actively and physically involved in the independence movement, the American and Canadian missionaries who had supported and taught them in the period prior to the movement were forced by circumstance to deviate from their original mission in Korea. This paper aims to explore the idea that, although they initially swore political neutrality to the Japanese colonial government, North American Protestant missionaries in Korea were soon moved by the atrocities and abuses of the Japanese military to involve themselves in welfare and political advocacy. The March First Movement became a turning point for these American and Canadian missionaries who made the decision to respond to the movement by collaborating and defending the rights of Korean protestors.

Historical Context

Protestant missionaries had come to Korea as doctors, teachers, and translators, helping modernize Korean society in the late 19th Century. Arriving in the hermit nation of Korea after the signing of the 1882 U.S.–Chosŏn Treaty of Amity and Commerce and the 1883 British–Chosŏn Treaty, missionaries introduced Christianity to Koreans. According to the first missionary in Korea, Dr. Horace Allen, Koreans were "naturally inspired with a consuming desire to see or hear some new or interesting thing" (Allen, 1908, p. 85). Koreans were looking for change, as the country was struggling politically and economically towards the end of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Furthermore, Korea faced diplomatic pressure from Japan and Western Powers seeking trade and influence at the end of the 19th Century (Underwood, 2004).

The conclusion of these two treaties led North American Protestant missionaries to become revolutionaries in the Korean medical and educational fields. Missionaries like Dr. Horace Allen introduced and proliferated Western drugs and vaccines throughout Korea in the name of God, contributing to the rapid modernization of Korean medical practices. Allen and other missionaries also founded Severance Hospital, which became one of the country's largest medical institutions and served the Korean royal family (Allen, 1908). Under the leadership of American and Canadian missionaries, Severance served the Korean people for generations and still stands today as a frontrunner in Korean medical service (Yeo, 2015). Protestant missionaries from the United States and Canada also worked to spread Christianity through their teachings in mission schools. The lessons they taught were in high demand, and missionaries worked to equally spread education among all members of society, including women, the handicapped, and peasants (Yanghwajin Hall, 2006). According to Korean–American missionary Hugh Cynn, "[the missionaries considered] it proper for the Korean to say anything he wants to, if they only enter the Christian schools" (Cynn, 1920, p. 63). In addition to freedom of speech, human rights values were instilled into the minds of young students at the Protestant mission schools, which helped Koreans stay motivated through hard times. Commenting on the popularity of Christianity in Korea, American missionary Elmer Cable remarked, "We are pressed on every side by men and women who want us to teach them about Christ. We have a hundred more invitations than we can accept" (Gale, 1909, p. 226). Many Koreans converted to Christianity while attending these mission schools, and the missionaries who taught here were assisted by American and Canadian missionary translators, who worked with locals to publish Korean Bibles (Reynolds, 1910-1911, p. 303). These Bibles helped rapidly spread Christian teachings all over the Korean Peninsula. Through medical and educational work in Korea, American and Canadian missionaries helped lift Koreans out of poverty and despair, under the protection of God.

Figure 1. Photograph of Missionary Horace G. Underwood and his students, on display at the Independence Hall of Korea.

Spreading the Gospel in Colonial Korea

After the official annexation of Korea in 1910, the Japanese Empire began to regulate Christianity and the work of Protestant missionaries. The Japanese government approached Korean Christianity with caution because they lacked authority over the work of foreign missionaries. Many of these missionaries were from Japanese allies, including the United States and Canada. On the other hand, North American Protestant missionaries initially accepted the Japanese annexation, with many hoping that Japanese reform would significantly benefit the Koreans. The missionaries were skeptical of the prior Korean government due to its corruption and were open to a change in leadership. The instability of the previous government worried foreigners about Korea's potential to modernize, but the new Japanese leadership invited a sense of hope for the future of Korea (McKenzie, 1920; Clark, 1989). However, just as the Japanese government had obstructed Christianity to promote the state religion of Shintoism, Japan sought to compel Shintoism upon the Korean people to encourage, loyalty, nationalism, and militarism (Kim, n.d.). Across Korea, this Japanese initiative is reflected in the words of missionary Arthur J. Brown, who recounts:

"The Japanese desire to control everything within their dominions, as foreign businessmen have learned to their cost. This is particularly true in Korea, where they deem it necessary to their plans to be absolute masters. Now the Japanese see in the Korean Church numerous and powerful organizations which they do not control" (Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1919, p. 87).

Brown captures Japan's dilemma; Japan desired to control Christianity but could not do so because of potential negative diplomatic consequences with Western powers. The Japanese government also strongly opposed what was being taught in missionary schools, as Korean Christians were notorious for their anti–Japanese sentiment. The murder of a pro–Japanese foreign minister in 1907 and the assassination of the Japanese Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi a year before the annexation treaty were both carried out by Korean Christians (McKenzie, 1920). Despite the Japanese government's efforts to limit Christianity's influence, mission schools remained popular amongst the Korean people. They were a place where young Koreans could escape the Japanese academic curriculum and the schools served as a safe haven from propaganda (Underwood, 2004). Koreans preferred to study in missionary schools and learn English for the chance to attend school abroad in the United States—a freedom that many Koreans desired to achieve (Brown, 1919). The more patriotic an individual was, the more likely they had or were attending a Christian mission school. The North American Protestants took advantage of this popularity to convert the Korean populace (Lee, 2000).

Figure 2. Women's Bible Class in Taiku (Daegu), 1917. Obtained from the Presbyterian Historical Society.

As a result of Japan's reluctance to support the growth of Christianity, tensions between Protestant missionaries and the Japanese government in Korea were inevitable. Dr. Henrik Sørensen, an East Asian scholar, points out that in Korea, "religious freedom was something that was bestowed on you by the government as long as there was full cooperation between the two parties" (Sørensen, 1993, p. 66). Protestant missionaries had to learn that "religious freedom was not something to be taken for granted" (Sørensen, 1993, p. 66). It is worth noting that Korea was a special case; normally, missionaries originated from the colonizing nation. In a personal interview with Mr. Peter Underwood, the great-grandson of American missionary Horace G. Underwood, Mr. Underwood juxtaposed the religious and political teachings introduced to Koreans against the official Japanese ideologies. In other colonies such as India or Egypt, the authorities and missionaries were both from the British Empire, which allowed the groups to function independently without conflict. The situation in Korea was an anomaly in the landscape of Protestant evangelism, and this was a source of religiopolitical tension faced by Mr. Underwood's missionary ancestors (P. Underwood, personal communication, January 4, 2024). The most notable of these series of conflicts between the Protestant missionaries and the Japanese were the "Conspiracy Cases," during which the Japanese government banned the Christian curriculum and forced resisting missionary schools to close down. The initial cases in 1912 were sparked by the revelation of a plan to assassinate the Japanese Governor–General, and missionaries George McCune and Samuel Moffett were arrested and accused of supporting the criminals (Rhodes, 1934). While the initial case was resolved and the missionaries were acquitted, tensions arose again in 1915 when Japanese teachers began protesting in response to the rise of missionary schools in Korea. The unpopularity of the Japanese government schools was evident, and the Japanese took action, passing the "Regulations on Religious Propagation" law, or Ordinance 83, into effect (Brown, 1919; Kim, 2016). The following is a transcript of Japanese Education Minister Sekiya Teisaburo's orders in the *Nagasaki Press* on March 30, 1915:

"Private schools are required to fix their curricula in accordance with regulations controlling public common schools, higher common schools, or government special schools, it being also prohibited to them to include any course of study other than those authorized by these regulations. In consequence, in all these schools it is prohibited to give religious education or to observe religious rites" (Brown, 1919, p. 592)

American and Canadian missionaries responded by appealing to the Japanese government. They felt that the ban on religious teaching went against the religious freedom that the Japanese had promised foreigners in Korea.

According to the missionaries, "A mission school that is not permitted to have Bible study does not possess educational freedom, and religion that is not permitted to teach the Bible in its own schools is not free" (Brown, 1919, p. 594). Closing mission schools in Korea would mean that the Protestant mission on the Peninsula as a whole would come to an end, which was a reality that missionaries, mostly the Presbyterians, did not want to see. To resolve the issue, Protestant missionaries negotiated a ten–year grace period of religious tolerance with the Japanese government in Korea. Due to Western political influence during this time, Japan took steps to avoid conflict with the Protestant missionaries in Korea, even as attempts to restrict Christian teachings continued (Kim, 2016). While the Japanese government diplomatically guaranteed missionaries their personal freedom, missionaries were more focused on keeping Christian evangelism in Korea alive. Cooperation was their biggest tool, and North American Protestant missionaries were willing to negotiate with the government to keep institutions open and activities unrestricted (Brown, 1919). Although the Japanese tightened restrictions on Protestant missionaries over time, missionaries made sacrifices to preserve their mission.

The Catalyst

The outbreak of the March First Movement came as a shock to both Protestant missionaries and the Japanese government. Most missionaries were too caught up in their work to notice the rising tension between Korean Christians and Japanese authorities. While there were a few exceptions to the knowledge that North American Protestant missionaries had about the planning of the movement, most foreigners shared the same initial reactions as the Japanese colonizers (D. N. Clark, personal communication, January 17, 2024). Amidst the chaos, both Americans and Canadians were ordered to remain neutral in the conflict by their respective governments. American Consulate–General Leo Bergholz had this to say to American missionaries in Korea:

"Although I am convinced that our missionaries now in Chosen (Korea) have held themselves aloof from the movement referred to[,] I am, nevertheless, sending you... copies of a circular letter... enjoining upon [the missionaries] the necessity of scrupulously abstaining from participating in the domestic affairs of the country" (Bergholz, 1919, p. 459).

The same was said to Canadian missionaries by the British diplomat to Korea, Patrick Ramsey (Ku, 1985). Missionaries were in Korea for one objective, and that was evangelism—spreading Christianity across the Korean Peninsula. When the violence of the March First Movement broke out, all missionaries were ordered to abstain from interference, since it was not their business to do so. In addition, many Korean Christians who partook in the Movement were students at the missionary schools, and the missionaries could not risk being associated with the consequences that the Koreans faced (Clark, 2003).

Not long after the commencement of the March First Movement, the Japanese military police began making accusations and released arrest warrants, some targeted towards the Protestant missionaries stationed in Korea. At the outbreak of the movement, the abundance of Christian leadership and followers aroused Japanese suspicions. This was a turning point in Japanese relations with all foreign missionaries, as Japan now felt compelled to suspect all Christian missionaries even though foreigners were initially uninvolved. According to Dr. Donald N. Clark, professor of East Asian Studies and History at Trinity University:

"The missionaries could not avoid association with the movement. Nearly half the signers of the Declaration of Independence on March First had been [Korean] Christians, eleven of them ordained ministers and former students in the Presbyterian and Methodist theological seminaries. Several had personal ties with missionaries" (Clark, 2003, p. 49).

Due to their close ties to the Korean church, North American Protestant missionaries were also perceived as a threat to the Japanese government, and the Japanese military police in Korea detained and investigated missionaries on occasion. One of the most notable Japanese arrests was the detention of American Reverend Dr. Eli Mowry, who was taken into Japanese custody on accusations of sheltering Korean protestors (Associated Press, 1919). Japanese concerns were also compounded by the fact that censorship of the press had left only a few reliable sources in Korea,

which meant rumors were common and spread quickly throughout the colony (Manela, 2009). The narrative spread by independence fighters in Korea was that President Wilson planned to dispatch the American military to Korea because the Paris Peace Conference had supposedly recognized Korea's independence (P. Underwood, personal communication, January 4, 2024; Lee, 1963). As a result, the Japanese government felt the need to investigate Protestant missionary involvement in the movement because of these rumors. As the government crackdown began, missionaries in Korea faced a dilemma: should the missionaries abide by the government's orders or resist and support their students? The North American Protestant missionaries chose to negotiate their way out of the situation. The Japanese government had sought missionary aid to quell the March First Movement and requested a meeting with the missionaries to discuss the matter on March 22, 1919. The Japanese Minister of Justice remarked during the conference, "If you put forth your effort to quiet the people you will do much service and in this way you will do much for humanity and peace" in an effort to use foreign influence to stop the movement (*Report of First*, 1919). In a second conference held two days later on March 24, Japanese officials vehemently sought for missionaries to religiously assuage their followers (*Report of First*, 1919; *Report of Second*, 1919). Bishop Herbert Welch of the Methodist Episcopal Church recounted in his autobiography:

"In these meetings we missionaries were urged by the Japanese officials and businessmen to use our influence to bring the demonstrations to a stop. It was said that as representatives of a religion standing for law and order we ought to take our position by the side of the government and against the insurgents; and that as friends of the Korean people themselves, knowing that such agitation could bring nothing but disappointment and suffering, we should endeavor to dissuade them from these political activities (Welch, 1962, p. 85)

These meetings signaled a potential change in missionary–Japanese relations, but the government's failure to bring missionaries over to their side caused further tension.

Furthermore, the catalyst for change in North American Protestant missionary involvement was the atrocities against Korean Christians during the outbreak of the March First movement. The previous period of religious tolerance evaporated as the Japanese government felt compelled to take action against the heavy involvement of Korean Christians in the independence movement. Christians were specifically targeted and they were more frequently arrested and sentenced to longer periods of prison time than other Korean participants in the movement. According to Canadian journalist F.A. McKenzie, Japanese soldiers would begin interrogating Koreans by asking if they were Christian—those who said "yes" were beaten, while those who denied being Christian were released from custody. Local Japanese military police ordered the execution of many Korean Christians in retaliation for the organization of the March First Movement (McKenzie, 1920; "Koreans Appeal," 1919). Leaders of the Korean Church Council of North America reported horrific accounts of Christian persecution, an example of which is presented in this excerpt from a letter calling for support from Korean Americans:

"Theological students and Christians have become victims of the barbarous Japanese soldiers and policemen. [The Japanese police] drag Christians into the streets, and demonstrate their barbarity by torturing, sometimes even tying wooden crosses upon them, saying, 'as your father (Jesus) bore the cross, you shall bear the cross also'" (Hahm & Min, 1919).

On a local level, the Japanese military police worked to exterminate the entire Korean Christian population and did so through religious cleansing. Japanese forces not only killed Christians but attempted to erase any trace of their religion by burning Bibles and churches as well (Kendall, 1919). Protestant missionaries reacted to these atrocities with support for the Korean independence movement, and the violence they witnessed signaled a change in their stance during the March First Movement. They took the stance of "no neutrality for brutality"—a motto of moral disapproval of the Japanese treatment of Korean Christians. Both American and Canadian protestant missionaries accepted this approach to the movement, and peaceful relations with the Japanese government were no longer possible (Ion, 1977; Lee, 2000).

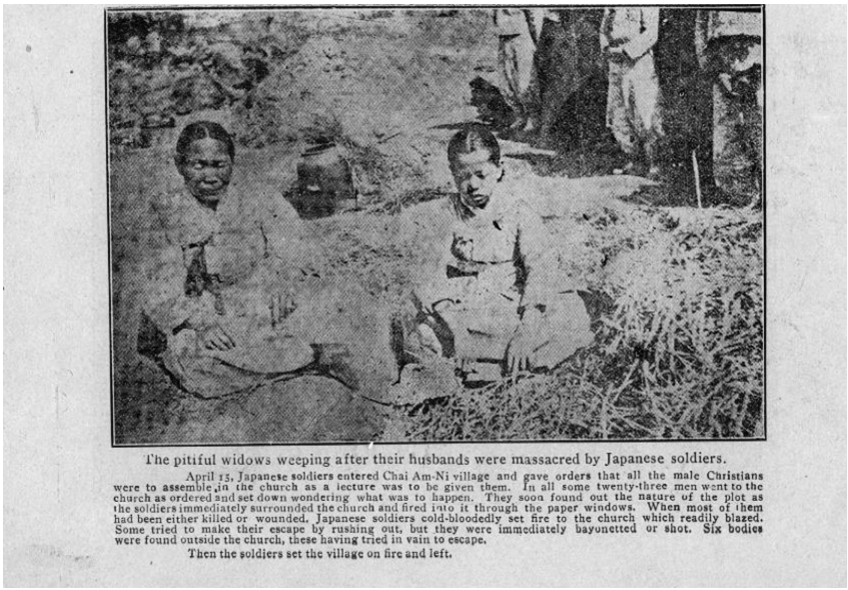

Figure 3. "The pitiful widows weeping after their husbands were massacred by Japanese soldiers.“ Obtained from the USC Digital Library.

The cruelest of Japanese atrocities witnessed by North American Protestant missionaries is known today as the Cheamni Massacre. On April 15, 1919, Japanese soldiers herded Korean residents of the Cheamni Village in the south of Seoul, most of whom were Christians, and proceeded to lock them in a church and burn the building down. This was no ordinary incident of Korean–Christian genocide. More than 30 Koreans, including women and children, were burned to death by Japanese military police forces.[45] Korean independence activist Henry Chung describes the massacre in his report, *The Case of Korea*, a collection of evidence on Japanese violence and the development of the March First Movement:

“When most of the Koreans had been either killed or wounded, the Japanese soldiers cold–bloodedly set fire to the thatch and wooden building which readily blazed. Some tried to make their escape by rushing out, but were immediately bayoneted or shot. Six bodies were found outside the church, having tried in vain to escape. Two women, whose husbands had been ordered to the church, being alarmed at the sound of firing, went to see what was happening to their husbands, and tried to get through the soldiers to the church. Both were brutally murdered” (Chung, 1921, p. 235).

Several Protestant missionaries in the area personally witnessed the aftermath of the massacre, but the most notable was missionary Horace H. Underwood, who recorded the testimonies of villagers and survivors of the massacre. News of the grim affair quickly spread worldwide with the help of North American Protestant missionaries, whose roles transformed from evangelism to serving a greater purpose in the crosshairs of political turmoil between Korea and Japan.

A Turning Point in Missionary Advocacy

Witnessing the horror of the Japanese retaliation, many missionaries began working to support the Korean people. Missionaries were willing to risk neutrality to support the movement against Japanese brutality. Missionary Samuel A. Moffett recounted in a letter during the movement, “I cannot tell you… how despicably mean, cruel, vulgar, and savage these Japanese have shown themselves. They are not civilized, they are not fit to govern another people, they have no right to be given control of the Pacific Islands” (Blair, 1919). North American Protestant missionaries in Korea no longer prioritized collaboration with the Japanese colonial government anymore; their new stance of “no

neutrality for brutality" drove international pressure on the Japanese government (Nagata, 2005). Now, missionaries advocated for Koreans by sheltering protestors, treating the wounded, and publicizing the cruelty faced by the independence movement; they were now guardians, doctors, and journalists amidst Korean societal pandemonium.

Witnessing the Japanese persecution of Korean Christians, North American Protestant missionaries and other foreigners in Korea began sheltering Koreans in their homes. Independence activist Helen Kim recalls the story of how she was sheltered in her orphanage, stating:

"Miss Marie Church, a young missionary teacher, took the responsibility of taking me by ricksha... I was disguised as a traditional sewing woman… I played with the three small children of the family and attended to their needs. While they were at school I sewed. I do not remember a single thing I made on the sewing machine, for my mind was preoccupied by the activities of the independence movement" (Kim, 1964, pp. 43-44).

Under the protection of missionaries, Korean participants in the movement hid from the Japanese military. American Reverend Dr. Eli Mowry was caught sheltering Koreans and convicted of this crime. He was sentenced to five years of hard labor (McKenzie, 1920). By April 10, 1919, the Korean Provisional Government had been set up in Shanghai; Koreans abroad in China, the United States, and other parts of the world also showed support for the March First Movement through protests and rallies. While North American Protestant missionaries were not direct contributors to these international demonstrations, their support to help Koreans flee the country played a key part in the creation of the Korean Provisional government (Baldwin, 1979).

As Japanese atrocities continued, more Korean Christians required urgent aid. Rather than receiving treatment at government hospitals, many Koreans instead chose Western medical care at the North American Protestant–founded Severance Hospital, where they were safe from Japanese capture. The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America stated in their report, titled *The Korean Situation*, that:

"Men, women and children have been repeatedly kicked, beaten with fists or gun butts, bayoneted, sabred and shot, until our Mission hospitals... are filled with the wounded; Severance Hospital having cots and beds in every available space, even the hallways" (Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1919, p. 22)

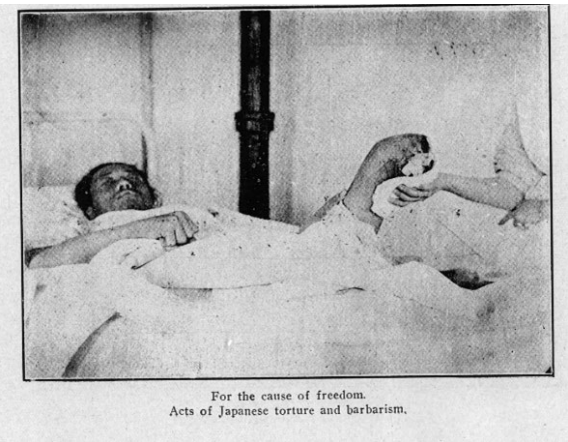

Figure 4. Photographic evidence of Japanese torture of Koreans. Obtained from the USC Digital Library.

Unbeknownst to doctors and missionaries, Severance had previously served as the headquarters for leaders of the March First Movement and was an early safe haven for Korean Christians. Final preparations for the March First Movement occurred at Severance, and it was rumored that the Korean Declaration of Independence was kept hidden under a newborn baby's bed before the start of the movement (Kb Kookmin Bank, 2023). Japanese authorities often conducted investigations at Severance, but the hospital was able to ensure the safety of Korean Christian victims (Kim, 2019). The results of barbarous Japanese torture were on full display at Severance, and missionaries felt obligated to save Korean lives. Severance hospital records show that from April 1, 1919, to March 31, 1920, Severance

had more than 2,300 patients, a significant increase compared to an average of 1,500 in previous years (Fletcher, 1920). Thanks to the critical roles played by North American Protestant missionary doctors, the lives of many Korean protestors were saved amidst the ruthless conflict.

However, the most important impact the March First Movement had on North American Protestant missionaries was that it became the turning point where the missionaries no longer relegated themselves to religious service but felt compelled to become progenitors of political protest. Their reports on the violence against Koreans eventually reached the Western Hemisphere and raised awareness in foreign governments. Missionary Samuel A. Moffett proclaimed, "Send the incidents to any paper that will publish them, the Continent and daily papers, leaving out any names that would bring it back to us or the people" (Blair, 1919). In this manner, missionaries became journalists on a battlefield, whose reports informed international audiences about the March First Movement and the subsequent violent repression. Articles published in global newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* helped elucidate ordinary Americans and Canadians of the religious cleansing that Korean Christians were facing ("Tell of Japanese," 1919; "Japan and Christianity," 1919). In addition to these reports sent to publications, missionary experiences were also featured in American Congressional hearings, which marked a new frontier in the awareness of the Korean Independence Movement (*58 Cong. Rec.*, 1919). Detailed descriptions of the Cheamni Massacre and other Japanese atrocities were presented before the largest American legislative body and improved publicity of the March First Movement. In particular, after the massacre, journalism by foreigners was critical in the attempt to bring Japanese perpetrators to justice. Meanwhile, the Japanese government heavily opposed the missionaries's work to spread news of the movement. Governor–General Sāito responded in the *Japan Advertiser*, "There can be little doubt now but that the principal cause of the unrest among the Koreans is due to propaganda carried on by Korean political malcontents outside of Korea and by the missionaries in the peninsula" (Ku, 1985, p. 251). The Japanese criticism of missionary reports ironically illustrates the vitality of missionary roles as journalists—North American Protestant missionaries were the most reliable sources of information for Western powers.

Legacy

The efforts and contributions of North American Protestant missionaries during the March First Movement inspired many Koreans to convert to Protestantism. Japanese records from 1919 show that only 1% of the Korean population was Protestant, yet nearly half of all religious Koreans arrested during the movement identified as Protestant (Lee, 2000). According to a 2023 public survey by the Korea Research Institute, Korean Protestants now make up 20% of the South Korean population (*[2023 Religious*, 2023) Although Protestantism in North Korea was eventually suppressed out of existence due to the advent of Kim Il Sung and Communism, the rise of Protestantism persisted in the South (United States Department of State, n.d.). Alfred Washington Wasson, former principal of the Hyŏpsŏng Theological Seminary, noted in a report that "the charges against the missionaries, instead of discrediting them in the minds of the people, put them in greater favor. They were looked upon as comrades in spirit" (1934, p. 102). Koreans lionized North American Protestant missionaries for their support of Korean independence and religious freedoms during and after the movement. The March First Movement served as a turning point in the roles North American Protestant missionaries took in Korea and is a critical factor for why Protestantism continued to grow in Korea throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries.

The efforts of North American Protestant missionaries in Korea extended beyond just supporting Koreans, as they also helped give birth to a new nation. Former students of missionary schools such as President of South Korea Syngman Rhee (*I Sŭngman*) used what they learned from their missionary teachers to become national leaders and establish the Korean Provisional Government. Educated at the American Methodist Pai Chai *(Paejae*) school before moving to the United States, Rhee helped lead the efforts of the March First Movement on the other side of the Pacific (*I Sŭngman*, n.d.). The current South Korean Constitution and legal codes feature many Western values originally taught to Koreans by North American Protestant missionaries. In his address to Congress on April 27, 2023, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol stated:

"Missionaries helped widely introduce the values of freedom and solidarity to Korea. These values are the foundations of Korea's Constitution. They have made a huge impact on our independence movement and the foundations of Korea" (C-Span, 2023).

Thanks to the influence that North American Protestant missionaries had on the Korean people, Korean independence leaders were able to create a Western–orientated nation ready for modernization. The Korean independence movement as a turning point in Protestant evangelism in Korea played a significant factor in Korea's resilience and determination as a nation. Even today, many of the institutions set up by North American Protestant Missionaries still thrive in South Korea and serve as medical and educational pillars. Severance Hospital, which traces its roots back to the first North American Protestant Missionaries in Korea, continues to be a nationwide leader in medical treatment and technology (Yeo, 2015). A majority of the 293 schools and 40 universities founded by Christian missionaries in Korea were Protestant, and the ideals of the March First Movement continue to thrive within these institutions into the 21st century (Grayson, 2002). The heroic efforts of North American Protestant missionaries to support Korea both before and during the March First Independence Movement, though underappreciated and often unrecognized, continue to resonate in modern South Korea throughout the 21st century.

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