

## March 1, 1919: The Beginning of the Korean Spring

*“We hereby proclaim the independence of Korea and the freedom of the Korean people. We proclaim this so that the world may witness the equality of all humans. We proclaim this so that our own posterity may enjoy the inherent right of independence and self-respect.”*

— *Korean Declaration of Independence, 1919.*

“Samil,” meaning March 1st in Korean, is a profoundly significant date in Korea’s history, symbolizing the nation’s determination to pursue independence after being under Japanese rule from August 22, 1910, to August 15, 1945.

During this period, Korea was annexed by the Japanese Empire, leading to economic exploitation. Japanese settlers acquired land at low prices, cultivating and exporting rice to Japan, while Koreans suffered from food shortages and famine. In response, many Koreans either fled the country or organized resistance movements both domestically and abroad.

Following World War I and during the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919, Korean independence activists sought diplomatic avenues for Korea’s independence, drawing upon U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s principle of self-determination. However, the efforts of Kim Gyu-sik, Korea’s representative at the conference, failed to garner significant attention from major world powers. Consequently, a group of 33 Korean students in Tokyo drafted the “Korean Declaration of Independence” on February 8, 1919, which was later presented on March 1 by the “Samil Movement” or “March 1st Independence Movement.”

The date of the declaration was strategically chosen to coincide with the funeral of Emperor Gojong, the first emperor of the Korean Empire, anticipating that many people from various provinces would travel to Seoul for the funeral, thereby facilitating the spread of independence sentiments across the nation.

After the declaration was read at two specific locations in Seoul, emphasizing peaceful protests, Koreans began marching, chanting “manse” (meaning “long live”)—leading to these demonstrations being termed “Manse Protests”—and waving the Korean flag. Subsequent protests aimed to disseminate the ideals expressed in the declaration, encouraging more individuals to join the movement within their communities.

Although the March 1st Movement did not immediately result in Korea’s independence, it unified Koreans domestically and internationally, leading to the establishment of a Provisional Government in Shanghai, China, and later organizing armed resistance in Manchuria against Japanese colonialists. Despite continued oppression by the Japanese government, Koreans persistently endeavored to preserve their cultural identity, strengthening national consciousness and patriotism. For these reasons, March 1 remains a pivotal date in Korean history, recognized as a national holiday.

*For those interested, VANK, a private organization dedicated to promoting Korea internationally, facilitated the translation of the Korean Declaration of Independence into over ten languages, including Spanish, in 2018. The Spanish translation was undertaken by attorney Abel Kiwoong Um, partner and manager of the law firm Mundus Apertus in Mexico, and Jang Jeong-yoon, a professor of Korean history at the Korean School of Guatemala.*

Pérez Gamboa, J. (2023, marzo 1). *1 de marzo de 1919: el inicio de la primavera coreana*. Korea.net.  
<https://spanish.korea.net/NewsFocus/HonoraryReporters/view?articleId=229536>