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The Characteristics and Significance of the Korean Independence Movement: New Understanding and Evaluation of the History of the Korean Independence Movement

Chang Se-yun^a

^a Northeast Asian History Foundation

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Keywords: Korean History; Korean Independence Movement; Japan; Japanese-Korean relations; Cairo Declaration 1943.

1. Introduction

The author has recently been interested in Polish history and has read *Episodes of Polish History* written by Kim Yong-deog, a Professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, (Seoul: Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Knowledge Press, 2013) and several books on Polish history written by renowned British historian Norman Davies (1939-).¹ After reading them, the author realized that Polish history is very interesting and, in some ways, has something in common with Korean history. The two histories of course are totally different in the main players and the development process, since Poland is a powerful country in Eastern Europe, which has developed by maintaining

¹ Norman Davies, *Europe at War 1939-1945: No Simple Victory*, London: Macmillan, 2006; idem, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (new edition), Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

its own unique culture and traditions, while Korea is in East Asia (or in Far East) far away from the European state. The histories of the two countries, however, clearly have something to compare. The history and geopolitical position of Poland having suffered from Russia, Germany and other surrounding powers and Korea having suffered from the pressure of neighbouring countries such as China, Japan, and Russia seem to be sufficient to cause sympathy. Korea and Poland both seem to have the same path full of hardships toward independence and freedom, economic prosperity, and industrialization and democratization.

This paper briefly describes the characteristics of the Korean independence movement and the resistance of the Korean people against Japan's invasion and rule of Korea from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, and in particular, for about 50 years from 1895 to 1945. Given that the Polish people once lost their country for as many as 123 years from 1795 to 1918 and eventually regained the nation's independence after all sorts of hardships and a long time of struggles, it has great academic significance to compare the history of the Korean independence movement with the history of the Polish resistance and independence movement against the ruling of Russia, Germany and Austria.

2. Japan's forceful occupation and colonial rule of Korea and the subsequent resistance of the Korean people

It is pointed out that the noticeable characteristics of Japanese imperialism consist of its first stage of the 'subordinate imperialism' where Japan depended Western (imperialist) powers such as the United Kingdom and the United States (also France, Germany, and Russia); and its second stage where the Asian country closely followed the form of European imperialism similar to the case of Germany.² It is noteworthy that Japan seemed subordinate to and dependent on the imperialism of other European powers (or the U.S.). As is generally known, however, it is also paradoxical that Japan was in conflict with the U.K and

2 William G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism 1894-1945*, Oxford University Press, 1987; Jeong Yeong-jin (tr.), *Japanese Imperialism 1894-1945*, Seoul: Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Knowledge Press, pp. 9-316.

the U.S. since the 1930s as a result of the advancement and expansion of Japanese imperialists. It was due to this that Japanese imperialism eventually walked down the road of defeat, and Korea was able to break away from the colonial rule and regain independence.

The Japanese colonial rule of Korea was the direct rule that did not allow any autonomy to Koreans at all, the rule of annihilating the spirit of the Korean people and assimilating them into Japanese. In other words, by establishing the Japanese Government-general of Joseon and appointing an army general or a navy admiral as the Governor-general, Japan brutally suppressed Koreans' resistance and independence movement for the exploitation of the colony and war mobilization. Japanese military power including the army and the police, as well as government authority, supported its colonial rule. The Japanese rule of Joseon for full 35 years from 29 August 1910, to 15 August 1945, can be largely divided into four stages. Japan disparagingly called the Korean peninsula, which previously had been the territory of the Korean Empire, just Joseon, the name of the former Joseon Dynasty.³

2.1. In the 1910s: the establishment of the oppressive military ruling and the colonial regime

The Japanese rule of Korea in the 1910s took the form of repressive, coercive ruling by using force. Japan, which had succeeded in suppressing the Righteous Army Movement (1895 -1910), the save-the-nation movement of the Korean people, completely denied the fundamental rights of the Korean people by announcing the Edict for Assembly Control on 25 August 1910, just before the forceful occupation. In addition, the Japanese Government-general of Joseon focused on colonial education in order to achieve the assimilation policy toward Koreans. The Government-general proclaimed in the 1st Joseon Education Act of 1911 that it would "nurture good and loyal people", and prohibited Koreans' national education in the Rules for Private Schools of 1911 and the Rules for Village Schools of 1918.

3 Details related to Japan's invasion included in Chapter 2 mainly referred to *The Japanese Imperialist Rule of Joseon* written by Park Gyeong-sik (Seoul: Cheong-a Publishing, 1986) and *The Japanese Imperialist Rule of Korea* written by Kim Un-tae (Seoul: Pakyoungsa, 1998).

It was the land survey that represented Japan's colonial ruling policy during the period of military rule. This was not a simple economic exploitation policy but the an all-out invasion policy of the Japanese authorities, which was regularized with the announcement of the Ordinance for Land Survey in 1912 and continued until the end of 1918 in order to transform Korea into a colonial state. As a result of this survey, the Governor-general became the biggest landowner in Korea and the Korean land ownership system was converted into the colonial one, resulting in the stratification and collapse of Korean peasants. On the other hand, the survey increased tax revenue and accordingly enabled the Government-general and the Japanese government to secure capital for the colonial rule. Japan also oppressed the Korean national industry and actively supported Japanese investors to enter into the country through evil laws of the colonial regime such as the Ordinance for Companies.

Meanwhile, Japan oppressed Koreans' independence movement by fabricating the so-called Anak Affair (Anak is the name of the area in Hwanghae Province) in December 1910 and the attempt to assassinate Governor-general Masatake Teruchi in January 1911. In spite of this violent repression, however, Koreans continued their independence movement at home and abroad: the system for the independence movement was established and campaigns to establish overseas stations for the Korean independence army were staged in Manchuria of north-eastern China and Primorsky Krai of far eastern Russia. All of these efforts resulted in the March 1st Movement starting on 1 March 1919, the largest anti-Japan independence movement of the Japanese colonial rule. In addition, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was established in Shanghai, China.

Meanwhile, with the end of the Russian Socialist Revolution and World War I in 1917, new countries including Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland (1918) were born in the area of the Russian Empire. In particular, the emergence of the Bolshevik regime in Russia was a significantly noticeable historical event.

Moreover, the Bolshevik regime led by Vladimir I Lenin announced the 'peace declaration' (Decree on Peace) in November 1917, just after the revolution. In the declaration, the regime proposed "immediate peace without compensation and annexation" (i.e. occupation of foreign territory and annexation of foreign nationals). The declaration

also defined annexation, not only in Europe but also in every place around the world, as the integration of a nation into a strong nation against the nation's will, and stressed that it had to be abolished in accordance with 'justice and democracy'. Although the phrase 'principle of self-determination' was not used here, it emphasized the concrete details of this principle. The peace declaration then clarified the principle of breaking down secret diplomacy and pursuing open diplomacy. This may be seen as 'Lenin's moment', which gave a shock to the world as World War I ended.⁴

It was the Soviet regime's 'peace declaration' that was the direct cause for U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to deliver the 14-point State of the Union Address on 8 January 1918. The long introduction of the address was filled with praises for the peace declaration. Based on the declaration, Wilson declared the general peace principle of Europe, but in fact, overestimated the propaganda of the Soviet regime.⁵ These two incidents, however, had a profound impact on the independence of Poland and Korea. In particular, Poland eventually won independence in 1918 as the "establishment of independent Poland" was mentioned in the 13th of Wilson's 14 points.⁶

2.2. In the 1920s: 'cultural politics' and toughened oppression and exploitation

The Government-general of Joseon had to revise its colonial rule as it keenly recognized the limitation of coercive ruling due to Koreans' nationwide independence movement having started on 1 March 1919. The Japanese authorities turned to the 'cultural politics'. This seemed to alleviate coercion but, in fact, was a deceptive governing style that led to the division of the Korean people and further economic exploitation.

The Governor-general proclaimed the freedom of speech, the press, and assembly by implementing the 'cultural politics'. As a result, newspapers and magazines were launched and social organizations were set

4 Kim Yongkoo, 'Historical Significance of the Versailles System and the Korean Peninsula', *Significance of Korea's March 1 Independence Movement and the Year 1919 in World History*, Seoul: NAHF, 2010, p. 213.

5 Loc. cit., p. 214.

6 Kim Yongkoo, *Diplomatic History*, Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 2016, pp. 600-603.

up. The Japanese authorities allowed such limited freedom and were able to more easily monitor the tendency of Koreans' ideas. In 1922, Japan also announced the 2nd Joseon Education Act to prevent Koreans' national education and to inject militaristic ideas. Along with these, Japan created a colonialist ideology by distorting Korean history through the Korean History Compilation Committee and Keijo Imperial University. In doing so, Japan intended to cultivate pro-Japanese forces and therefore divide the Korean people.

It was the rice production increase plan that represented Japan's economic exploitation policy of the 1920s. On the surface, this plan claimed to advocate the salvation of Joseon peasants, the contribution to the social development of Joseon and the growth of wealth of the Joseon peninsula. The real purpose was, however, to make Korea a Japanese food supply base in order to solve the rice shortage in Japan. The plan, which was carried out until the first half of the 1930s, demonstrates the colonial exploitation, since it increased rice production and, at the same time, resulted in exports of a significantly larger amount of rice to Japan. As a result, Koreans were forced to suffer more hunger and most peasants were ruined.

The Japanese colonial rule of the 1920s promoted the stratification of the Korean people and exacerbated conflicts within the nation. The rule, however, served as an opportunity that in Korea, socialist ideology was accepted, and workers and peasants, whose class consciousness was awakened, emerged as the main players of the national liberation movement. Against these backdrops, the Korean independence movement expanded to the public and aggressive anti-Japan struggles developed under various ideologies and methodologies. Meanwhile, from the mid-1920s, efforts were made to build a coordinated front between nationalists and socialists, e.g. the single national party movement and the New Trunk Association, or Shinganhoe movement. In November 1929, the nationwide anti-Japanese Gwangju Student Movement also emerged.⁷

7 To learn details about the Gwangju Student Movement, see Kim Seong-min, *Gwangju Student Movement of 1929*, Seoul: Yeoksa Gonggan, 2013.

2.3. In the first half of the 1930s: shifting of the damage of the Great Depression and conversion to a war footing

In 1934, the Japanese authorities suspended the plan for more rice production. As the economic depression started in 1929 and the bumper crops of 1930 caused rice prices in Japan to plummet, the plan conflicted with the interest of Japanese farmers. As a result, Japan shifted the damage of the Great Depression to colonial Joseon and put Korean peasants in further crisis. To resist this, Korean peasants intensified their anti-Japan movement, and Japan claimed to support the Rural Promotion Campaign from 1933 and touted the salvation of peasants and the rehabilitation of the farm household economy.

This, however, was to conceal the exploitation structure of imperialism and shift the responsibility for the failure of the colonial rule and the full accountability for the damage to Korean peasants. In addition, the Rural Promotion Campaign was carried out with the intent to change the direction of the colonial agricultural administration, which had so far focused on landlords, to include general peasants in the system.

In September 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria of north-eastern China and established a puppet state of Manchukuo. This drove Japan to invade the mainland China in earnest. In order to carry out aggression, Japan pursued the industrial policy that had been neglected so far in the name of promoting both agricultural and industrial development. Now, the colonial Joseon attracted attention as a new investment destination for Japanese monopoly capital to overcome the economic depression. Thus, some industrialization projects were conducted in the northern area of Joseon, which was another aggression policy that was carried out, irrelevant to the will of the Korean people, by those Japanese investors as key players under the active protection and encouragement from the Governor-general. In other words, the Korean Peninsula became a 'logistical base' for the Japanese imperialist forces to invade China. As a result, each industrial sector exhibited lameness that was not in harmony with each other, and showed regional biases centring on the northern and north-western

regions of the Korean peninsula. In this process, most Korean investors excluding a very few ended up being ruined.⁸

The changes in the Japanese colonial rule of the 1930s, namely, the strengthening of militaristic ruling and the invasion of north-eastern China, had a great influence on Koreans' independence movement. The aggression of Manchuria by the Japanese Empire drove Koreans to join forces with the Chinese in this area to resist the invasion. The representative example was the activities of Koreans in nationalist Korean Independence Army and Joseon Revolutionary Army; and the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army of the Chinese Communist Party.⁹

In the mid-1930s, however, as the Japanese authorities and the Kwantung Army toughened their suppression in the north-eastern area of China, Korean independence activists of the region were forced to move to the mainland China. Though the patriotic deed of Martyr Yun Bong-gil in Shanghai in 1932 also invigorated stagnant independence movement of the mainland China, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea had to hit the road filled with hardships due to Japan's extreme oppression. In Joseon, the independence movement was succeeded by the student movement, and then by the worker and peasant movements after the dissolution of the New Trunk Committee, and the research of Korean studies were deepened, including the history research conducted by nationalist historians.

2.4. From the late 1930s to August 1945: strengthening of full-blown mobilization and the plan to eradicate the Korean people

Japan, which started the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, passed the National Mobilization Law in 1938, entered into the war mobilization regime, and strengthened the exploitation for war. The National Spir-

8 Problems in industrialization of this period have caused controversies over the modernization of Korea and the origin of capitalism in the domestic and foreign academic circles. The obvious fact, however, is the industrialization of colonial Joseon and some development projects conducted by the Japanese Government-general and Japanese invaders in the 1930s and the 1940s were designed to invade and exploit Joseon and China. To learn more about this, see Chang Se-yun, 'Japan's Colonial Rule of Korea and the Response of the Korean People', [in:] *One Hundred Years after Japan's Forced Annexation of Korea: History and Tasks*, ed. Doh See-hwan, Frankfurt – New York – Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015.

9 Chang Se-yun, *Korean Independence Movements in Manchuria in the 1930s*, Cheonan: The Institute of Korean Independence Movement Studies, The Independence Hall of Korea, 2009.

itual Mobilization Movement, which began in 1938 with four slogans of National Unity, Untiring Perseverance, Loyalty and Patriotism, and Japan and Korea as One, and the National Full-blown Mobilization Movement, which started in 1940 by expanding the former, were part of the exploitation policy to mobilize all Koreans in war.

At the same time, the Government-general came up with measures to eradicate the Korean people and assimilate them into Japanese through the Japanization policy. By closing *The Dong-A Daily News* and *The Chosun Ilbo*, Japan controlled the ideology, information and communication of Koreans. It also tried to annihilate Korean history and language and turn the Korean people to its subjects conforming to Japan's aggression policy by implementing a series of unjust laws for colonial education (the 3rd Joseon Education Act of 1938, the Elementary School Regulations of 1941, and the 4th Joseon Education Act of 1943). In particular, the decree of changing Korean names to Japanese ones, which was enacted in February 1940, was to destroy the traditional pedigrees and the family concept of Koreans. At the same time, Japan established Japanese-style shrines in major regions of Korea and forced the Korean people to worship there, destroying their unique spirit. The Japanization policy that forced the blind loyalty to the Emperor of Japan reached its peak after the implementation of the conscription system in 1944. The system was designed by Japan, which provoked the Pacific War in December 1941, to force Korean youth to go to the battlefield.

During this period, the Japanese authorities' mobilization and severe suppression caused the Korean people to endure enormous suffering and devastated Koreans' original traditions and spiritual culture. Even in this situation, however, Koreans persisted through the independence movement in China, Primorsky Krai of Russia, and the Americas, and eventually regained independence with the end of World War II and the defeat of Japan. Major independence movements active during this time included the Provisional Government of Korea in the mainland China and the Korean Liberation Army; the Independence Alliance of North China and Joseon in which Koreans joined forces with Chinese; Koreans of the 88th International Brigade of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army (which was incorporated in the Soviet Red Army and was controlled by the Comintern and the Chinese Communist Party) in the Primorsky Krai

of Russia; and the Joseon Alliance for National Government in Korea. These organizations predicted the defeat of the Japanese imperialists and conceived the independence of the Korean people and the establishment of a nation state in their own way.¹⁰

3. The Cairo Declaration of 1943 and activities of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea

The Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea existed for 27 years (April 1919 – November 1945) in the territory of China just as the French Exile Government led by Charles De Gaulle (1890-1970), and consistently promoted its own independence movement, while maintaining a close relationship not only with the Chinese but also with the Chinese government. From April 1919 to April 1932, the Korean interim government worked in the French concession area of Shanghai, China, and then moved to Chongqing of inner China in September 1940.¹¹

November 2017 marked the 74th anniversary of the Cairo Declaration, which played a critical role in the independence of the colonial Joseon. Therefore, this paper intends to briefly describe how the provincial government and its leaders, who were active in China around the Cairo Declaration, responded to the declaration, the Korean independence, and the approval of the provisional government.

3.1. Situations of world powers surrounding Korean issues in the early 1940s

The relationship between the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and the Chinese government can be evaluated with the period roughly divided into two based on the Sino-Japanese War

10 Jung Byung Joon, *The Situations of Korean Independence Activists before the Korean Liberation*, Cheonan: The Institute of Korean Independence Movement Studies, 2009.

11 To learn information about the relationship between the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and the French concession authorities during this period, see Chang Se-yun, 'Le Gouvernement provisoire de Corée et la concession française de Shanghai 1919-1932', [in:] *France – Corée. 130 ans de relations. 1886-2016*, Sous la direction de Jin-Mieung Li et Saankyun Yi, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016.

of July 1937.¹² Some researchers, however, recognize as a major occasion the patriotic deed of Martyr Yun Bong-gil who threw a bomb in Shanghai in April 1932, and examine the relation in three periods.¹³

In August 1941, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill jointly announced the Atlantic Charter, and in September of the year the British government actively supported the French and Polish governments in exile. This change of the international situation gave the Korean interim government leaders great amount encouragement. Accordingly, the provisional government requested a formal approval from the Chinese government. In addition, the provisional government, whose President was Kim Koo, had already sent letters to President Roosevelt twice, on 25 February and 6 June 1941, in order to present five conditions including requests for the approval for the interim government and diplomatic, military and economic aid. In those letters, the government also notified the election of Rhee Syngman (1875-1965) the chairman of its Foreign Relations Department.¹⁴ The U.S. government of course did not reply to the letters.

The leaders of the interim government recognized the Chinese government, especially its Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, as an indirect diplomatic channel for negotiating with the Allies including the U.S. and the U.K. Since it was difficult for them to meet the heads of the U.S. and the U.K., they had no choice but to meet with and persuade Chiang to make those heads to take action. Particularly, after Japan provoked the Pacific War in December 1941, interim government leaders were very worried about the news that international powers would directly manage Korea (trusteeship) for some time without immediately liberating it, though the defeat of Japan was expected.

The management of Korea after World War II was first discussed by the U.S. during the talks among U.S. President Roosevelt, U.S. Sec-

12 Chu Heon-su, *History of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea*, Cheonan: The Institute of Korean Independence Movement Studies, 1989.

13 Chunhui Hu, 'China and The Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea', *The Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and the Independence Movement* (presentation materials of the international conference held by the Society of Korean Modern and Contemporary History on 8-9 April 1999), pp. 1-4.

14 To learn more about this, see Baikbum Kim Koo Academy, *Letters of Baikbum Kim Koo*, Paju: Nanam Publishing House, 2005, pp. 93-96, 108-109.

retary of State Cordell Hell and British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, held in Washington on 24 March 1934. Roosevelt insisted that trusteeship had to be implemented in Korea and the Indochina Peninsula after Japan's defeat. He named the U.S., China and the Soviet Union as members of the trusteeship council.¹⁵ At that time, Eden responded negatively to the opinion. Despite his response, however, the U.S. maintained such a policy since it reckoned colonial states including Korea had to be managed under trusteeship after the end of the war.¹⁶

In such a situation, the provisional government president Kim Koo and foreign affair department head Jo So-ang, and commander of the Korean liberation army Lee Cheong-cheon met with Chiang at China's provisional capital of Chongqing on 26 July 1943. Kim and Jo asked Chiang not to be blinded by the indentation of the U.S. and the U.K. to put Korea under trusteeship of joint international management for some time, but to support and carry through the complete independence of Korea asserted by the Korean interim government. In response to the request, Chiang pledged that in order to do so, China would do its best to stand up to the trusteeship asserted by the U.S. and the U.K.¹⁷ The Provisional Government leaders achieved a breakthrough that at least on the surface, Chiang pledged to oppose the trusteeship plan of the U.S. and the U.K. and make efforts to guarantee Korea's independence.

China's policy toward the Korean independence movement and the Korean provisional government made achievements at the Cairo Conference held in November 1943. In the conference attended by the heads of the U.S., the U.K., and China, the independence of Korea 'in due course' was agreed, as is well known. Of course, the vague phrase 'in due course' created considerable suspicion and anxiety for Korean independence activists, but it was clear that at least after World

15 Kim Hakjoon, 'The Background to the Division of the Korean Peninsula and Its Entrenching Process', *Understanding of History around National Independence*, Seoul: Hangilsa, 1979, p. 66.

16 Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, transl. Kim Ja-dong, vol. 1: *Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes. 1945-1947*, Seoul: Ilwol Seogak, 1986, pp. 149-150.

17 Collection of Official Conversations of Korean Leaders, *The Complete Works of Baikbum Kim Koo*, compiled by the Committee for the Compilation of the Works of Baikbum Kim Koo, Seoul: Dae-han Maeil Shinbo, 1999, p. 252; Kim Heegon, *A Study on the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea*, Seoul: Jisik Sanup Publications, 2004, pp. 167-168.

War II ended, Korea would become independent. Chiang's diaries and Taiwanese researchers specify that in the conference, Chiang actively advocated and specifically mentioned Korea's independence despite the opposition of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.¹⁸ Though this is sometimes considered an exaggerated record, of course, the role of Chiang in the conference cannot be underestimated when it comes to the Korean independence issue in the conference.

3.2. Korea mentioned in the Cairo Declaration

The Cairo Conference was the meeting of leaders of great powers and had a significant influence on the future of Korea after the end of World War II. The heads of the U.S., the U.K. and China participated, and Korea was mentioned in the Cairo Declaration officially announced on 1 December 1943, as follows:

Japan will also be expelled from all territories which were taken by violence and greed. The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent. [The underline is drawn by the author.]

These provisions of the Cairo Declaration become a decisive statement to Korea and the Korean people. At the time of this declaration, more than 100 ethnic minorities were colonies or semi-colonies, but Korea was the only nation that was guaranteed independence like this by global powers. This declaration also lived on in the Potsdam Declaration proclaimed on 26 July 1945.

Therefore, Indian independent hero and well-known politician JaWaharlal Nehru once wrote in his book *Glimpses of World History* that he envied Korea since among Asian colonies, it was the only country that was guaranteed independence by world powers.¹⁹ Thus, the efforts of Korean interim government leaders such as Kim Koo

18 Ray Huang, *Chiang Kai-Shek and His Diary as a Historical Sources*, transl. Goo Beom-jin, Seoul: Blue History, 2009, p. 376; Lee Sang-cheol, 'Historical Records on the Korean Independence Movement Included in the Diaries of Chiang Kai-Shek', *Monthly Chosun*, 2010, no. 368, pp. 530-543; Chunhui Hu, *The Korean Independence Movement in China*, Seoul: Dankook University Press, 1987, pp. 278-279.

19 JaWaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, transl. Roh Myeong-sik, Seoul: Samsung Mungo, 1974, pp. 272-273.

and Jo So-ang should be highly praised since they led the 'oldest government in exile' after its establishment in April 1919²⁰ and struggled to achieve independence for a long time despite hardships. In the end, the inclusion of the independence of Korea in the Cairo declaration was a product of long-term efforts and struggles of Korean independence activists.

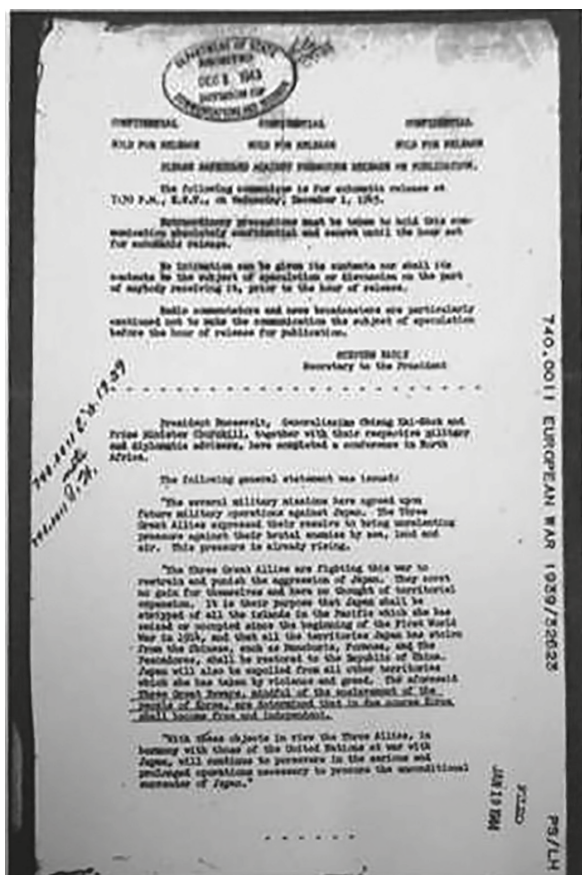


Fig.1. The sentence underlined in red is concerned with Korea in the Cairo Declaration proclaimed on 1 December 1943

- 20 The *New York Times* of the U.S. reported on 29 February 1944, "Koreans Seek to Join Allied Ranks in War; 'Oldest Government in Exile' to Mark 25th Year Tomorrow" (Ko Jeong-Hyoo, 'Analysis of the News Articles of the U.S. Press about the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea: With *The New York Times* as the Center', *Journal of Korean Independence Movement Studies*, 2012, no. 42, Cheonan: The Institute of Korean Independence Movement Studies, p. 232).



Fig. 2. The article of *The New York Times* reporting the pledge for the independence of Korea (December 1943)

Though the Korean independence activists and general Koreans succeeded in blocking global powers such as the U.S. and the Soviet Union from implementing trusteeship in Korea after August 1945, they unfortunately failed to prevent South Korea and North Korea from separately establishing their own governments. Since the U.S. and the Soviet Union (Russia) separately occupied the Korean Peninsula, the two divisional governments were founded.

4. The characteristics and nature of the Korean Independence Movement

The Korean Independence Movement demonstrated complex and diverse aspects and its characteristics are briefly summarized as follows:

First, the independence movement (national liberation movement) showed persistence from 1894 to August 1945. In other words, Korea fought all the way to deny the Japanese invasion and ruling, and struggled to achieve independence throughout the period of time. The independence movement was first sparked by the resistance of unofficial troops against the Japanese army's invasion and occupation of Geongbok Palace in Seoul on July 1894, and continued until August 1945 when

Koreas regained independence. In particular, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was established in 1919, and led the overseas independence movement as the backbone of the movement for 27 years in the difficult circumstances in China.

Second, the venues of the Korean independence movement exhibited internationality. Koreans' independence movements arose in every place where Koreans resided such as the Americas (North America, Central America, etc.), Europe, China, Primorsky Krai of Russia, and Japan. This not only directly took a toll on the Japanese imperialism, but also played a quite important role in informing the world of Koreans' strong will to independence. The reason behind the internationality of the independence movement was that Korean towns where were already formed in Manchuria of China, Primorsky Krai of Russia, and the Americas since the end of the Joseon Dynasty and Koreans at home and abroad were eager for independence.²¹

Third, the methodology of the independence movement and the patterns of anti-Japanese struggles varied. In order to regain independence and freedom from Japan, Korean independence activists sought various methods, ideologies, and theories such as the theory of armed struggles; the theory of prioritizing education and the industry (enhancing capability); the theory of anarchism; the theory of patriotic struggles; and the theory of diplomacy. This not only reflects Koreans' strong will to win independence, but it also means that the independence movement developed under various ideologies.

Fourth, Korean independence movement groups consistently strived to integrate themselves, though they have showed the tendency of faction and dispersion. It was very difficult to maintain armed organizations in foreign countries and carry out independence movements. To do so, they had to receive the permission and support of the country where they resided, and the movement would be inevitably susceptible to changes in the situation of the country. A typical example were the conflicts between the Korean provisional government and the Chinese government, which had been created since the formation of the Korean Liberation Army in Chongqing, China, in Septem-

21 Currently, about 10 percent of Koreans reside overseas, which is comparable to Jews, Poles and Chinese.



Fig. 3. A Photo of Korean Provisional Government Leaders taken just before they returned to their homeland (Chongqing, China; 3 November 1945)

ber 1940. In addition, the relocation of some 170,000 Koreans from Primorsky Krai to Central Asia forced by Joseph Stalin in September 1937 demonstrated the sorrow of those who lost their country. It was sometimes effective for overseas independence movement organizations to do their work in separated smaller groups. Therefore, there was sometimes friction among some organizations, but independence groups constantly sought integration as they did in the New Trunk Association's movement in Korea and the integration movement in China.

Fifth, the independence movement developed in a nationwide manner, as key players of the independence movement gradually spread to the extent of transcending all conditions such as sex, age, occupation, status and religion. This was possible due to the March 1st Independence Movement of 1919, in which about two million people participated. Such a nationwide movement should be evaluated as an unprecedented and exemplary national liberation movement in the history of the liberation struggles of world's oppressed peoples.

Finally, Koreans' independence movement can be assessed that it has significance in the world history in that it was done in solidarity not only with Koreans but also with other oppressed peoples equivalent to the three quarters of the global population of that time and had a certain impact on their liberation struggles. The March 1st Independence Movement made a breakthrough in the independence movement of the Korean people, and at the same time, spread to China's May 4th Movement, India, the Philippines, and Egypt and had a considerable influence on the liberation struggles of the oppressed nations.

5. Conclusion

As Japan annexed the Korean Empire in August 1910, Korea lost its sovereignty and came under the Japanese colonial rule. The interim governments were established both at home and abroad in 1919 in the wake of the March 1st Independence Movement for the recovery of the sovereignty. In April 1919, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was established in Shanghai, China, in order to mobilize the capacity for the independence of the Korean people.

The Korean independence movement of the first half of the 20th century had universality and at the same time uniqueness in world history, and has both homogeneity and heterogeneity when compared with other colonial national liberation movements. In order to correctly understand the characteristics of the Korean independence movement, it is necessary to discuss it from the perspectives of time, stage, area of activity, ideology and strategy, and world history. The author can summarize his own interpretation of the characteristics and significance of the Korean independence movement in world history as follows:

First, the Korean independence movement played a pioneering role in the liberation movement of colonies across the world. Second, despite the fact that the Japanese invasion and governing policy were the ones for annihilating the Korean people, Koreans protected their own culture. Third, the venues of the Korean independence movement were widely distributed over all regions where Koreans resided, such as Europe (France, etc.), the Americas (North America, Central America), China, Russia and Japan. Fourth, independence activists and groups who were active in foreign countries developed various activities in response to the political characteristics of the region or the country. Fifth, Korean activists joined forces with those who fought for anti-imperialist battles and liberation struggles of oppressed minorities in their areas of activity of China and Russia (Primorsky Krai, Siberia, etc.). Sixth, the Korean interim government was organized and played a symbolic and central role in the Korean independence movement.²² The history of the Korean national liberation movement including the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, which continued its independence movement for 27 years overseas without submitting to any difficulties, also has significance in world history.

The British historian Norman Davies, whom the author mentioned in the introduction, even compared Polish history to 'God's play ground.'²³ The modern Korean history may also be regarded as having undergone a similar road of hardships to that of Poland. But now, in the history of Korea and Poland, God's play ground should not be repeated again.

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