

# THE MARCH FIRST MOVEMENT

**GRADES:** 7-12

**AUTHOR:** Susan H. Davis

**SUBJECT:** Social Studies, U.S. History

**TIME REQUIRED:** Three to five class periods

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Understand how Japan's annexation and colonization of Korea influenced the growth of Korean nationalism.
2. Identify the importance of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points declaration and its effect on Korea.
3. Analyze the connection between the Korean Declaration of Independence of March 1, 1919 and Wilson's "doctrine of self-determination" policy.
4. Analyze photographs of the March First Movement.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the March First Movement by writing a letter to President Wilson.

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:** (all attached)

- Handout 1: Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points
- Handout 2: The March First Proclamation of Korean Independence
- Handout 3: Written Document Analysis Worksheet
- Handout 4: Photographs of the March First Movement
- Handout 5: Photograph Analysis Worksheet

## **BACKGROUND:**

Imperialism was not unique to Europe and the United States. By the early 1900's, Japan was perceived by the United States and Europe as a growing imperialist power.

From 1904 to 1910, the Japanese entered into a series of diplomatic agreements and policies that gradually subjected Korea to their control. In 1905, during the Russo-Japanese War, President Theodore Roosevelt concluded that Korea should be a Japanese protectorate. Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Taro met with U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft in July 1905 and signed the Taft-Katsura Memorandum. The Taft-Katsura Memorandum codified an agreement between the two powers: the United States would not to interfere with Japan's occupation of Korea and Japan would not to interfere with America's occupation of the Philippines.

By 1906 the Japanese took over the administration of Korea's foreign affairs and in June of 1907, the Japanese forced Korea's King Kojong to abdicate. On August 22, 1910 Japan forced Kojong to approve of the Treaty of Annexation and Korea formally became a colony of Japan.

By 1912 the United States had sanctioned Japan's take-over of Korea. The subsequent occupation lasted from 1910 through 1945. Historians have divided the period of Japanese colonization into three parts:

- **Subjugation:** Japan established its authority over Korea through direct military rule and violence (1910–1919.)
- **Accommodation:** Japan allowed Korean society to develop limited freedoms, including the power to organize schools, businesses and newspapers (1920–1931.)
- **Assimilation:** Japan tightens its control over Korean society in an attempt to force participation in the imperial war effort (1932–1945.)

On January 8, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson issued his Fourteen Points declaration. Included in these points was the assertion that all small nations should be allowed to exercise self-determination. Korean leaders both at home and abroad were inspired by Wilson’s Fourteen Points, which ultimately led to an independence movement.

In early 1919 Syngman Rhee appealed to President Wilson to place Korea under the trusteeship of the League of Nations. President Wilson did not respond. Korean students in Tokyo and China discussed how to gain independence and organized a committee to draft a Declaration of Independence from Japan. The declaration was drafted on February 26, 1919.

The political situation in Korea has become more tense with the sudden death of the country’s former king, Kojong. Many Koreans believed the Japanese had poisoned him. Koreans anxiously awaited his funeral, set for March 3.

At the same time, student and religious groups in Seoul agreed to formally read the declaration of independence on March first in the city’s Pagoda Park. At 2:00 PM on March 1, 1919 the 33 signatories of the Declaration of Independence met at the park, along with crowds of supporters, and declared Korea’s independence from Japan. The Japanese police used brutal force to suppress the gathering. This sparked nationwide protest and independence demonstrations, collectively known as the March First Movement. It has been estimated that the Japanese military killed over 7,500 unarmed Koreans and wounded nearly 16,000 in its attempts to put down the March First Movement. On April 17, 1919 Canadian and American missionaries informed the world of the Japanese brutality.

The March First Movement gave rise to modern Korean nationalism. Exhausted by their attempts to suppress the movement, the Japanese changed their colonial policies and allowed the Korean people certain cultural freedoms.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. The goal of this lesson is to analyze documents in groups of 2-3.
2. Pass out Handout 3 and have each group answer the questions for Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the Korean Declaration of Independence.
3. After students analyze Wilson’s Fourteen Points, discuss the ideology of “self-determination of small nations” and how Korea interpreted this concept.
4. After students analyze The March First Korean Declaration of Independence, discuss the following questions:
  - What grievances did Koreans have against Japan?
  - What rights did the Koreans demand as citizens of the world?
  - How did the Declaration of Independence relate to Wilson’s Fourteen points?

- How was Korea's declaration of independence similar to America's?
5. Students will work in small groups and analyze the photographs of the March First Movement (Handout 4) using the Photograph Analysis Worksheet (Handout 5).
  6. After students analyze the photographs, discuss students' interpretation of the March First Movement.
  7. Have each student write a letter to President Wilson in favor of Korean Independence as though they were a participant of The March First Movement.

**EVALUATION:**

The students' letters to President Wilson will assess their understanding of the March First Movement. Use the following rubric to evaluate student's letter.

<b>Letter to Pres. Wilson</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Understands Fourteen Points	Uses "self-determination" ideology in letter	Refers to the Fourteen Points but not specifically "self-determination"	Does not mention the Fourteen Points
Understands Korea's desire for independence	Uses phrases from the March First Declaration of Independence; Addresses Japanese imperialism	Refers to the March First Declaration of Independence	Does not mention the March First Declaration of Independence
Understands who participated in the March First Movement and its consequences	Includes students, Christians, treatment by Japanese	Leaves out one to two groups that participated and only lists a few consequences	Does not state specific groups and does not give detailed consequences
Mechanics of letter	Letter contains few grammatical errors, proper letter form is used	Letter contains several grammatical errors	Letter does not use correct format for letter and many grammatical errors

**REFERENCES:**

Carter, Eckert et al. *Korea Old and New, A History*. Ilchokok Publishers: Seoul, Korea, 1990.

Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun, A Modern History*. W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1997.

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Kang, Hildi. *Under the Black Umbrella, Voices From Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2001.

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## HANDOUT 1: WOODROW WILSON'S FOURTEEN POINTS



Delivered on January 8, 1918

It will be our wish and purpose that the processes of peace, when they are begun, shall be absolutely open and that they shall involve and permit henceforth no secret understandings of any kind. The day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by; so is also the day of secret covenants entered into in the interest of particular governments and likely at some unlooked-for moment to upset the peace of the world. It is this happy fact, now clear to the view of every public man whose thoughts do not still linger in an age that is dead and gone, which makes it possible for every nation whose purposes are consistent with justice and the peace of the world to avow now or at any other time the objects it has in view.

We entered this war because violations of right had occurred which touched us to the quick and made the life of our own people impossible unless they were corrected and the world secure once for all against their recurrence. What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression. All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest, and for our own part we see very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to us. The program of the world's peace, therefore, is our program; and that program, the only possible program, as we see it, is this:

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.

XI. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

XII. The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to

the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

In regard to these essential rectifications of wrong and assertions of right we feel ourselves to be intimate partners of all the governments and peoples associated together against the Imperialists. We cannot be separated in interest or divided in purpose. We stand together until the end.

For such arrangements and covenants we are willing to fight and to continue to fight until they are achieved; but only because we wish the right to prevail and desire a just and stable peace such as can be secured only by removing the chief provocations to war, which this program does remove. We have no jealousy of German greatness, and there is nothing in this program that impairs it. We grudge her no achievement or distinction of learning or of pacific enterprise such as have made her record very bright and very enviable. We do not wish to injure her or to block in any way her legitimate influence or power. We do not wish to fight her either with arms or with hostile arrangements of trade if she is willing to associate herself with us and the other peace-loving nations of the world in covenants of justice and law and fair dealing. We wish her only to accept a place of equality among the peoples of the world—the new world in which we now live—instead of a place of mastery.

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Text Source: President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points", Essential Documents in American History. Database Online Green Neck Publishing, 1997 through present. Available from EBSCO Academic Search Premier. EBSCO Publishing: Ipswich, MA. Accession #9706246537 pg.1, 3p.

## **HANDOUT 2: THE MARCH FIRST PROCLAMATION OF KOREAN INDEPENDENCE**

**March 1, 1919**

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We herewith proclaim the independence of Korea and the liberty of the Korean people. We tell it to the world in witness of the equality of all nations and we pass it on to our posterity as their inherent right.

We make this proclamation, having behind us 5,000 year of history, and twenty million united, loyal people. We take this step to ensure to our children for all time to come, personal liberty in accord with the awakening consciousness of this new era. This is the clear leading of God, the moving principle of the present age, the whole human race's just claim. It is something that cannot be stamped out, nor stifled, nor gagged, nor suppressed by any means.

Victims of an older age, when brute force and the spirit of plunder ruled, we have come after these long thousands of years to experience the agony of ten years of foreign oppression, with every loss to the right to live, every restriction of the freedom of thought, every damage done to the dignity of life, every opportunity lost for a share in the intelligent advance of the age in which we live.

Assumedly, if the defects of the past are to be rectified, if the agony of the present is to be unloosed, if the future oppression is to be avoided, if thought is to be set free, if right of action is to be given a place, if we are to attain to any way of progress, if we are to deliver our children from the painful, shameful heritage, if we are to leave blessing and happiness intact for those who succeed us, the first of all necessary things is the clear-cut independence of our people. What cannot our twenty millions do, every man with sword in heart, in this day when human nature and conscience are making a stand for truth and right?

What barrier can we not break? What purpose can we not accomplish?

We have no desire to accuse Japan of breaking many solemn treaties since 1836, nor to single out specially the teachers in the schools or government officials who treat the heritage of our ancestors as a colony of their own, and our people and civilization as a nation of savages, finding delight only in beating us down and bringing us under their heel.

We have no wish to find special fault with Japan's lack of fairness or her contempt of our civilization and the principles on which her state rests; we, who have greater cause to reprimand ourselves, need not spend precious time in finding fault with others; neither need we, who require so urgently to build for the future, spend useless hours over what is past and gone. Our urgent need today is the settling up of this house or ours and not a discussion of who has broken it down, or what has caused its ruin. Our work is to clear the future of defeats in accord with the earnest dictates of conscience. Let us not be filled with bitterness or resentment over past agonies or past occasions for anger.

Our part is to influence the Japanese government, dominated as it is by the old idea of brute force which thinks to run counter to common and universal law, so that it will change, act honestly and in accord with the principles of right and truth. The result of annexation, brought about without any conference with the Korean people, is that the Japanese, indifferent to us, use every kind of partiality for their own, and by a false set of figures show a profit and loss account between us two peoples most untrue, digging a trench of everlasting resentment deeper and deeper the farther they go.

Ought not the way of enlightened courage to be to correct the evils of the past by ways that are sincere, and by true sympathy and friendly feeling make a new world in which the two peoples will be equally blessed?

To bind by force twenty million resentful Koreans will mean not only loss of peace forever for this part of the Far East, but also will increase the ever-growing suspicion of four hundred millions of Chinese, upon whom depends the danger or safety of the Far East-besides strengthening the hatred of Japan. From this all the rest of the East will suffer. Today Korean independence will mean not only daily life and happiness for us, but also it would mean Japan's departure from an evil way and exaltation to the place of true protector of the East, so that China, too, even in her dreams, would put all fear of Japan aside.

This thought comes from no minor resentment, but from a large hope for the future welfare and blessing of mankind. A new era wakes before our eyes, the old world of force is gone, and the new world of righteousness and truth is here. Out of the experience and travail of the old world arises this light on life's affairs. The insects stifled by the foe and snow of winter awake at this same time with the breezes of spring and the soft light of the sun upon them.

It is the day of the restoration of all things on the full tide of which we set forth, without delay or fear. We desire a full measure of satisfaction in the way of liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and an opportunity to develop what is in use for the glory of our people.

We awake now from the aid world with its darkened conditions in full determination and one heart and one mind, with right on our side, along with the forces of nature, to a new life. May all the ancestors to the thousands and ten thousand generations hold us from within and all the force of the world aid us from without, and let the day we take hold be the day of our attainment. In this hope we go forward.

### THREE ITEMS OF AGREEMENT

1. This work of ours is on behalf of truth, religion and life undertaken at the request of our people, in order to make known their desire for liberty. Let no violence be done to anyone.
2. Let those who follow us, every man, every hour, show forth with gladness this same mind.
3. Let all things be done decently and in order, so that our behavior to the very end may be honorable and upright.

The 4252nd year of the Kingdom of Korea 3rd Month -

## Representatives of the People

The signatures attached to the document are:

Son Byung Hi, Kil Sun Chu, Yi Pil Chu, Paik Long Sung, Kim Won Kyu, Kim Byung Cho, Kim Chang Choon, Kwon Dong Chin, Kwon Byung Duk, Na Long Whan, Na In Hup, Yang Chun Paik, Yang Han Mook, Lee Yer Dai, Yi Kap Sung, Yi Mung Yong, Yi Seung Hoon, Yi Chong Hoon, Yi Chong Il, Lim Yei Whan, Pak Choon Seung, Pak Hi Do, Pak Tong Wan, Sin Hong Sik, Sin Suk Ku, Oh Sei Chang, Oh Wha Young, Chung Choon Su, Choi Sung Mo, Choi Ju, Yong Woon, Hong Byung Ki, Hong Ki Cho.

### HANDOUT 3: WRITTEN DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

1.	<p>TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper  <input type="checkbox"/> Letter  <input type="checkbox"/> Patent  <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum                 </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Map  <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram  <input type="checkbox"/> Press release  <input type="checkbox"/> Report                 </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement  <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record  <input type="checkbox"/> Census report  <input type="checkbox"/> Other                 </td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Patent <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum	<input type="checkbox"/> Map <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram <input type="checkbox"/> Press release <input type="checkbox"/> Report	<input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record <input type="checkbox"/> Census report <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Patent <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum	<input type="checkbox"/> Map <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram <input type="checkbox"/> Press release <input type="checkbox"/> Report	<input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record <input type="checkbox"/> Census report <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
3.	<p>DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/>			
4.	<p>AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/> <p>POSITION (TITLE):</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/>			
5.	<p>FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/>			
6.	<p>DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-D.)</p> <p>A. List three things the author said that you think are important:</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/> <p>B. Why do you think this document was written?</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/> <p>C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/> <p>D. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"/>			

## HANDOUT 4: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MARCH FIRST MOVEMENT

Women's student group marching through the streets of Seoul to protest the Japanese occupation of Korea



Crowd of Koreans demonstrating at Kwanghwamun in downtown Seoul

Demonstrators arrested by Japanese police before being detained for questioning





<b>Step 2. Inference</b>	
	<p>Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<b>Step 3. Questions</b>	
A.	<p>What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?</p> <hr/> <hr/>
B.	<p>Where could you find answers to them?</p> <hr/> <hr/>

*Designed and developed by the  
Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.*

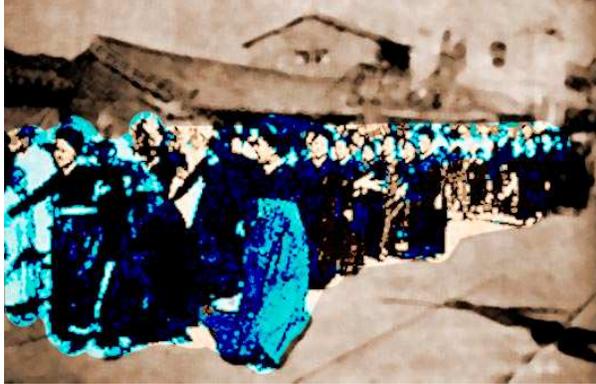
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## HANDOUT 6: THE SAM-IL (MARCH FIRST) INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Lee Wha Rang

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March 1st (3.1 - *sam-il* in Korean) is a national day of remembrance of those patriots who stood up against the armed savages from Japan on March 1, 1919. Every citizen of Korea knows what 'sam-il jul' means and samil is the most significant national event in our history. Unfortunately, it



is perhaps the most misunderstood event. The *sam-il* movement was inspired by U.S. President Wilson's 14-point proclamation and the 1919 Paris Peace conference that proclaimed ending of colonial rules.

*Photo: Korean women marching for Korea's independence on March 1, 1919. The marchers were inspired by President Wilson's 14-point proclamation and the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.*

As such it was the first major event in Korea that was rooted in a foreign origin. President Woodrow Wilson's '14-point' proclamation on January 1, 1918, that, amongst others, proclaimed:

A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

President Wilson's apparent intention was to carve out the booties of World War I (1914-1918) among the victors that included Japan. The devastation of the war caused social upheavals in Russia, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy and other nations. The Tsar of Russia was kicked out of Moscow and killed in Siberia, and socialism and fascism vied for power in Europe. Former colonies of Germany and Austria did indeed attain independence in accordance with Wilson's lofty proclamation.

However, not all colonies were freed, for the Wilson Doctrine did not apply to Korea, India, Tibet, Persia, Libya, Morocco, Vietnam and some other colonies of the WWI victors. The oppressed people of these colonies desired independence and mounted more intense struggle to expel colonial powers. Korean nationalists erroneously took Wilson's words at face value and believed Korea would be freed per Wilson's proclamation.

A Korean delegation headed by Kim Gyu-sik attended the Paris Peace Conference (February 1919), which refused to seat the Koreans as voting delegates. The Koreans were totally unaware of the secret pact of the US, Japan and France to exclude Korea and Indochina from the Paris Conference.



일제와 싸운 애국지사들을 잊지말자 !

*Photo: Japanese killed Koreans in many ways, beheading being their favorite 'sport'. Top: the moment of death of an unnamed Korean patriot. Bottom: severed heads on display.*



The *Sam-il* Anti-Japanese March was led by young students and Christians in Korea on March 1, 1919. It was crushed brutally by the Japanese. A Declaration of Independence, patterned after the American version, was read by teachers and civic leaders in tens of thousands of villages throughout Korea: “Today marks the declaration of Korean independence. There will be peaceful demonstrations all over Korea. If our meetings are orderly and peaceful, we shall receive the help of President Wilson and the great powers at Versailles, and Korea will be a free nation.”

Nearly two million students, patriots and Christians responded and joined the march. The naive Koreans were not aware that the American President Wilson was not quite the good guy he claimed to be: America had years earlier agreed to Japan's annexation of Korea. The 33 organizers of the movement were mostly Christian idealists and had no experience in mass movement and so the March failed disastrously.



*Photo: Hundreds of Korean nationalists were executed on a cross.*

The Japanese suppressed the movement with brutal force. They fired into groups of Korean Christians singing hymns. Christian leaders were nailed to wooden crosses and were left to die a slow death – “so that they can go to heaven”. Mounted police beheaded young school children. The police burned down churches. The official Japanese count of casualties include 553 killed,

1,409 injured, and 12,522 arrested, but the Korean estimates are much higher, over 7,500 killed, about 15,000 injured and 45,000 arrested.