

The Centenary of Korea's Sam-il (March First) Independence Movement: Remembering Japanese Art Critic Yanagi Sōetsu's Solidarity with Colonized Koreans

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Abstract

One hundred years on from Korea's Sam-il (March First) Independence Movement, this article outlines a number of factors that led to the mass mobilization of Koreans in sustained nationwide efforts to oust the Japanese colonizers from the peninsula. Although much of the pro-independence activism took place at the grassroots level in Korea, the movement also provided an opportunity for contemporaneous transnational commentators to publicly make known their disapproval of Japan's escalating imperial expansionism and its rigid colonial policies. In Japan, a number of concerned observers questioned the dominant mode of thinking at the time which pitted the colonial project as a noble and altruistic venture that would "civilize" Koreans. Criticisms ranged from a distrust of the empire's political motivations to the economic costs of running the colonies, and moral opposition based on humanitarian grounds. One Japanese commentator who demonstrated solidarity with the colonized Koreans was the art critic Yanagi Sōetsu 柳宗悦 (1889–1961), who published a number of impassioned appeals in an effort to demonstrate his indignation at Japan's occupation of the peninsula and to highlight the importance of acknowledging and protecting Korea's vast repository of extraordinary visual cultures.

Keywords: Yanagi Sōetsu, Sam-il Independence Movement, March First Movement, Japanese colonialism, Korean visual

culture, Kwanghwamun Gate

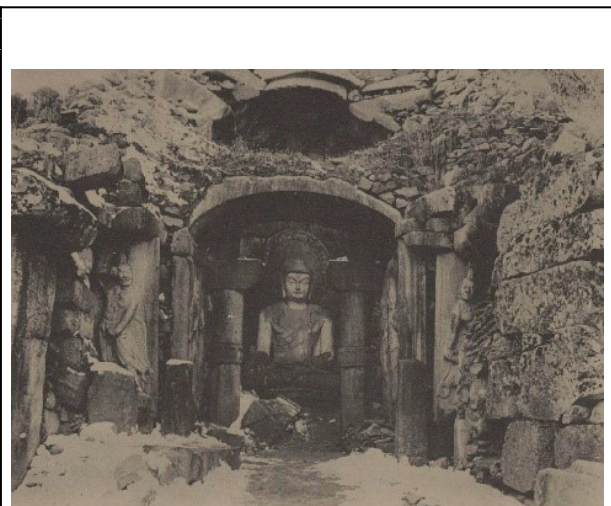
2019 marks the hundredth anniversary of the stirrings of a major watershed in Korean history, the March First Movement 三一運動 (Kr. Sam-il undong; Jp. San'ichi undō), which began with mass popular protests calling for independence in Seoul on 1 March, 1919. These protests ignited others across the country that maintained momentum for over a year, forming the earliest and most widespread displays of Korean resistance to the Japanese seizure of Korea in 1905, the annexation in 1910, and the era of colonization which lasted until Japan's defeat in World War II. As a political campaign seeking the reinstatement of Korean sovereignty, the Sam-il Movement was not confined to the Korean peninsula, but extended to the diaspora and supporters in many international locations including Japan, Manchuria, China, the United States, and parts of Europe.¹ The study of these cosmopolitan accounts is important in broadening our understanding of their contribution to intellectual exchange on the movement and situating modern Korean history within the broader global context. This article focuses predominantly on expressions of support for the Koreans shown by the Japanese art critic Yanagi Sōetsu 柳宗悦 (1889–1961),² who closely watched the unfolding events in Korea (Jp. Chōsen) in the colonial era, monitoring how the protests affected daily life for Koreans in the colony, and whether his peers would speak out against the brutality of Japan's response to

the crisis.

Yanagi's interest in Korea began around 1914, when an acquaintance living in colonial Korea, Asakawa Noritaka 浅川典孝 (1884-1964), visited him at his home in Abiko (Chiba) with a gift of a Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) porcelain vessel decorated with a cobalt-painted "autumn-grass" design. Yanagi was captivated by the understated elegance of the work, sparking an interest in Korean visual cultures that also led him to seek out similarly rustic handmade wares in Japan. Later, he would define such wares as *mingei* 民芸 (a contraction of *minshūteki kōgei* 民衆の工芸, "crafts of the people") after he and his potter friends Hamada Shōji 浜田庄司 (1894-1978), Kawai Kanjirō 河井寛次郎 (1890-1966), Tomimoto Kenkichi 富本憲吉 (1886-1963) and Bernard Leach (1887-1979) established Japan's Folk Crafts Movement 民芸運動 (Mingei undō) in the mid-1920s.³

In 1916, Yanagi decided to visit Asakawa Noritaka and his younger brother Asakawa Takumi 浅川巧 (1891-1931) in Seoul (Jp. Keijō) in order to experience Korean culture first hand. Arriving at the Port of Pusan on 11 August, Yanagi toured a number of locations in the southern part of the peninsula before catching the train to Seoul to spend two weeks with the brothers. While in North Kyōngsang Province, Yanagi was particularly impressed with the ancient capital of Kyōngju (Jp. Keishū), where he was struck by the beauty and grandeur of Sōkkuram Grotto (Jp. Sekkutsuan).⁴ The grotto had been constructed from granite blocks in the eighth century under Unified Silla (668CE-935CE), when Korean Buddhist art and architecture was at its zenith. However, when it was "discovered" by the Japanese around 1910, it was in a state of disrepair due to centuries of neglect under the Neo-Confucian governance of the Chosŏn monarchy. Between 1913 and 1915, the Government-General of Korea 朝鮮總督府 (Kr. Chosŏn ch'ongdokpu; Jp. Chōsen sōtokufu)

carried out its first restoration project on Sōkkuram.⁵ On his visit, however, Yanagi was scathing of the results, complaining that "It looks less like a restoration than a case of vandalism." In his own careful observations of the "eternal masterpiece" (*ei'en na kessaku*) Sōkkuram, Yanagi identified in the central, principal Buddha and thirty-seven relief carvings of other figures in the Buddhist pantheon on the surrounding grotto walls a unique national aesthetic emblematic of the spirit of the Korean people.⁶



The unrestored Sōkkuram Grotto, circa 1912 (Source: Chōsen Sōtokufu [The Government General of Korea], *Bukkokuji to Sekkutsuan* [Pulguksa and Sōkkuram], 1938, "Plate 22 Former View of Sekkutu-an Cave-Temple," n.p.)

At the time of his visit, Yanagi was part of a group of educated young men in Tokyo including Mushanokōji Saneatsu 武者小路実篤 (1885-1976), Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883-1971), and Arishima Takeo 有島武郎 (1878-1923) who styled themselves as the group Shirakaba 白樺 (White Birch). The group was formed through their mutual interest in modern Western art and literature, which the members introduced in the 160 issues of their eponymous journal from 1910 to 1923. As a

platform for the dissemination of avant-garde ideas celebrating individuality and subjective expression, Shirakaba took a leading role in modern Japan in disseminating reproductions of the works of artists including Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Paul Gauguin (many for the first time), and translations of the writings of art historians and thinkers such as Julius Meier-Graefe, C. Lewis Hind, and Henrik Ibsen.⁷ One of the individuals the group held a particular admiration for was Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), whose pursuit of individual betterment and unwavering commitment to liberal humanism aligned with the members' own ideological pursuits. For Yanagi, the discovery of Tolstoy was a crucial formative influence on his intellectual development, reinforcing his resolve (from around 1908) to distance himself from his youthful defense of militarism.⁸

After the outbreak of the Sam-il protests, Yanagi was among the first public intellectuals in Japan to openly state his anger at the entrenched view of Korean society and culture propagated by colonial apologists as backward and impoverished. Horrified by the swift and brutal nature of Japan's response to the protesters—and what he perceived as a lack of condemnation of Japan's actions in its newest colony—Yanagi began publishing prolifically about Korea in various newspapers and high-profile journals, framing his petitions for Japan's withdrawal from the peninsula and the return of Korean sovereignty around his expressions of empathy for colonial Koreans, his admiration for Korean art, and his concern for the preservation of the country's visual cultures.⁹

In Korea, the anti-colonial struggle had begun to take shape as pro-independence agitators were galvanized by national historians and social activists such as Sin Ch'aeho 申采浩 (1880–1936). Sin was among the first Korean intellectuals to portray Korea's past in terms of a nationalist historiography (Kr. *minjok sahak*).

His work, which traced strong ethnic links between Koreans and Manchurians in the ancient Kingdom of Puyŏ, rejected both the imposition of China's historical suzerainty over Korea and Japan's contemporary claims of authority in the peninsula.¹⁰ In 1907, Sin played a seminal role in the formation of the clandestine nationalist organization Sinminhoe 新民会 (New People's Association), before leaving the country just before the formal annexation in 1910, to continue his nationalist activities abroad.¹¹

The outbreak of the protests in Seoul in 1919 can be attributed to a number of factors feeding public resistance to the Japanese colonization of the country and grievances with the colonial administration. Foremost among these, Koreans opposed the harsh conditions of the first decade of authoritarian "military rule" (Jp. *budan seiji*) adopted by the colony's first governors, Terauchi Masatake 寺内正毅 (g. 1910–1916) and Hasegawa Yoshimichi 長谷川好道 (g. 1916–1919). The assimilationist program inaugurated under their guidance was designed to educate Koreans in Japanese ways, and was proclaimed as a philanthropic mission that amounted to "the spread of civilization."¹² The authorities believed that the racial and cultural similarities shared by the two peoples would ensure the success of the Koreans' incorporation into the Japanese empire. In reality, however, this "inclusion" in empire was only nominal, as colonial subjects were not afforded the same rights as Japanese nationals, and Korean culture was largely disparaged or ignored.¹³

Outside the colony, international events such as the 1917 dismantling of the Tsarist autocracy in the Russian Revolution, and the participation of Korean independence activists living in China at the World Conference of Small Nations in New York¹⁴ also began to fuel ideas about a new world order.¹⁵ In 1918, the dissemination of US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points address advocating

each nation’s right to self-determination (among other things) gave many Koreans a strong sense of hope about the prospect of repudiating Japanese rule and reinstating Korean sovereignty.¹⁶ But early in 1919, tensions between Koreans and the Japanese authorities escalated following the news of the death of Korea’s last monarch, Emperor Kojong (1852-1919), in the early hours of 21 January. Rumors began to circulate suggesting that his death was suspicious, and wall posters appeared throughout Seoul proclaiming that the emperor had been deliberately poisoned by the Japanese regime.¹⁷ One news publication noted just days before the protests broke out that “It is not surprising that the death of the former Emperor of Korea should have aroused feelings of regret in the minds of the Koreans for their vanquished independence.”¹⁸

As 200,000 Koreans from throughout the country descended on Seoul to witness Emperor Kojong’s funeral procession on 3 March, a group of thirty-three religious and cultural leaders who had drafted a Korean Declaration of Independence decided that the mass influx of people into the city presented a propitious opportunity to mount peaceful independence protests. On the morning of 1 March, the group met at a restaurant in downtown Seoul to sign and endorse the declaration before delivering it to the Government-General. Co-authored by historian Ch’oe Namsŏn 崔南善 (penname Yuktang, 1890-1957) and poet Han Yongun 韓龍雲 (penname Manhae, 1879-1944), the declaration adopted Wilsonian language to proclaim “the independence of Korea and the liberty of the Korean people,”¹⁹ and demanded that the Japanese regime withdraw immediately from the peninsula.²⁰

The text was a more moderate version of a document prepared by a group of Korean university students and intellectuals in Tokyo in January 1919—which had been dispatched to Japanese politicians, scholars, news outlets,

and Woodrow Wilson himself—promising “an eternal war of blood upon the Japanese” if their demands were not met.²¹ It was hoped that this document would simultaneously incite resistance to the Japanese colonizers among Koreans and garner support for Korean independence in the international community.²²

Approximately 3,000 copies of the declaration were distributed throughout Seoul that morning. In response, tens of thousands of Korean citizens from all walks of life poured into the streets waving the Korean flag, singing the national anthem, and shouting *Taehan Tongnip Mansei* (Long live Korean independence)! At two o’clock, the protestors gathered at T’apkol Kongwŏn (T’apkol Park, formerly Pagoda Park) to hear the declaration read publicly by the independence activist Son Pyŏng-hŭi 孫秉熙 (1861 - 1922).²³ It advocated non-violent demonstrations that would appeal to the international community for assistance in Korea’s bid to reclaim its freedom.²⁴



Bronze relief in T’apkol Park depicting the public reading of the Declaration of Independence on 1 March, 1919, Seoul (photograph by author, 2016)

The Seoul protest incited another 1,500 pro-independence demonstrations attended by over a million Koreans, in all but seven of the

country's 218 administrative districts. This mass mobilization was fuelled predominantly by word of mouth, since Japanese censorship prevented the communication of news or ideas not supported by the state.²⁵ Caught off guard at the unprecedented scale of the protests, the authorities ordered extra garrison forces from Japan, and launched a campaign of violent responses which included firing on unarmed crowds, razing villages, and conducting extrajudicial killings of anti-colonial protestors at the infamous Sōdaemun Prison.²⁶

Such flagrant acts of state violence only served to intensify the Koreans' commitment to regaining their sovereignty, and resulted in new forms of resistance such as acts of passive disobedience. Outspoken activists were forced underground, or to agitate for reform in diasporic Korean communities. The inability to establish an official movement in the colony led Koreans living in Shanghai to announce in April 1919 the formation of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea with Syngman Rhee 李承晩 (1875-1965) as its president *in absentia*. Rhee, who at that time living in the United States, attempted unsuccessfully to attend the Versailles Peace Conference in order to petition US President Wilson in person for Korea's independence. At the end of World War II, the Provisional Government in Shanghai provided leadership in Korea, with Rhee assuming the role as its first president.²⁷

The movement was finally suppressed in the spring of 1920, but during the "year of blood"²⁸ thousands of Korean nationals were killed by the Japanese gendarmerie and military forces, and many more were injured or jailed. The Japanese forces also suffered a number of deaths, and over one hundred wounded.²⁹ Yet even as images of the clashes between demonstrators and the authorities appeared in news sources around the world, no nation stepped forward to challenge Japan's authority in the peninsula.³⁰ Japan had emerged

victorious from the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and successfully concluded an alliance with the Entente Powers in World War I. As a result its "sphere of influence" was rapidly gaining recognition. In particular, the defeat of Russia was viewed by many as a dismantling of European claims to a superior civilization which dominated international affairs.³¹



Bronze reliefs (details) depicting the Japanese response to Korean protestors (photographs by author, 2016)

Meanwhile, in Taishō (1912-1926) Japan, the Sam-il Movement prompted many Japanese to scrutinize Korea's place in the empire for the first time since the 1910 annexation. As polarized opinions about the empire's actions in

Korea emerged, writers supportive of Japan's colonial expansionism and Korea's colonization were widely propagated in the popular press. Many Japanese and colonial-sponsored newspapers in Korea ran articles, for instance, that ignored any Japanese culpability in the protests, blaming instead the "insubordinate" behavior of Koreans and Western missionaries for the ongoing crisis.³² At the same time, the prevailing spirit of Taishō democracy created a climate for the dissemination of a range of ideas—including some that ran counter to state objectives—which lasted until the 1930s. Criticism of Japan's colonial policies was, however, typically subject to the types of heavy-handed censorship inherited from the Meiji (1868–1912) government's program to curtail the spread of "dangerous thought" (*kiken shisō*), which included redaction, deliberate blurring of type, or outright prohibition. Although the official publishing guidelines of the era remain unclear, writers were aware that the censorship division of the Home Ministry's Police Bureau was the final arbiter of what was made available in the public domain, and as a result, many adopted tactics of voluntary self-censorship. Those who transgressed the boundaries were issued warnings, and in cases where censorship alone was considered insufficient, punishment for infractions ranged from fines to prison sentences.³³

Yanagi's public articulation of his growing unease at Japan's dealings in Korea outweighed any concerns he may have held regarding censorship. The Sam-il protests catalyzed his decision to begin voicing his strenuous objections to Japan's colonial presence in the peninsula in more than a dozen essays published from May 1919 until around 1923. When the protests broke out, Yanagi was yet to count any Korean nationals among his circle of friends, but he quickly acquired many Korean admirers within and without the colony.³⁴ Although Yanagi never learned to communicate in Korean, the Asakawa brothers

(particularly Takumi) served as interpreters and cultural intermediaries on his many trips to the peninsula, and he later formed friendships with Korean intellectuals including the independence reformist Yōm Sang-sōp 廉想涉 (penname Hoengbo, 1897–1963). Yanagi's qualification to act as a spokesperson for the silenced Koreans, he maintained, was his sympathy and appreciation of "their inner desires which are manifested in their arts."³⁵

Yanagi's first Korea essay, "Chōsenjin o omou" (Thinking of the Koreans), was serialized in *Yomiuri Shinbun* 20 to 24 May, 1919, just two months after the advent of the March First Movement. The essay was translated into English and Hangŭl before publication in *The Japan Advertiser* (13 August) and *Tong-A Ilbo* (East Asia Daily, 12 April, 1920) respectively. In this work, Yanagi articulated his affection for the Korean people and Korean beauty, and began defining a role for himself as an advocate for the Koreans, who were denied freedom of speech under Japan's colonial policies. For example, he openly criticized assimilationism, which included such policies as teaching all school classes in the Japanese language. "We are even trying to change the way Koreans think," Yanagi complained. "We teach them Japanese morals and the graces of the imperial family, which have nothing whatsoever to do with them."³⁶ He recounted the "strange emotion" he felt upon viewing an embroidery on display at a Korean girls' school, and his dismay at hearing that the students had been taught to embroider in the Japanese method. According to their (Japanese) teacher, the embroidery was an outstanding example of how easy it was to assimilate the "benefits" of civilization, but Yanagi found it a "half-Westernized, tasteless and inelegant work, with unattractive designs and shallow coloring." This experience, Yanagi explained, made him "sad at the loss of Korea, which is rapidly losing its characteristic beauty" because it was "forced to participate in [Japan's] flawed education."³⁷

The independence protests also encouraged a number of other Japanese public intellectuals to step forward to call for action on the growing “Japan-Korea problem” (*Nissen mondai*). One of the most influential minds of the era, the liberal political thinker and Tokyo Imperial University professor Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 (1878–1933), generally viewed colonialism as a noble venture but described the independence crisis as a “humanitarian problem” that required the immediate abandonment of discriminatory treatment towards the Koreans. In an article published in April 1919, Yoshino also criticized Japanese assimilationism, and attributed Japan’s failure as a colonizing nation to a lack of “self-reflection” (*jiko hansei*). In the essay “Liberalism in Japan,” published in English, Yoshino again called for an end to assimilation, and assured his readers that if the issue of Korea’s independence were put to his students, ninety percent would rally for Korea’s autonomy.³⁸

Another leading Taishō intellectual, the journalist and political economist Ishibashi Tanzan 石橋湛山 (1884–1973), was a champion of “Small Japanism” (*shō Nihon shugi*) which argued for containment of Japan’s expansionism due to the excessive costs associated with running the colonies. He envisioned Korea’s self-determination as part of a new, liberal global order based on open international markets, cultural exchange, and restraint in the use of military force. For this reason, he welcomed the March First Movement, thinking that it signified the demise of Japanese rule in Korea and Japan’s maltreatment of the Koreans as though they were “dogs and horses.”³⁹ Similarly, the left-leaning Nishio Suehiro 西尾末広 (1891–1981) pronounced Korea’s colonization an abysmal failure, describing the forced assimilation of the Koreans “as futile as attempts to extinguish a raging fire with an old-fashioned hand-pump.”⁴⁰

Criticism of Korea’s colonial governance was by no means confined to the left, however, as entities such as Kokuryūkai 黒龍会 (Black Dragon Society)—a right-wing expansionist group formed in 1901 by Uchida Ryōhei 内田良平 (1874–1937)—also stepped forward to make their views known. Kokuryūkai advocated a pan-Asianist (*han-Ajia shugi*) approach to international relations that would shore up regional integration and cooperation and help legitimize Japan’s imperial ambitions in Asia. Following the March First protests, Uchida openly condemned the colonial administration’s policy of integrating Koreans into the empire as *shinmin* (subjects of the emperor) without affording them the same constitutional rights as Japanese nationals. While opposed to granting the Koreans outright independence, he argued that a program of “domestic self-governance” could help advance stability in the region.⁴¹

Like these other outspoken commentators of the era, Yanagi’s opposition to Korea’s colonization was rooted in a worldview that was at once liberal and cosmopolitan. His ideas for a broader vision of a new and modern Asia relied on Japan’s place in a progressive global order. Colonization had no place in this Tolstoian vision, and through his writings and public lectures, he made his views known to the colonial administration. “The thoughts of those who do have experience with and knowledge of Korea are primarily lacking in wisdom, depth, and warmth,” Yanagi complained. “This makes me cry often for the Koreans.” He attempted to reassure the Koreans, however, that “some of us [Japanese] are cognizant of our country’s failure to follow the rightful path to humanity.”⁴² Yanagi’s method in many of his essays on Korea was to draw attention to Japan’s unlawful occupation of Korea and his empathy for the Koreans through the mobilization of Korean visual cultures as vehicles to facilitate a path to rapprochement between the two countries. “I believe it is art, not science, that connects countries, and brings

humans closer together,” he declared. “Only artistic and religious understanding can appreciate the experiences of the inner heart, and generate an infinite love.”⁴³

In 1920, the publication of “Chōsen no tomo ni okuru sho” (A Letter to My Korean Friends), continued Yanagi’s campaign of denouncing Japan’s presence in Korea by pointedly highlighting the moral and ethical dilemmas arising from its forced assimilation policies:

The governors are attempting to assimilate you. But how is it that we who are so imperfect have the authority to do so? There is no position as unnatural as this, and there is no administration as lacking in authority. To insist on assimilation only engenders opposition. You must dismiss Japanization... Korea’s unique beauty and freedom of the heart must not be violated by other things. It is clear that these things cannot be violated forever. Real cooperation is not born of assimilation; only mutual respect between individuals will bring about union.⁴⁴

Yanagi’s bravery in speaking out in unequivocal terms in spite of the climate of elevated surveillance and suppression of free speech is characteristic of his conscientious responses to the injustices he encountered throughout his career. In 1922, his mounting frustration with Japan’s staunch control of the peninsula and his sympathy for the Koreans attracted considerable attention, as he openly described Japan’s annexation of the peninsula in another text as “a morally unforgivable act.”⁴⁵ Then, in August, he released an impassioned protest in the essay “Ushinawaren to suru ichi Chōsen kenchiku no tame ni” (The Historic Korean Monument Slated for Demolition) criticizing the colonial government’s plans to demolish Seoul’s Kwanghwamun Gate in order to make way for the imposing Western-style Capitol building that would serve as the Government-General’s new headquarters.

Kwanghwamun Gate was a wooden structure

with a stone base fronting the most revered of Korea’s Five Grand Palaces, Kyōngbokkung. The gate was a cherished symbol of Korea’s enduring nationhood, initially erected in 1394 at the behest of the new Chosōn dynasty’s founder, Yi Sōng-gye 李成桂 (1335–1408). Following its destruction by Japanese invaders in the late sixteenth century, it lay in ruins for two and a half centuries before it was rebuilt in 1867 using public donations.⁴⁶ Yanagi considered the gate an important legacy of traditional East Asian art, which he viewed as increasingly imperilled by the encroaching tide of Western and Japanese modernity. The article was serially published from 24–28 August in Seoul’s moderately nationalist *Tong-A Ilbo*, and then as the lead article in the September edition of the Japanese magazine *Kaizō* (Reform).⁴⁷ It was emotively styled in elegiac prose which directly addressed the gate:

My chest is tight at the thought of your suffering, yet there is nothing I can do. Everyone is hesitant to say anything. However, for me, to bury you in silence would be such a terrible tragedy. For this reason, I am taking the place of those who cannot speak. On the occasion of your death, I write this piece as a final reminder to the world of your existence. Sadly, I am separated from you by more than a thousand miles. I fear that even in the act of raising my voice amidst the silence that it is impossible to save you from the unscrupulous and powerful authorities.⁴⁸

One Korean scholar described this essay as “an unexpected ambush from Tokyo” that constituted “the first real barrier that the Government-General had encountered since the annexation.”⁴⁹ In the weeks following the publication of this essay, which “triggered public outrage across Japan,”⁵⁰ the Government-General bowed to public pressure and retracted its demolition plans for Kwanghwamun, much to the “enormous relief”⁵¹ of many observers. The gate was instead dismantled and erected nearby, only to

be destroyed in the Korean War (1950–1953).⁵²



The reconstructed Kwanghwamun Gate, Seoul (photograph by author, 2016)

While some of Yanagi’s publications brooked little or no scrutiny from the censorship bureau, his publication of such openly combative texts ensured that he garnered his fair share of attention from the authorities. In March 1920, two months before a planned trip to Korea, Yanagi submitted “A Letter to My Korean Friends” to the publisher *Shinchōsha*. Entries in his diary dated 21–22 March indicate that the essay was subsequently banned by the censorship bureau, before an abridged Korean translation run in *Tong-A Ilbo* in April was also banned by the Government-General. The work was finally released in the June issue of *Kaizō*, but it was subjected to such heavy-handed censorship that when he saw it for the first time Yanagi claimed that he barely recognized it as his own.⁵³ A Korean supporter confirmed that it was “often difficult to understand the meaning of [Yanagi’s] sentences because parts [of his texts] were blacked out like wounds all over a body.”⁵⁴

Yanagi was never arrested or incarcerated, but on a number of occasions he came dangerously close. For example, after returning from his

May 1920 trip, Yanagi was invited to speak at a Korean gathering. As he prepared to go on stage, he was discretely warned that there were several secret police in the audience, and a stenographer, to record his every word. His closest brush with the law coincided with the release of the Kwanghwamun essay. After its (censored) publication, Yanagi was officially registered as a “dangerous person,” and the Special Higher Police regularly watched his residence, and had him trailed by detectives.⁵⁵ Such accounts reflect Yanagi’s equanimity amidst the censorship climate, but they also highlight his daring in exposing himself to danger in the name of a higher moral agenda. “I know that there are other Japanese who feel as I do even though they have not said as much publicly,” he wrote in 1920. “But I, for one, do not wish to be cold regarding the fate of Korea.”⁵⁶

Although ultimately the Sam-il Movement failed to achieve its organizers’ aspirations to reinstate Korean sovereignty, it did eventually garner global attention and convince the Government-General to review its oppressive first decade of governance in Korea. In August 1919, Admiral Saitō Makoto 齋藤実 (g. 1919–1927 and 1929–1931) became Governor-General, ushering in a more conciliatory era of “cultural rule” (*bunka seiji*). Japanese intellectuals such as Yoshino, Ishibashi, Nishio, Uchida, and Yanagi—whose views differed considerably from the majority of public commentators championing Japan’s growing presence in East Asia as an inevitable and providential aspect of Japan’s place in the new world order—must have gained much satisfaction from this official shift in policy, even as it failed to reach the full level of its promised implementation. Although the Korean fight for sovereignty would not be realized for decades, the movement may also have wielded some influence on China’s May Fourth Movement, and similar nationalist protests in India, the Philippines, Egypt, and Ireland.⁵⁷

Certainly, the traumatic and often violent events of the March First Movement marked a turning point not only in Korea's colonial relationship with Japan, but also among Koreans in Korea, Japan and beyond. In addition to highlighting for the international community the injustices of Japan's expansionism, the movement was central in bolstering solidarity domestically, and consolidating the nationalist movement both in Korea and abroad in its quest for liberation. In the cultural realm, with the help of anti-colonial campaigners such as Yanagi, it also indirectly helped to secure the preservation of some of Korea's important cultural properties. Today, 1 March is commemorated as the national holiday Samil-chöl in South Korea, and every year the reading of the Declaration of Independence is re-enacted in T'apkol Park.⁵⁸ Ten large murals cast in bronze

encircling the participants serve not only as symbolic reminders of the resistance to Japanese rule and the brutal suppression of the movement, but also the heroic efforts of the many individuals who mobilized their families and their communities in the national and transnational struggle for Korean independence.

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Notes

¹ Daeyeol Ku, "The March First Movement: With Special Reference to its External Implications and Reactions of the United States," *Korea Journal* 42, no. 3 (2002): 219–55.

² Yanagi's given name was Muneyoshi, but he preferred the *on'yomi* pronunciation of the characters, calling himself Sōetsu. Following convention, all Asian names in this article are given in the traditional order, with surname preceding personal name, except in the endnotes where an author's work is published in English.

³ Takasaki Sōji, *Chōsen o omou* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1984), 237.

⁴ Sōkkuram was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1995.

⁵ Hyung Il Pai, "Tracing Japan's Antiquity: Photography, Archaeology and Representations of Kyōngju," in *Questioning Oriental Aesthetics and Thinking: Conflicting Versions of "Asia" Under the Colonial Empires*, ed. Shigemi Inaga (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2011), 289–316.

⁶ Yanagi Sōetsu, "Sekibutsuji no chōkoku ni tsuite," in *Yanagi Muneyoshi zenshū*, Volume 6

(Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1981), 110–44. All translations in this article are mine.

⁷ Erin Schoneveld, *Shirakaba and Japanese Modernism: Art Magazines, Artistic Collectives, and the Early Avant-garde* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 1.

⁸ Yanagi's early support of militarism was likely forged due to his family circumstances. Yanagi's father Narayoshi 槽悦 (1832–1891) was an admiral in the Japanese navy until his death when Yanagi was eighteen months old.

⁹ Penny Bailey, "The Aestheticization of Korean Suffering in the Colonial Period: A Translation of Yanagi Sōetsu's *Chōsen no bijutsu*," *Monumenta Nipponica* 73, no. 1 (2018): 27–85.

¹⁰ To shore up the validity of its colonization of Korea, the Japanese authorities propagated such ideas as the "Japan-Korea common ancestry theory" (Jp. *Nissen dōsorōn* 日鮮同祖論) and historical narratives describing Empress Jingū's conquest over the southern part of the peninsula—as recounted in the eighth-century *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan). Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 11–12; Michael Kim, "Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Transnationalism in Korean History," *Journal of Contemporary Korean Studies* 1, no. 1 (December 2014): 15–24.

¹¹ Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 202, note 111. Other important nationalist activists of the era include Pak Ūn-sik 朴殷植 (1859–1925), An Chae-hong 安在鴻 (1891–1965), and Mun Il-p'yōng 文一平 (1888–1939).

¹² Colonial apologist Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933) quoted in Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 134.

¹³ Mark E. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 82; John Lie, *Diasporic Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 9.

¹⁴ This was an event hosted by the League for Small and Subject Nationalities, a self-determinist group set up in New York during World War I which aspired "to establish a permanent congress of the small, subject and oppressed nationalities of the world; to assert the right of each nationality to direct representation at the peace conference following this war...[and] to emphasize the importance of restoring to these nationalities the right of self-government as an indispensable condition for world peace." See Charity Organization Society of the City of New York, *The Survey: Social, Charitable, Civic: A Journal of Constructive Philanthropy* 38 (1917): 120–121.

¹⁵ Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), 339.

¹⁶ Guoqi Xu, *Asia and the Great War: A Shared History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 120–21.

¹⁷ Yōng-ho Ch'oe and Tae-jin Yi, "The Mystery of Emperor Kojong's Sudden Death in 1919: Were the Highest Japanese Officials Responsible?," *Korean Studies* 35 (2011): 122–51. See also Carter J. Eckert, *Korea Old and New: A History* (Seoul: Korea Institute, Harvard University, 1990), 277–78.

¹⁸ "The Nervousness about Korea," *The Japan Chronicle*, 19 February, 1919.

¹⁹ "Korean Declaration of Independence," in *Source Materials on Korean Politics and Ideologies*, ed. Donald G. Tewksbury (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1950), 48–50.

²⁰ Richard H. Mitchell, *The Korean Minority in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

1967), 21; Xu, *Asia and the Great War*, 133.

²¹ Richard H. Mitchell, *The Korean Minority in Japan*, 19. See also Xu, *Asia and the Great War*, 131–32; Erez Manela, “The ‘Wilsonian Moment’ in East Asia: The March First Movement in Global Perspective,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009): 11–27.

²² Gi-Wook Shin, “March First Movement of 1919 (Korea),” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Volume 2, eds. David A. Snow et al. (Malden, Mass.: Wiley, 2013), 710–11.

²³ For details on Son and T’apkol Park, see Guy Podoler, “Revisiting the March First Movement: On the Commemorative Landscape and the Nexus between History and Memory,” *The Review of Korean Studies* 8, no. 3 (2005): 137–54.

²⁴ Dae-Sook Suh, “The Revolutionary Movement: A Brief Evaluation of Ideology and Leadership,” in *Korea Under Japanese Colonial Rule: Studies of the Policy and Techniques of Japanese Colonialism*, ed. Andrew Nahm (Kalamazoo: Center for Korean Studies, Western Michigan University, 1973), 187.

²⁵ Manela, “The ‘Wilsonian Moment’ in East Asia,” 11–27.

²⁶ Frank Baldwin, “Participatory Anti-Imperialism: The 1919 Independence Movement,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 1 (1979): 123–62; Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, 344.

²⁷ Richard S. Kim, “Inaugurating the American Century: The 1919 Philadelphia Korean Congress, Korean Diasporic Nationalism, and American Protestant Missionaries,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 26, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 50–76; Gi-Wook Shin, “March First Movement of 1919 (Korea),” 710–11.

²⁸ “Assimilation,” *Korea Review* 2 (August 1920): 8–9.

²⁹ The estimates for the numbers of deaths and casualties differ dramatically in Korean and Japanese records. Simons uses Korean estimates of 45,000 deaths and 7,000 wounded, but official Japanese estimates cited in Eckert report 553 and 1,409 respectively. See Geoff Simons, *Korea: The Search for Sovereignty* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1995), 132–35; Carter J. Eckert, *Korea Old and New*, 279.

³⁰ For example, the US State Department sent a missive to its ambassador in Japan stipulating that “The Consulate [in Seoul] should be extremely careful not to encourage any belief that the United States will assist the Korean nationalists in carrying out their plans... It should not do anything which may cause the Japanese authorities to suspect that the US government sympathizes with the Korean nationalist movement.” United States Department of State, *United States Policy Regarding Korea, Part I: 1834–1950* (Chunchon: Hallym University Press, 1987), 35–36.

³¹ Xu, *Asia and the Great War*, 121.

³² Ubukata Naokichi, “Nihonjin no Chōsenkan: Yanagi Sōetsu o tōshite,” *Shisō* 448 (October 1961), 66–77; Xu, *Asia and the Great War*, 124–27.

³³ Richard H. Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 160.

³⁴ Mari Nakami notes that Yanagi’s first acquaintance with a Korean national occurred on 2 February 1920, when a Korean student, Namgung Byōk, visited him at his home. See Mari Nakami, *Composite Beauty: Yanagi Muneyoshi’s Aspirations for Peace* (Balwyn North, Vic: Trans Pacific Press, 2011), 309, note 4.

³⁵ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Chōsenjin o omou,” in *Yanagi Muneyoshi zenshū*, Volume 6 (Tokyo:

Chikuma Shobō, 1981), 23–32.

³⁶ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Chōsenjin o omou,” 23–32.

³⁷ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Chōsenjin o omou,” 23–32.

³⁸ Sakuzō Yoshino, “[Liberalism in Japan \[1921\]](#),” in *What Japan Thinks*, ed. K. K. Kawakami (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 79–92, accessed 8 August 2019.

³⁹ Ishibashi Tanzan, “Senjin bōdō ni tai suru rikai,” in *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, Volume 3 (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1971), 79.

⁴⁰ Taiyō quoted in “Assimilation,” 8–9.

⁴¹ Sven Saaler, “The Kokuryūkai and the Rise of Nationalism, Pan-Asianism, and Militarism in Japan, 1901–1925,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2014): 125–60.

⁴² Yanagi Sōetsu, “Chōsenjin o omou,” 23–32.

⁴³ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Chōsenjin o omou,” 23–32.

⁴⁴ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Chōsen no tomo ni okuru sho,” in *Yanagi Muneyoshi zenshū*, Volume 6 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1981), 33–51.

⁴⁵ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Hiyō: Arekisandā Paueru ‘Nihon no Chōsen tōchi seisaku o hyōsu,’” in *Yanagi Muneyoshi zenshū*, Volume 6 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1981), 184–86.

⁴⁶ Jae-eun Kang, *The Land of Scholars: Two Thousand Years of Korean Confucianism* (Paramus, New Jersey: Homa Sekey Books, 2006), 180–81, 430.

⁴⁷ Yuko Kikuchi, “Yanagi Sōetsu and Korean Crafts within the Mingei Movement,” *Papers of the British Association for Korean Studies* 5 (1994): 23–38.

⁴⁸ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Ushinawaren to suru ichi Chōsen kenchiku no tame ni,” in *Yanagi Muneyoshi zenshū*, Volume 6 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1981), 145–54.

⁴⁹ Kim Ūr-han, “Kōkamon to Yanagi Sōetsu sensei,” *Shinwa* 175 (June 1968): 23–27.

⁵⁰ Kim Ūr-han, “Kōkamon to Yanagi Sōetsu sensei,” 23–27.

⁵¹ Yi Chin-hŭi, “Richō no bi to Yanagi Sōetsu: Chōsen no tomo datta Nihonjin,” *Kikan sanzenri* 12 (1978): 46–59.

⁵² In 1968, under Pak Chōnghŭi’s (1917–1979) administration, the stone base of the gate was again relocated to the front of the Capitol building, where it underwent a reconstruction in concrete. In 2006, another project began on Kwanghwamun which restored much of the gate’s wooden structure and relocated the gate to its original position 14.5m to the south. Completed in 2010, it stands at the northern end of Kwanghwamun Plaza in Seoul’s Jongno-gu district. It is a popular site for tourists, and each year attracts many visitors who jostle to take photographs of the royal changing of the guard ceremonies held daily.

⁵³ Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Yanagi Muneyoshi* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1994), 195–96.

⁵⁴ Kim Hui-myōng, “Yanagi Sōetsu sensei to Chōsen no geijutsu,” *Shinwa* 91 (May 1961), 16–17.

⁵⁵ Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Yanagi Muneyoshi*, 193–94, 198–99.

⁵⁶ Yanagi Sōetsu, “Chōsen no tomo ni okuru sho,” 33–51.

⁵⁷ Ku, “The March First Movement,” 223.

⁵⁸ In North Korea, 1 March is not a holiday, and is regarded as a failed attempt at an anti-imperialist revolution. See Gi-Wook Shin and Rennie Moon, “1919 in Korea: National Resistance and Contending Legacies,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 2 (2019): 399–408.