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A Political Factor in the Rise of Protestantism in Korea: Protestantism and the 1919 March First Movement.

TIMOTHY S. LEE

Everywhere the first impulse to social action is given as a rule by real interests, i.e., by political and economic interests. Ideal interests lend wings to these real interests, give them a spiritual meaning, and serve to justify them. Man does not live by bread alone. He wants to have a good conscience as he pursues his life-interests. And in pursuing them he develops his capacities to the highest extent only if he believes that in so doing he serves a higher rather than a purely egotistic purpose. *Interests without such "spiritual wings" are lame; but on the other hand, ideas can win out in history only if and insofar as they are associated with real interests.*

—Otto Hintze

Surveying the modern religious landscape in East Asia, one is struck by a curious fact: the efflorescence of Protestantism in (South) Korea and the lack of such development elsewhere in the region, particularly China and Japan.¹ This situation is curious since all three countries are

1. According to a survey released by South Korean government's Department of Statistics, as of December 1994, about 24.1 percent of South Koreans fifteen years or older claimed to be Christian. Of these, 18.2 percent were Protestant and 5.9 percent Roman Catholic (cited in *Dong-A Ilbo* [Seoul], 28 Dec. 1994). The total South Korean population for that year was about forty-five million. In a more recent survey, conducted in 1997 by Korea Survey (Gallup) Polls, the figure for the Protestants is higher, with 20.3 percent of South Koreans eighteen or older identifying themselves as Protestant, as opposed to 18.3 percent for the Buddhists, and 7.4 percent for the Roman Catholics (cited in *Kurisch'an Sinmun* [The Christian Press, Seoul], 22 June 1998). In Japan, according to a 1990 figure, Protestants accounted for about one-half of 1 percent of the total population. The total percentage of Japanese Christians, including Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox, was 0.88, which amounted to about 1.1 million. See Kumazawa Yoshinobu and David L. Swain, eds., *Christianity in Japan, 1971–1990* (Tokyo: Kyo Bun Kwan, 1991). Reliable statistics for Chinese Christians are hard to come by, but a figure announced by the government-sanctioned China Christian Council shows that by August 1997 there were upwards of 13.3 million Chinese Protestants. For the same year, the Chinese government estimated the number of Roman Catholics attending its sanctioned churches to be about four million. In simple numbers, therefore, Chinese Christians exceed their Korean counterparts, but in terms of the percentage of the population, they are far smaller. For since China's 1997 population was about 1.3 billion, the 17.3 million

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heavily shaped by Buddhism and Confucianism, the commonality that might lead one to suspect that Protestantism's ability to adapt and spread would be more or less equal in these three nations. Moreover, stoking curiosity is the fact that in both China and Japan, the history of Protestant evangelism was considerably longer than that in Korea, in China by seventy-seven years, in Japan by twenty-five years.² Why then is Protestantism especially successful in (South) Korea?³

Since the early years of the missionary movement in Korea many have puzzled over this question. To the early missionaries to Korea, who were delighted but also baffled by their unexpected success, the best answer lay in divine providence.⁴ Less theologically, others have sought to puzzle out the problem by seeking some decisive factor that was present in Korea but absent in China and Japan. This search for a decisive causal variable has elicited a number of candidates, including Koreans' allegedly affective temperament and receptive character, and a mode of evangelistic strategy—namely, what came to be known as the Nevius Method, which insisted that the proselytes take the initiative of governing and supporting their church, as well as propagating their newfound faith. Possible causes also included homologies be-

Christians comprised only about 1.3 percent of the total population. See "China Keeps Pressure on Catholic Church," *Christian Century*, 5 Nov. 1997, 1,000; and Ann Martin and Myrl Byler, "What's Happening to Christians in China?" *Christian Century*, 24 Sept.–Oct. 1997, 837.

2. In 1807 Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society initiated the first Protestant missionary work in China. In Japan, three denominations from America—the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the (Dutch) Reformed Church of America—did the same in 1859. The first resident missionary to arrive in Korea was Horace N. Allen, who arrived in 1884. See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, vol. 3: *The 19th Century Outside Europe: The Americas, the Pacific, Asia, and Africa* (1961; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1969); John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974); Winburn T. Thomas, *Protestant Beginnings in Japan* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1959); and L. George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1832–1910* (1927; reprint, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1970).
3. Nowadays, to talk of Protestantism in Korea is to talk of Protestantism in South Korea. But this was not always the case. Indeed, prior to 1945, when the nation was divided, Protestantism was widespread all over the peninsula; moreover, it was especially strong in the north, boasting nearly three hundred thousand adherents. But since 1945, just as the Socialists and Communists were being rooted out in the south, the Protestants suffered harsh persecution in the north that forced most of them to flee to the south. As a result, North Korea now has at most ten thousand believers with two state-approved Protestant churches (there is also one Catholic church). For the purposes of this study, however, this distinction is unimportant, since all the events under discussion took place before 1945. See my "Born-Again in Korea: The Rise and Character of Revivalism in (South) Korea, 1885–1988" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996), 122–35; Paek Chung-hyôn, *Pukhanaedo Kyohoeoga Innayo?* [Is There a Church in North Korea?] (Seoul: Kungmin Ilbo, 1998); and Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: Norton, 1997), 185–298.
4. George T. B. Davis, *Korea for Christ* (London: Christian Workers' Depot, 1910), 14.

tween certain aspects of Protestantism and traditional Korean beliefs—for example, between the concept of God and *Hanulnim*, the Korean high god—and structural similarities between the polity of the Presbyterian Church (which is especially strong in Korea) and the extended-family-oriented organization of traditional Korean society. Reasons for Protestantism's success in Korea may even be found in the contingency of a missionary physician's nursing back to life an influential politician gravely wounded in a failed coup d'état, or in a great many Koreans' yearning for a religion that was more credible and potent than Buddhism or Confucianism. Other reasons include post-Korean War factors such as intensive urbanization and deterioration of traditional values, and a series of massive evangelistic campaigns that overran South Korea in the wake of the war, like the World Evangelization Crusade of 1980.⁵

To be sure, in accounting for a complex historical development like the success of Protestantism in Korea, no monocausal explanation will suffice. Any attempt to address this issue satisfactorily and comprehensively, therefore, should duly consider all the major factors like those mentioned above. Such an attempt, however, will not be the object of this study, since that is clearly beyond our scope. Instead, our task here is more limited but nevertheless important: to consider a political factor that (in the context of modern East Asian history) must have been a decisive factor in the rise of Protestantism in Korea. This political factor is the manner in which Protestantism in Korea—unlike Protestantism in China and Japan, or even Roman Catholicism in Korea—became associated with the real, or political, interests of Korean people, and attained the legitimacy it needed to lay roots and grow in Korea.

That there was a political dimension to the success of Protestantism in Korea is not difficult to surmise. For if we take Hintze's observation as an interpretive warrant—that an ideal succeeds in history only in so far as it becomes associated with the real interests of the people to whom it is exposed—it must also be granted that an ideal-driven religion like Protestantism could have succeeded in Korea only because it somehow became associated with the real interests of the Koreans.⁶ In Korean history, from 1876—when the land was officially

5. Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East* (New York: Scribner, 1919), 516; Charles Allen Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Method* (Seoul: Christian Literature Society, 1937); Spencer Palmer, *Korea and Christianity: The Problem of Identification with Tradition* (Seoul: Hollym, 1967); Everett N. Hunt Jr., *Protestant Pioneers in Korea* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1980); and Lee, "Born-Again in Korea," 165–230.

6. The epigraph, with added italics, is part of a larger quotation cited by Reinhard Bendix to characterize Max Weber's approach to socio-historical analysis. See his *Max Weber: An*

"opened" by Japan—to 1919, the year of the March First Movement, such real interests were expressed mainly in political terms of safeguarding—and later regaining—Korean sovereignty in the face of foreign, especially Japanese, encroachments. Such expressions, along with the sentiments that engendered them, are generally known as Korean nationalism.⁷ In the Korea of the time, nationalism functioned as a touchstone of legitimacy, such that in order for a foreign religion or ideology to be accepted and have a chance of success there, it had to be identified with that sentiment. This nationalism made no exception for Protestantism.

That Protestantism and Korean nationalism became positively associated with each other is a well-known datum in Korean church history. But what is insufficiently developed in the historiography is an analysis that makes sense of the linkage between this datum and the extraordinary success of the Korean Protestant church—especially an analysis based explicitly on a sound theoretical warrant. Making up for some of this insufficiency—engaging in a more warrant-conscious

Intellectual Portrait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 46–47. Here, it should be noted that by contrasting "ideas" with "real interests," Hintze does not imply an economic determinism in which ideas are nothing but epiphenomenal projections of some material interests. Indeed, in the quotation, Hintze goes on to assert, "And this ideology is as 'real' as the real interests themselves, for ideology is an indispensable part of the life-process which is expressed in action" (47). Weber's classic works on the relationship between ideology and real interests are well known. They include *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Winchester, Mass: Allen and Unwin, 1930); and *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York: Free, 1949). A more recent Weberian study along this vein—one that compares modern fundamentalism in the United States and Iran—is Martin Riesebrodt's *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1998).

7. Here, the difficulty of using the concept "Korean nationalism" must be acknowledged. If it were defined in terms of specific contents, then it would be more accurate to speak of it in the plural. For between the late nineteenth century and 1919, at least three specific versions of Korean nationalism surfaced: (1) that of the ultraconservative party *wijông ch'òksa* (Defend Orthodoxy, Reject Heterodoxy), which sought to preserve intact the traditional order; (2) that of the *Tonghaks* (Eastern Learning), a peasant-based reform movement that sought to purify the state through an uprising; and (3) that of the *kaehwa* (Progressive) party that sought to modernize Korea along the line of Meiji Japan. Despite these complications, for the purposes of this study it is not untoward to use the word in the singular, so long as the term is taken to mean the general sentiments and representations that espoused the idea of "Korea for, by, and of Koreans," since at least on this one important point, all these three groups agreed. See Chai-sik Chung, *A Korean Confucian Encounter with the Modern World: Yi Hang-no and the West* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of Berkeley, 1995); Young Ick Lew, "The Conservative Character of the 1894 Tonghak Peasant Uprising: A Reappraisal with Emphasis on Chôn Pong-jun's Background and Motivation," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 7 (1990): 149–77; and Yong-ho Ch'oe, "The Kapsin Coup of 1884: A Reassessment," *Korean Studies* 6 (1982): 105–124. On the legitimating power of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

analysis of this issue—is one of the two objectives of this study. And the warrant used here is Hintze’s insight on the relationship between ideal and real interests, used in conjunction with an analysis that shows how differently Protestantism interacted with Korean nationalism when compared with the way it interacted with Chinese and Japanese nationalism, and with the way Roman Catholicism interacted with Chosôn (1392–1910), the last Korean dynasty. Additionally, as the second objective, this study seeks to provide a more nuanced portrayal of the association between Protestantism and Korean nationalism. Protestantism and Korean nationalism are usually portrayed as natural allies, destined to coalesce into one. In fact, however, the relationship between the two—more specifically, between the missionaries and nationalists—was fraught with ambiguities and tension, and not till the end of 1919 was it clear that the relationship would come out positive.⁸

Identification between Protestantism and Korean nationalism did not occur through any single auspicious event. It came about through a series of such events, in addition to the vicissitudes of East Asian politics that favored Protestantism when it first arrived in Korea in the mid-1880s. If, however, one event epitomized this association in all its complexities, it was the March First Movement of 1919. It was in this pivotal event in the development of Korean nationalism that Korean Protestants—by virtue of their disproportionately large participation and suffering—demonstrated beyond all doubts their commitment to the Korean nation. It was in this event that the missionaries to Korea—after vacillating between their empathy for the Koreans and eagerness to display good will to the Japanese colonizers, whose tolerance they needed for their evangelistic enterprise—decidedly demonstrated their sympathies for the Koreans, and were, in turn, fully embraced by them. Moreover, it was in this event that the Korean Protestant Church contributed some of the most potent symbols of Korean nationalism, symbols that are still celebrated in (South) Korea and bespeak the positive association between Protestantism and Korean nationalism.

I. PROTESTANTISM AND THE NATIONALISM OF CHINA AND JAPAN

Before discussing the March First Movement and the Protestants’ involvement in it, however, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly a

8. For example, see John McManners, ed., *The Oxford History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 536–37: “[Christianity] became identified with patriotic anti-Japanese feeling. After annexation in 1910 this tendency increased, since church groups were virtually the only independent bodies with national organizations and international ties.” Though not entirely wrong, this is too simplistic a depiction of the relation between Protestantism and Korean nationalism—as will be shown below.

contrasting history. Protestantism interacted negatively with the nationalism of China and Japan, a development that indirectly supports Hintze's thesis on the relation between ideal and real interests, which in turn attests to the significance of the political factor in the rise of Protestantism in Korea. For if, as Hintze posits, an ideal succeeds in history only if and in so far as it successfully associates with the real political interests of the people to whom it is exposed, then it must also be the case that if an ideal does not succeed in a people's history, it must be because it has failed adequately to associate with their real interests.

As in Korea, Chinese and Japanese political interests of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were embodied in their respective nationalisms.⁹ Thus the legitimating role of nationalism was no less important in these two nations than it was in Korea. But unlike in Korea, Protestantism's interaction with Chinese and Japanese nationalism was by and large negative. This appraisal neither denies that Protestantism had a powerful appeal on significant segments of the populations—such that they eventually developed into indigenous Chinese and Japanese churches—nor that it shared in the patriotism of a great many individual Chinese and Japanese Christians.¹⁰ But on the more collective level—that of the nation rather than the individual or even the subnational group—Protestantism's interaction with China and Japan was antagonistic, precluding any chance of there being a positive identification between the religion and either nation.

The reason for such antagonism lay in the history of unhappy interaction between Protestantism and these two nations. In China, for example, Protestantism became identified with an England that inflicted the Opium War (1839–42) on the Chinese. The Japanese identified Protestantism with an American commodore, Matthew C. Perry, whose gunboat diplomacy humiliated them and pried open their ports. As a result of such conflicts, Protestantism (or Christianity in

9. Here, nationalism in Japan and China is regarded in the same vein as in Korea—in terms not of its specific contents but of the general sentiments and representations that the sovereignty of China or Japan must remain in the hands of its respective denizens.

10. On nationalistic Christians in Japan, see Irwin Scheiner, *Christian Converts and Social Protest in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); for the same in China, see Philip West, "Christianity and Nationalism: The Career of Wu Lei-ch'uan at Yenching University," in Fairbank, *Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, 226–46. On Japanese Christianity, see David Reid, *New Wine: The Cultural Shaping of Japanese Christianity* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities, 1991); on Chinese Christianity, see Daniel H. Bays, ed., *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

general) appeared to the Chinese and Japanese as part and parcel of a Western imperialism bent on militarily and economically subjugating their nations. In China, such antagonism was clearly and violently expressed in events like the Boxers' uprising of 1900, student-led anti-Christian movements of the 1920s, and ultimately in the Chinese Communists' expulsion of the missionaries in the 1950s.¹¹ An aspect of this antagonism is documented by Kap-che Yip in his *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students: The Anti-Christian Movement of 1922–1927*, wherein he writes, "Indeed, by 1924 they [the intellectuals] viewed Christianity as not only unscientific and outdated, but also as a major obstacle to China's attainment of national independence. Many alleged that it was the vanguard of Western imperialism."¹² In Japan, similar antagonism was expressed in the so-called Uchimura Kanzo Lese Majesty Incident of 1891, the passage of the Religious Bodies Law in 1939, and the expulsion and imprisonment of Christian missionaries on the eve of Japan's entrance into the Second World War.¹³ In view of this series of events, historian Winburn T. Thomas writes: "Anyone believing in Christianity was regarded as having lost his national spirit, for it was rumored that the growth of the foreign faith would endanger the future of the nation."¹⁴ Given such histories of conflict, then, it is not surprising that Protestantism has failed to flourish in China and Japan.

II. CATHOLICISM AND KOREAN NATIONAL INTERESTS

In Korea, too, it must be remembered, antagonism toward Christianity—more specifically, Roman Catholicism—was not absent. In fact, the conflict between Catholicism and Chosŏn provides further evidence that indirectly corroborates Hintze's thesis. The history of

11. Paul Varg, *Missionary, Chinese, and Diplomats* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).
12. Kap-che Yip, *Religion, Nationalism and Chinese Students: The Anti-Christian Movement of 1922–1927* (Bellingham, Wash.: Washington University Press, 1980), 2. On the conflict between missionaries and Chinese nationalism, also see Paul Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860–1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963); and Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
13. The Uchimura incident occurred when he, a Christian school teacher, refused to bow before the imperial rescript on education, whose "supercharged symbolic value exceeded by far the prestige and authority of anything but the emperor himself." As a result, "This celebrated incident became the occasion for renewed invective against Christianity as an unpatriotic, foreign religion, incompatible with 'the Japanese Way.' Uchimura was pilloried in the press and removed from his position by the minister of education." See Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 122–23.
14. Thomas, *Protestant Beginnings in Japan*, 188.

Catholicism in Korea began in 1784. That year Yi Sung-hun, a somewhat disaffected member of Chosôn's *yangban*, the dominant status group of the kingdom, visited Beijing as a member of a Korean envoy. In the city, he had himself baptized by a resident French missionary. Upon returning to Korea, he and like-minded friends formed a proto-church that met clandestinely for worship. In time, the church grew, such that by 1800, when Chou Wen-mu of China secretly slipped through the border as the first Catholic priest to minister to Koreans, its numbers had swelled to ten thousand. In spite of such growth, the church's first one hundred years brought unceasing hardships. In Chosôn, a tightly knit society founded on a rigid neo-Confucian ideology, there was little room for ideological or religious latitude. Consequently, when the Catholics and their activities were found out by the authorities, they were accused of heresy and treason, their religion regarded as baneful to the kingdom. In part, the Catholics' troubles were provoked by their own hard-to-hide refusal to participate in the ubiquitous ancestor worship that structured Korean society and embodied its neo-Confucian way of life.¹⁵ There were also suspicions that the Korean believers were in alliance with Catholic countries to undermine the Chosôn state. One specific incident that afforded plausibility to such suspicion occurred in 1801. That year, in the course of a nationwide hunt for Catholics, the authorities arrested the Catholic Hwang Sa-yông and found in his possession a letter he had written to send to Western missionaries in Beijing. In the letter, Hwang described in bitter terms the harsh persecution to which Korean Catholics had been subjected, and requested the missionaries to invoke the military aid of Catholic nations to force the Korean king to allow religious freedom to the Catholics. For the Chosôn government, Hwang's letter was the conclusive evidence that Catholicism was a seditious sect, and that its adherents were traitors bent on subverting Chosôn's socio-political order. Subsequently, to eliminate the perceived threat, the state intensified its repression of the Catholics. A series of bloody persecutions ensued, culminating in the massacres of 1866-73, in which more than eight thousand Catholics were executed.¹⁶ By 1886, due to changed political circumstances, official persecution of the Catholics ended. Even then, however, the stigma of

15. On the history of Catholicism in Korea, see Yu Hong-yôl, *Han'guk Ch'ônju Kyohoesa* [A History of the Korean Catholic Church], 2 vols. (Seoul: Katollic Ch'ulp'ansa, 1962). Also see Choi Suk-woo, "Korean Catholicism Yesterday and Today," *Korea Journal*, Aug. 1984, 4-13. On Confucianism in Korea, see William Theodore de Bary and JaHyun Kim Haboush, eds., *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

16. Yu Hong-nyôl, *Han'guk Ch'ônju Kyohoesa*, 2:44.

disloyalty clung to Catholicism. And this stigma would not be shaken off until the 1960s when, thanks largely to the Vatican II Council, Korean Catholics took more congenial attitudes toward their native traditions and actively participated in South Korea's prodemocracy movements, which most of their countrymen supported.¹⁷ Even so, the fact that only one-quarter of South Korean Christians in the late 1990s are Catholics, whereas all but a tiny minority of the rest are Protestants—even though Catholicism has been in Korea twice as long as Protestantism—attests how difficult it is for a religion to succeed among a people whose real interests lie elsewhere.

III. PROTESTANTISM AND KOREAN NATIONALISM

In September 1884, American physician Horace N. Allen arrived in Korea as the first Protestant missionary to reside there. With his arrival, there occurred an exception to the general trend of conflict between Christianity and East Asian cultures. Changed political circumstances had predisposed Chosôn rulers to be more receptive to foreign influences. Already a few years prior to Allen's arrival, Chosôn had abandoned its xenophobic policy, realizing it could no longer ward off foreign encroachments by sealing up the borders. Indeed, by 1876, Chosôn had been compelled by Japan's gunboat diplomacy to sign its first modern diplomatic treaty with that nation—much the same way that Japan did with the United States in 1854, under duress and with guarantees of extraterritoriality to the other party. Shortly, similar treaties followed suit with the United States (1882), Germany (1882), Great Britain (1884), Russia (1884), and France (1886). Clearly, by the 1880s Chosôn leaders had caught on to the international realpolitik in which their country was enmeshed. They had also resigned themselves to the view that assimilating at least some aspects of Western culture, mainly sciences and technology, was essential for their nation's survival. This resignation, in turn, led the Korean court to countenance the arrival of the missionaries, even though Christian evangelization was officially barred in Korea.

In addition to benefiting from changes in international politics, the Protestant missionary enterprise also profited from struggles in Korean domestic politics. It benefited especially from a failed coup d'état of December 1884, in which a group of the nation's progressives attempted to force a reform on the government by murdering their

17. Nyung Kim, "The Politics of Religion in South Korea, 1974–89: The Catholic Church's Political Opposition to the Authoritarian State" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1993).

conservative rivals.¹⁸ In the midst of this coup, Min Yong-ik, the queen's nephew and a powerful figure in the conservative camp, was gravely wounded, and could not be healed by court doctors. To the good fortune of the Protestants, however, he was nursed back to health by Allen. Subsequently, through the aid of Min and the queen, Allen was able to convince King Kojong (1852–1907) to start a Western hospital in the country. Thereafter, it was only a small step for him to arrange for the arrival of Horace G. Underwood (of the Northern Presbyterian Church) and Henry Appenzeller (Northern Methodist Church), the two most important pioneers of Protestant missions in Korea. By 1890 Underwood and Appenzeller were joined by additional missionaries and, with the antiproselytization law all but dead, they actively ventured beyond the capital into the countryside to evangelize.¹⁹

Partly due to the proselytizing efforts of missionaries like Underwood and Appenzeller, the Korean Protestant Church experienced one of its most explosive growth periods between 1890 and 1907. In 1896, for example, the total number of Protestants was 4,356; in the following year, the figure increased by more than 50 percent to 6,614. By 1900, the number reached 20,918, nearly a five-fold increase. By 1907, when a nationwide revival swept through the churches, the figure increased to 106,287—growth of more than twenty-four times in a space of eleven years. And in 1909–10, twenty thousand more were added to this number as a result of the nationwide “One-Million-Souls-for-Christ” movement.²⁰

Two factors figured into this rise of church membership, aside from the missionary efforts: the deterioration of Korea's political circumstances and the Koreans' perception that the Protestant church sympathized with their misfortunes. Between 1890 and 1910, Korea's political fortunes declined precipitously. The cause of this decline lay in internal and external conditions. Among the numerous internal conditions were a government beset by baneful factional struggles, corrupt officialdom, and overtaxed peasants.²¹ Among the external factors, the most important was the imperialistic struggle to dominate Korea that developed among China, Russia, and Japan. These two conditions, in the end, combined to engender in Korea a series of upheavals and disasters that devastated the people. These included the Tonghak

18. Ch'oe, “Kapsin Coup of 1884.”

19. Paik, *History of Protestant Missions in Korea*, 168.

20. Lee, “Born-Again in Korea,” 35, 55.

21. Carter Eckert, et al., *Korea Old and New: A History* (Seoul: published for the Korea Institute, Harvard University, by Ilchokak; distributed by Harvard University Press, 1990), 192.

peasant rebellion of 1894; the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–95 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5 (both won by Japan); the establishment of a Japanese protectorate over Korea in 1905 (which effectively terminated Korean political sovereignty); and, finally, the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, which formally ended Korea's existence as an independent country.

As one disaster after another befell Korea, the already distorted society became even more so, distressing and disorienting the people. A great deal of Korea's traditional worldview and structures were now irreparably damaged. Disillusioned people strove beyond traditional options in their search for salvation. One such nontraditional option was the Protestant church, which promised a new life to whoever would convert. In China and Japan, such a promise might have sounded hollow. In Korea, however, none of the imperialistic powers that plagued the natives were Protestant, affording the missionaries' promise *prima facie* appeal. The missionaries' extraterritorial rights, which protected them from the arbitrariness of corrupt Korean officials and overt imperialists like the Japanese, enhanced the attractiveness of this promise. Consequently, a great many Koreans took up the missionaries' promise, as attested by one missionary: "The general unrest and lack of something to which they may cling is causing the people to turn to the Missionary and the message he has; and they are trying to find out if we have something which they can trust. On my last visit to the country I often heard the expression '*wei-chi hal kot tomuchi oupso.*' (There is altogether no place to trust.)"²²

These Koreans who took refuge in the churches were as attached to their land and culture as any people would be, and were susceptible to nationalist incitement. On the other hand, it would be erroneous to conclude that all Koreans who had flocked to the church had done so with a political agenda. Indeed, most of them were ordinary folk seeking to escape from sufferings caused by national disasters beyond their control.²³ Nevertheless, the possibility remained that at least some of the Koreans who had joined the church were driven by political agendas. Indeed, prior to 1910, many—especially among the young, educated, and politically conscientious members of the *yangban*—had joined the Protestant Church believing it would offer Korea a means to wade out of its predicament.

22. J. R. Moose, "A Great Awakening," *Korea Mission Field* 2 (1906): 51–52. *Korea Mission Field* (hereafter KMF) was an interdenominational journal dedicated to publicizing issues relative to Protestant missionary work in Korea. It ran from November 1905 to November 1941.

23. Kenneth M. Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 44.

Included among them was Yun Ch'i-ho, one of the early converts to Protestantism and a well-known progressive of his time. As a leader of various reform movements, and influenced by the Social Darwinism of the day, Yun believed that for Korea to avoid being winnowed out in a struggle for survival, it must do more than adopt things Western piecemeal. Korea must undergo a more fundamental change. It must adopt and cultivate the very values and practices that had propelled powerful nations such as Britain and the United States. To achieve this, Koreans could do no better than to turn to Christianity—by which Yun meant Protestantism. Thus Yun, educated in America and virulently critical of Korea's Confucian past, wrote in his diary: "Our people have for several hundred years been slaves of others, possessing no wisdom or manly character. . . . How then, given the present state of our country, can we hope for our independence. . . . Thus the pressing need at present is to increase knowledge and experience, teach morality and cultivate patriotism. . . . There is no other instrument able to educate and renew the people outside the Church of Christ."²⁴

To Yun and others like him, education and moral renewal were long-term processes that Koreans must pursue with patience and determination. But Yun and his kindred were not the only politically conscious individuals in the church. There were also quite a few who were less patient—and more militant—than Yun. Their presence was apparent after 1905, when Japan established the protectorate and made its intention to seize Korea obvious. Among them were the likes of Chang In-hwan, who in March 1908 assassinated D. C. Stevens, the Japanophile American whom Japan had foisted on Korea as legal advisor and who incurred Korean wrath by proclaiming the benefits of Japanese rule to Korea; and Yi Chae-myông, who in December 1909 unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Yi Wan-yong, the most notorious of the Korean collaborators with the Japanese.²⁵

A church politicized by people like Chang and Yi, however, was anathema to the missionaries. Most Protestant missionaries to Korea came from conservative backgrounds—born, raised, and trained in the tradition of revivalism. As such, they conceived as the ultimate goal of their missions the saving of souls, not the amelioration of Korea's social or political ills.²⁶ Consequently, they were alarmed by the rise of

24. *Yun Chi-ho Diary*, 23 Dec. 1892, quoted in Wells, *New God, New Nation*, 51. Yun studied at Vanderbilt University, 1888–91, and Emory University, 1891–93.

25. *Kidokkyo Taebaekhwa Sajôn* [Christian Encyclopedia], s.v. "Yi Chae-myong"; and Han Young-je, *Han'guk Kidokkyo Inmul 100nyôn* [Who's Who in One Hundred Years of Korean Christianity] (Seoul: Christian Literature, 1987), 132.

26. Of the first generation of missionaries to Korea, Arthur Judson Brown, secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Northern Presbyterian Church, wrote the following: "The

strong nationalistic sentiments within the church. They believed that such sentiments would distract the church from engaging in evangelism, and would also more importantly taint the church as subversive in the eyes of the Japanese colonizers, whose toleration was crucial to their evangelistic work in Korea. This point was made plain to the missionaries in the so-called Conspiracy Case of 1911–13, in which the Japanese arrested a large number of Korean Christian leaders on the trumped-up charge of their having plotted to assassinate the first governor-general to Korea, Terauchi Masatake. Given this predicament, the missionaries—save a few exceptions like Homer B. Hulbert—espoused a policy of political neutrality, and discountenanced the rise of nationalistic sentiments within their churches.²⁷ A 1907 editorial of *Korea Mission Field* (KMF), the missionaries' most public and important periodical, clearly enunciated such a policy: "A strict neutrality has been maintained and a determination to keep hands out of politics is a well known fact to all who are acquainted with the missionary plans and policy of the Christian Church."²⁸

The missionaries, by disallowing political activities from taking place within the church, believed that they were taking a nonpartisan stance. In fact, however, such a stance was not possible in Korea at the time. For between Japanese colonialism and Korean nationalism, there was no middle ground. One had to choose a side. Refusing to take a side, as the missionaries did with their declaration of political neutrality, merely meant accepting the status quo—that is, Japanese rule. Moreover, though espousing political neutrality, the missionaries in fact took proactive steps to deter the spread of nationalistic sentiments in their churches. In 1906, for example, when twelve students from P'yongyang (or Sungsil) Academy—a mission school—participated in a rally against the imposition of the Japanese protectorate over Korea, they were promptly suspended.²⁹ Furthermore, from 1910 on, when Japanese rule over Korea began in earnest, the missionaries made it clear that they were willing not only to accept the status quo but also to

typical missionary of the first quarter century after the opening of the country was a man of the Puritan type. He kept the Sabbath as our New England forefathers did a century ago. He looked upon dancing, smoking, and card-playing as sins in which no true followers of Christ should indulge. In theology and biblical criticism he was strongly conservative, and he held as a vital truth the premillenarian view of the second coming of Christ. The higher criticism and liberal theology were deemed dangerous heresies." See his *Mastery of the Far East*, 540.

27. Hulbert was an extraordinary Methodist missionary who unsuccessfully sought an audience with President Theodore Roosevelt on behalf of King Kojong to counter the Japanese encroachment in Korea.

28. KMF 3 (1907): 153–56.

29. W. M. Baird, "Pyeng Yang Academy," KMF 2 (1906): 221–24.

regard the Japanese as partners in their self-appointed task to enlighten Koreans. Such sentiment was attested by the following 1918 KMF editorial, written to welcome the arrival of the second governor-general of Korea, Hasegawa Yoshimichi: "We are pleased thus to honor our Governor General; firstly because the Bible commands us to honor the Powers that be; . . . Thirdly, because the Governor General and the missionaries are both interested in the Koreans to improve their condition. Though methods employed are different they need not conflict, but, on the other hand, should be mutually helpful and complementary."³⁰

Having led the church to accept Japanese rule, the missionaries and their native cooperators could not help but disappoint a great many nationalists, both within and without the church. Consequently, after 1910 the church, which just a few years earlier had appeared to offer so much for the realization of an independent Korea, no longer appealed to nationalists. The nationalists outside the church no longer flocked to the church, and those inside it left in search of other means to realize their goal. A striking example of the latter was Yi Tong-hwi. Yi was a noted revivalist who had adhered to Yun's ameliorationist approach even years after the annexation. Eventually, however, he too became disillusioned and left the church to found in 1921 the Korean Communist Party, the first of its kind.³¹ The church's "apolitical" stance,

30. "Editorial Notes," KMF 14 (1918): 1-3. Despite this editorial, and other gestures of conciliation on the part of the missionaries, the Japanese continued to regard the missionary work as an impediment to their colonization of Korea. A certain amount of friction, therefore, always inhered in their relationship. After 1910, this friction surfaced with regard to mission schools, which the governor-general disapproved of for, among other things, making the Bible a mandatory subject. As a way of controlling the schools, the governor-general required pupils in mission schools to pass a series of tests before recognizing their degrees. Since a degree without the governor-general's recognition lacked utility outside the church, and since pupils in public schools—run by the governor-general—were spared such tests, the mission schools lost much of their attraction for unbelieving Koreans, thereby depriving the missionaries of a means of evangelism. The missionaries remonstrated against this double-standard policy, and requested to have the test requirement dropped. But their request was met only in the aftermath of the March First Movement in 1919. Be that as it may, the missionaries' remonstrance was in keeping with their "apolitical" stance. It was stimulated by their evangelistic concern, not out of any desire to resist Japanese domination of Korea. Also, though the test requirement may have adversely affected the missionaries' proselytization efforts, it was but a small setback compared to the impact the missionaries' opposition to Korean nationalism within the church had on the stalemating of church growth. See Han'guk Kidokkyo Yōksa Yōriguhae [Institute for the Study of Korean Church History], *Han'guk Kidokkyohoeai Yoksa* [A History of the Korean Church] (Seoul: Christian Literature Press, 1990), 2:84.

31. Min Kyoung-bae, Iljaehaûi *Han'gukkidokkyo Minjok Sinang Undongsa* [A History of Korean Christian National and Religious Movements under Japanese Rule] (Seoul: Taehan Kidokkyo Sôhoe, 1991), 249; Peter Lee, ed., *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2:457. In addition to Yi, others who left the

therefore, adversely affected its growth in the decade following 1910. This turn of events was noted by Southern Methodist missionary Alfred W. Wasson, who in the early 1930s wrote: "If we turn to the statistics of the other churches, we find an analogous condition. In both the Methodist Episcopal and the Presbyterian churches, there is an increase in the number of missionaries and Korean workers and a falling off in the number of baptisms per year, and in both the total number of members and probationers in 1919 is less than in 1911. Clearly then we have come to a period of arrested growth in the church as a whole. What is the explanation? . . . This event [the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910] marked a change in the mind of the people. The revolutionary spirit, which was so marked in the period 1906–1910, now gave way to a reluctant acceptance of the inevitable. . . . The church was no longer looked upon by outsiders as a possible instrument for saving the life of the nation."³²

It is hard to resist speculating on what might have happened to Protestantism in Korea if the missionaries' "apolitical" stance had held sway during the period when, for most Koreans, nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiments were two sides of the same coin. Had that been the case, Protestantism might very well have dissipated its early gains in Korea, and would have incurred the bitter antagonism of Korean nationalists. Protestantism would, then, have been no more successful in Korea than it had been in China or Japan. Protestantism in Korea, as it turned out, did not follow that path. For despite the missionaries' efforts, most of the men and women who composed the Korean church could not stand aloof from the tragic fate of their nation. And when they openly defied Japanese rule in response to the urgings of their nationalistic leaders, and were brutalized for it, neither could the missionaries stand aloof. This was the case in the March First Movement.

IV. THE 1919 MARCH FIRST MOVEMENT

The March First Movement marked a turning point in modern Korean history.³³ It was a classic event, à la David Tracy, in which

church included some of the most important figures in modern Korean history: Kim Kyu-sik (a prominent leader of the Korean Provisional Government, founded in the aftermath of the March First Movement) and Yô Un-yông (who in 1945 organized Korean People's Republic). Given this, it is inaccurate—or at best simplistic—for the *Oxford History of Christianity* to state that Protestantism's identification with "patriotic anti-Japanese feeling" increased after 1910.

32. *Church Growth in Korea* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1934), 78, 96.

33. For detailed treatment of this event, see Frank P. Baldwin Jr., "The March First Movement: Korean Challenge and Japanese Response" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University,

Koreans of different backgrounds came together en masse to defy their Japanese colonizers and to demonstrate to the world their fervent desire for independence.³⁴ In the end, the movement failed to achieve its objective of Korean independence, but it did succeed in galvanizing and uniting Koreans. The most concrete manifestation of that unity was the founding in April 1919 of the Shanghai Korean Provisional Government, which, despite its troubled history, was the most important of the organizations that fought for Korean independence during the colonial period.³⁵

Like all classic events, the March First Movement is pregnant with diverse meanings and interpretations.³⁶ Despite such diversity, consensus has emerged—at least among historians in South Korea and the United States—on the major factors that went into the making of the movement. One such factor was the Koreans' persistent desire for independence, a desire fueled by their historical memory and imagination as one nation whose history stretched back to 2333 B.C.E., when the mythical Tan'gun purportedly founded the earliest Korean kingdom, Old Chosôn. The overly repressive nature of Japan's first ten-year rule in Korea constituted the second factor. During this period, the colonial government employed racial discrimination, systematic terror, and torture as mainstays of their policy, prompting historian Frank P. Baldwin Jr. to write in 1969, "The political, social and educational disqualification imposed on Koreans from 1910 to 1918

1969); and "The March First Movement," in Lee Chong-shik, *Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 101–25. There appears to be no connection between the March First Movement and the May Fourth Movement that occurred in China in the same year. The latter, also a mass movement, was sparked by the Allied victors' decision to leave in Japanese hands the German concession in Shandong. John K. Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap, 1992), 267.

34. "My thesis is that what we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons 'classic' is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth . . . some disclosure of reality in a moment that must be called one of 'recognition' which surprises, provokes, challenges, shocks and eventually transforms us; an experience that upsets conventional opinions and expands the sense of the possible; indeed a realized experience of that which is essential, that which endures." David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 108.
35. Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 344.
36. See Baldwin, "March First Movement," 2–13. Though written thirty-one years ago, Baldwin's dissertation on the March First Movement still remains the best English-language, if not Western, source on the subject. Much more is available in Korean, but the Korean interpretations do not vary much from Baldwin's. See Han'guk Yöksa Yôn'guhoe and Yöksamunjae Yôn'guhoe (Institute for the Study of Korean History and Institute for the Study of Historical Problems), eds., 3.1 *Minjokhaebang Undong Yôn'gu* [A Study of the March First National Liberation Movement] (Seoul: Ch'ôngnyôn'sa, 1989).

resemble the plight of the American Negro living a precarious, subservient existence in America."³⁷

These two factors were deep-seated and fundamental to the March First Movement. The more immediate factor was the Fourteen Points speech made by President Woodrow Wilson of the United States. First delivered in January 1918, nine months after he had convinced Americans to join the Allies in World War I, Wilson's speech seemed to promise the right of self-determination to colonized peoples everywhere.³⁸ Later, this ideal would turn hollow, as it was not applied to the colonies held by Allies, such as Japan.³⁹ But when the speech was first aired, Korean nationalists embraced it as a clarion call to action. The first Koreans to act on it were those outside Korea, who were freer and had readier access to the news than their counterparts in Korea.

Thus when the war ended in November 1918, Korean emigrés in China and the United States prepared to make their cases for Korea in the Paris Peace Conference, which began January 1919. In Shanghai, the nationalist leaders agreed to send Kim Kyusik, an erstwhile Protestant educated by Underwood, as a delegate to Paris to plead for Korea. They also sent covert operatives to Korea to obtain financial and moral support for their efforts. The most successful of these was Protestant Sonu Hyôk who, arriving in Korea, called on a number of well-known Protestant leaders like Yi Sûng-hun and Kil Sôn-ju, and succeeded in obtaining a promise that they would hold a peaceful demonstration in support of Kim when he arrived in Paris. Their demonstration aimed both to give the lie to Japanese propaganda that Koreans were content and well-off under their rule, and to proclaim the Korean desire for independence. At about the same time, late January 1919, leaders of the native religion *Ch'ôndokyo* (Heavenly Way) also planned to hold a peaceful demonstration independently of the Protestants. The impetus for their plan came from a contact sent by a group of Korean students studying in Japan. They, too, had been planning clandestinely to hold their own independence demonstration in Tokyo. These students were spurred on in their plan by a Japanese newspaper account of Korean emigrés in the United States who had sought to enlist American aid to regain Korean independence.⁴⁰ Subsequently, on 8 February 1919, about four hundred Korean

37. Baldwin, "March First Movement," 12.

38. On the influence of the Versailles Peace Conference on the March First Movement, see Baldwin, "March First Movement," 14-51.

39. Baldwin, "March First Movement," 132.

40. Baldwin, "March First Movement," 39, 38. Tokyo, as the metropolis of the Japanese empire, attracted young and ambitious people from Korea (and China and elsewhere). Once there, in an atmosphere much freer than in Korea, many of them were exposed to

students assembled in the Tokyo YMCA and demonstrated, decrying Japanese repression in Korea and demanding the independence of Korea. The demonstration lasted about an hour, till it was broken up—and the leaders arrested—by the police.

This Tokyo student demonstration inspired Koreans in the peninsula and emboldened the Protestants and Ch'ôndokyoists planning their separate demonstrations. Both their efforts were further filliped on 23 January when Kojong died, a singularly advantageous circumstance since droves of people would converge on Seoul to participate in the monarch's funeral, scheduled for 3 March. By 22 February, realizing that they shared much the same objective, the Protestants and Ch'ôndokyoists joined their efforts. Five days later, they were joined by the Buddhists, completing the triumvirate of the religious leadership at the helm of the movement.⁴¹ Then as a last preparatory step, thirty-three of the top leaders of the triumvirate inscribed their names on a Declaration of Independence, copies of which were to be distributed to people on the eventful day.

On 1 March 1919, Protestantism's most potent encounter with Korean nationalism took place. On that day, in Seoul's Pagoda Park, thousands of Koreans—men and women, young and old—had been gathering since the morning for a rally. Many of them had come from the countryside for Kojong's funeral. Then at two o'clock in the afternoon, a young Protestant man mounted the platform in the middle of the park and stirred the crowd by reading the Declaration of Independence. As soon as he was finished, the crowd burst into deliriously resounding cheers: "*Taehan Tongnip Manse!*" (Long live Korean Independence!) What took place next was well captured by Korean Methodist Hugh C. Cynn, who wrote the following in his 1920 book, *The Rebirth of Korea: The Reawakening of the People, Its Causes, and the Outlook*:

Soon, from the East Gate to the West Gate and from the Bell Tower in the center of the city to the South Gate, a veritable pandemonium of enthusiasm and joy reigned. Students with books in one hand and uplifted cap in the other; stately white-robed old gentlemen with their hoary beards flowing and their wrinkled hands waving; young girls with their dark skirts streaming and upturned faces shining; elderly ladies with their characteristic green veils on top of the immaculate dress; mechanics with their rolled-up sleeves and some of them with tools still in hand; sons of the rich with their shimmer-

various streams of Japanese intellectual life, including communism, and, instead of studying to be loyal imperial subjects, strove to free Korea.

41. By this time, the more radical leaders of the Korean independence movement were either imprisoned or exiled, prompting the moderate religionists to step forward.

ing silk coats flying; rustic farmers with horny fingers and bony arms lifted toward the blue heavens; stocky-limbed cart-pullers with their long white cloth wound tightly round the head and hung loosely behind; staid and substantial-looking merchants and shopkeepers, some with their long pipes, and others with pen either in their hands or behind their ears; fat and plump youngsters with their baggy wadded pantaloons, some in wooden shoes, and some in silk slippers; smart-looking young men dressed in European style and wearing rimless spectacles; and men and women of every and sundry description, age, and rank—one and all—were in a happy delirium, shouting, “*Mansei! Mansei! Tok-rip Mansei!*”⁴²

Shortly after the Declaration of Independence was read in the Pagoda Park, Koreans elsewhere in the city and in the country at large staged similar demonstrations. Within days, the movement for independence erupted in virtually every corner of the country, in nearly all segments of the Korean society, with over two million directly participating in more than fifteen hundred gatherings, occurring in all but seven of Korea’s 218 county administrations.⁴³

The March First Independence Movement was meant to be nonviolent. It started out that way, but in the end it failed to remain so. The leaders intended to appeal to the conscience of the Japanese colonizers and, more importantly, to the Wilson-led victors at the Paris Peace Conference, by using peaceful demonstrations.⁴⁴ The Paris conference, however, ignored the demonstrations. Instead of affecting the Japanese conscience, the demonstrations only galled the gendarmes, who, assisted by Japanese residents in Korea, indiscriminately beat and shot at the demonstrators. In the face of such reaction, the peaceful demonstrations soon turned into violent uprisings. Police stations were attacked and no Japanese was safe in the streets. To crush the uprising, more soldiers were sent to the peninsula. By mid-April, the violent phase of the uprising was over, and when the government-general regained full control of the peninsula a year later, a great many casualties had been suffered by the Koreans, as the Japanese authorities themselves recorded: 7,645 killed, 15,961 injured, with 715 houses, forty-seven churches, and two schools destroyed and burned.⁴⁵

42. (New York: Abingdon, 1920), 24–25. Cynn was educated in a mission school and received a master’s degree at the University of Southern California in 1911. He wrote this book while visiting the United States in May 1919 as a participant in a Methodist conference.

43. Lee, *New History of Korea*, 344.

44. Baldwin, “March First Movement,” 53.

45. Lee, *New History of Korea*, 344.

V. THE MARCH FIRST MOVEMENT AND PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES

Soon after the independence movement broke and it became clear that it was not random but carefully planned, many Japanese—given their low opinion of the Koreans—suspected the missionaries to be behind it, and denounced them. Such a denunciation, for example, was published on 12 March by *Chosen Shimbum*, a Japanese daily in Korea: “The stirring up of the mind of the Koreans is the sin of the American missionaries. This uprising is their work. . . . They take the statement of Wilson about the self-determination of nations and hide behind their religion and stir up the people. However, the missionaries have tried to apply the free customs of other nations to these Korean people who are not fully civilized. From the part that even girl students in Christian schools have taken it is very evident that this uprising has come from the missionaries.”⁴⁶

Despite this newspaper’s contention, the truth was that the demonstrations surprised the missionaries no less than the Japanese. A position paper submitted by the missionaries to the American Consulate in Seoul voiced such surprise: “Except for the admitted fact that they are propagators of a gospel which has more than once been accused of turning the world up side down missionaries have had no direct relation to this present movement. It was but natural that the charge should at once be made in the Japanese press that missionaries were the instigators of the uprising. This may be categorically denied. It arose without their knowledge. Their advice as to the inception and direction of the movement has not been sought.”⁴⁷ Accused of having abetted and aided the Koreans, the missionaries vigorously denied the accusation and protested their political neutrality. Eventually, in mid-March, influenced by protestations and pressure from the American consulate, the government-general publicly exonerated the missionaries.⁴⁸

In hindsight, given their manifest disapproval of Korean nationalists’ aspirations, it is understandable that the missionaries were not

46. Quoted in Cynn, *Rebirth of Korea*, 64.

47. “The Present Movement for Korean Independence,” State Department Record, Consular Bureau (filed 8 July 1919), 44.

48. Frank P. Baldwin Jr., “Missionaries and the March First Movement: Can Moral Men Be Neutral?” in Andrew C. Nahm, ed., *Korea Under Japanese Colonial Rule*, (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Western Michigan University Press, 1973), 197. In this article, Baldwin argues that during the March First Movement the missionaries in fact remained neutral. But if neutrality required that the missionaries aid or hinder neither the Japanese nor Koreans, they failed to be so. For the missionaries, as will be seen below, hindered the Japanese by helping to turn international opinion against their suppression of Korean demonstrations.

apprised of the movement. And if by keeping the missionaries in the dark the planners intended to minimize any hindrance to achieving their goal, subsequent developments proved them to have been prudent. For when the demonstrations erupted, many missionaries' immediate reaction was to dissuade their Korean converts from joining them. One particularly poignant example of such dissuasion is found in the journal of Methodist missionary Mattie Wilcox Noble, who wrote in her 1 March entry:

Today has been a great day for Korea. How long their joy will last, who can say? At two P. M. all the schools, from grammar grades or middle schools up went on strike against Japan's governing Korea, and all started out on the streets in parade, hands thrown in air, caps swung, and Hurrahs ("Ten Thousand Years to Korea") shouted. People of the streets dropped in line with them; and such joyful shouting all over the city. I could see from our window one long procession filing past the corner around the palace wall. The Government Schools for Girls also paraded, and when a company of boys came past Ewa Haktang [a Methodist school for girls], they rushed into the compound and called to the girls to come on. The girls rushed out to go but Miss Walter in her kimono ran down to bolt the big gate and head off the girls. Mr. Tayler and Mr. Appenzeller went over to her assistance and they succeeded in keeping the Ewa girls from going. They cried, and some of the boys grew almost wild, but had to go on and leave them.⁴⁹

On the one hand, missionaries such as Tayler and Appenzeller genuinely feared for the safety of Korean believers, even if much of that fear emanated from paternalism. On the other hand, the missionaries were alarmed lest by their converts' taking part in the demonstrations their own apolitical stance would be jeopardized. Despite their efforts, however, the missionaries could not stem the tide of nationalistic fervor that swept through their schools and churches. Nor could they prevent the Japanese violence that was perpetrated on the demonstrators.

Seeing Koreans brutalized, the missionaries could no longer remain aloof. They became actively involved in caring for the injured. Moreover, insisting on "no neutrality for brutality"—a slogan born of moral indignation—the missionaries urged the Japanese authorities to desist from using brutal tactics against the demonstrators.⁵⁰ Failing to make much impact by a direct appeal, they drew on the resources of their overseas contacts. They documented clear cases of Japanese atrocities

49. *The Journals of Mattie Wilcox Noble, 1892–1934* (Seoul: Han'guk Kidokkyo Yōksa Yōn'gusō [Institute of Korean Church History Study], 1993), 275.

50. Baldwin, "Missionaries and the March First Movement," 197.

and, using unofficial channels, reported to mission boards and influential friends in Europe and America. Such documents of about one thousand pages were compiled by the Commission on Relations with the Orient of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, and in July 1919 a select portion of them were published as a pamphlet by the council under the title *The Korean Situation: Authentic Accounts of Recent Events by Eye Witnesses*. Among the numerous accounts cited in the pamphlet are the following:

On March 4th, about 12:30 noon, loud cheering was again participated in by the Koreans. With this cheer the Japanese fire brigade was let loose among the crowds with clubs; some carried pickax handles; others their long lance fir-hooks, some iron bars, others hardwood and pine clubs, some with short-handled club hooks. They rushed into the crowds, clubbing them over the heads, hooking them here and there with their lance-hooks, until in a short time many had been seriously wounded, and with blood streaming down their faces were dragged to the police station by the fire brigade.⁵¹

Chung Yung Hui, aged 34, lives in the county of Paiju. On March 28th, at one o'clock in the afternoon, a crowd of 400, yelling "Mansay," were met by Japanese gendarmes, who fired. Eight men were killed. They had done no violence, and were not even armed with rocks. This man was shot through the neck.⁵²

At Maungsan: During the first part of March after the people at this place had shouted for independence, fifty-six people were asked by the gendarmes to come to the gendarme station, which they did. When they were all inside the gendarmerie compound the gates were closed, gendarmes climbed up on the wall and shot all the people down. Then they went in among them and bayoneted all who still lived. Of the fifty-six, fifty-three were killed and three were able later to crawl out of the heap of dead. Whether they lived or not is not known. A Christian woman in whom we have confidence made her way to foreign friends after several days' travel and made the above statement. Undoubtedly it is true.⁵³

Accounts such as these proved to be a public relations nightmare for the Japanese government, as they provoked international outcries and, in the United States, provided ammunition to senatorial critics of Japan.⁵⁴ Consequently, the Japanese government was compelled not only to renounce using brutal tactics against the demonstrators, but

51. Federal Council of the Churches of Christ of America (FCCCA), comp., *The Korean Situation: Authentic Accounts of Recent Events by Eye Witnesses* (New York: FCCCA, 1919), 30-31.

52. FCCCA, "The Korean Situation," 37.

53. FCCCA, "The Korean Situation," 33.

54. Baldwin, "March First Movement," 185.

also to overhaul its colonial policy in Korea. As part of this overhaul, Japan recalled heavy-handed Hasegawa and installed in his place the more diplomatic but no less imperious Saito Makoto in September 1919.

The missionaries' moral courage in the face of Japanese brutality proved crucial for Protestantism. The missionaries' humanitarian treatment of the injured, and their publicizing of the Koreans' plight, went a long way to redeem them—and their religion—in the eyes of many Koreans. Subsequently, from 1919 on, no Korean could blindly accuse the missionaries of being self-serving, of having no sympathy for the Korean people, without evoking a loud cry of dissent from their more discerning countrymen.⁵⁵

VI. KOREAN PROTESTANTS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE MARCH FIRST MOVEMENT

The missionaries' participation in the March First Movement—their caring for injured Koreans and exposing Japanese atrocities—was a crucial but unwitting contribution. The Korean Protestants' participation in the movement, on the other hand, was quite deliberate. Moreover, they participated in the movement in cooperation with other patriotic groups. Indeed, the March First Movement was a pan-Korean phenomenon to which no single group could lay claim. From the top leadership that signed the Declaration of Independence down to the peasants pounced on by the gendarmes, solidarity prevailed. And among the religionists who were at the forefront of the movement, ecumenism was the order of the day. Nevertheless, it must be noted that once the movement got underway, the contribution rendered by

55. One of the few Westerners, perhaps the only one, who had any inkling of the March First Movement before it erupted was Dr. Frank W. Scofield. He was a veterinarian and medical missionary from Canada and was requested to take pictures of the planned rallies. As the movement proceeded, he was one of the most vigorous advocates of Korean rights, speaking out against the Japanese brutality, for example, at a conference of Far East missionaries in Tokyo in September 1919. But his most potent and lasting contribution to the movement was the numerous pictures he took of various aspects of the movement. These pictures, especially those of the Suwôn and Cheamni massacres (to be discussed later), played a role in galvanizing international pressure against Japan. In 1920, Scofield was expelled from Korea by the governor-general but returned when the country was liberated. His contribution to the March First Movement was appreciated by Koreans, who affectionately referred to him as the "thirty-fourth" signer of the Declaration of Independence. In 1960, Scofield was decorated with an Order for Cultural Merits by the South Korean government. Upon his death on 20 February 1970, he was interred in the "Tongnip Yugongja" section of the Korean National Cemetery, reserved for those who had rendered distinguished services for the independence of Korea. "The Fire and Massacre at Suwôn Church: Told by Dr. Scofield," *Kurisch'an Sinmun* [Christian Press], 27 Feb. 1965; and in the same newspaper, "Dr. Scofield," 18 April 1970.

Korean Protestants—roles played and suffering borne—stood out. Of the thirty-three signers of the Declaration of Independence, for example, more than half—sixteen—were Protestants—as opposed to two Buddhists, and fifteen Ch'ôndokyoists.⁵⁶ For the movement to have spread so quickly and cohesively, communication and organization were key. Here, too, the church's national network and local leadership played crucial parts.

How significantly Protestantism contributed to the March First Movement can also be gauged if we analyze some figures concerning those arrested during the demonstrations. According to a report issued by the Japanese military police near the end of 1919, 19,525 persons were arrested in connection with the demonstrations. Of these, 3,371 were Protestants—more than 17 percent of those arrested—an impressive figure considering that, by 1919, the Protestants comprised only about 1 percent of the total population.⁵⁷ Of those people arrested, 6,310 were religionists; among these, the Protestants predominated, accounting for 53 percent (3,376). Furthermore, of the arrested, 489 were clergy; among these, Protestants comprised nearly half (244)—more than twice the Buddhists (120) and almost twice the Ch'ôndokyoists (125). Finally, of the 471 women arrested, Protestants accounted for more than 65 percent (309), attesting to the empowering effect the religion had on Korean women.⁵⁸

In addition, as a result of its in-depth involvement, Protestantism came to be linked with some of the most potent symbols of the movement. One such a symbol was the little village of Cheamni, near the city of Suwôn. On this village, on 15 April 1919, a unit of Japanese gendarmes descended. They rounded up into the village church all the village men who had been demonstrating in previous days (mostly Methodists or Ch'ôndokyoists), locked the door, and set the church on fire. Some tried to claw their way out, only to be cut down by awaiting bullets and bayonets.⁵⁹ In the end, twenty-nine villagers were massacred, and the church was burnt to the ground together with the whole village. Reprehensible as the Cheamni massacre was, it was not an isolated incident. Quite a number of other villages met similar fates. Thanks partly to the publicity the missionaries gave to this incident,

56. Kim Sung-t'ae, "Chonggyoin-ui 3.1 Undong Ch'amyô-wa Kidokkyo-ui Yôkhwar" [Religionists' Participation in the March First Movement and the Role of Christianity], *Han'guk Kidokkyo Yôksa Yon'gu* [Journal of the Institute for the Study of Korean Church History] 25 (1989): 17–24.

57. Kim, "Chonggyoin-ui 3.1 Undong Ch'amyô," 39.

58. Kim, "Chonggyoin-ui 3.1 Undong Ch'amyô," 39.

59. *Kidokkyo Taebaekhwa Sajôn* [Christian Encyclopedia], s.v. "Cheamni Kyohoe" [Cheamni Church].

Cheamni became a symbol for all those villages as well as a symbol of Japanese atrocities and Korean suffering under Japanese rule.

Another potent symbol of the March First Movement was Yu Kwan-sun (1902–20). When the independence movement broke, Yu was a seventeen-year-old student at Ehwa Hakdang, a mission school. Arrested and imprisoned for taking a leading role in demonstrations, Yu refused to abjure her passion for Korean independence. To make it more galling for the Japanese police, on the anniversary of the movement, she and others in the prison instigated a commemorative demonstration.⁶⁰ Brutally beaten and tortured, she died in prison.

In the twenty-five years after the March First Movement, during which Japan continued to rule Korea, memories of Cheamni and Yu Kwan-sun persisted among Koreans. Then with Japan's defeat in World War II and the subsequent liberation of Korea on 15 August 1945, they emerged as nationalist icons. In 1959, a commemorative monument emblazoned with the words of President Syngman Rhee was set over the site of the burnt church in Cheamni. Moreover, Cheamni has become a pilgrimage destination not only for Korean Protestants and nationalists, but also repentant Japanese Christians, a group of whom donated funds that enabled a new worship hall to be constructed in the village in 1969. As for Yu Kwan-sun, she has become the epitome of patriotism, venerably referred to as *yôlsa* (patriot) or, more affectionately, "Sister Yu Kwan-sun." To honor her, a museum was built in her name; her statue was erected in Seoul's conspicuous Namsan (South Mountain) Park, and elsewhere; a prestigious medal was posthumously conferred on her by the South Korean government; and the song "Sister Yu Kwan-sun" is taught to school children all over South Korea, who sing it on 1 March.

Yu Kwan-sun and Cheamni are two vivid symbols of the March First Movement that live on in the collective memory of the Korean people, especially in the South, where 1 March is celebrated as a national holiday. In annual March First commemorations, as these and other symbols of the movement are remembered and celebrated, believers and nonbelievers alike acknowledge the inextricable association established between Protestantism and their nation in 1919. The flavor of such a celebration is aptly captured by Baldwin in the following somewhat dated but still essentially valid description:

The anniversary of the March First Movement is commemorated in the Republic of Korea by solemn patriotic celebrations throughout the country. In 1967 the ceremonies in Seoul began in the morning

60. Hong Suk-jang, *Yu Kwan-sun Yang'gwa Maebong Kyohoe* [Yu Kwan-sun and Maebong Church] (Seoul: Toso Ch'ulp'an Amen, 1989), 92.

near the capitol building with an address by President Pak Chonghi. Under huge Korean flags and before the foreign diplomatic representatives assigned to Korea, the president spoke briefly but movingly of the sacrifices of 1919 and the Movement's contemporary meaning to all Koreans. The short program ended with the reading of the Declaration of Independence of 1919 by the last surviving signer, Yi Kapson [a Protestant]. The erect, white-haired man, a living symbol of the continuity between 1919 and the ceremony, read slowly in a firm, ringing voice. At the conclusion the huge crowd roared three times "Tongnip Manse," as demonstrators did along the same streets in 1919.

In the afternoon another ceremony was held at Pagoda Park where the Movement began in 1919. The speaker of the National Assembly presided over a program of speeches, martial music and floral presentations at the memorial marker where the declaration was first read that Saturday afternoon forty-eight years earlier.

The anniversary was noted by the monthly magazines for March with accounts by aged participants, interpretive articles and editorial comment, a practice begun in 1946, the first year after liberation. All newspapers carried articles on the Movement and reported the commemorative ceremonies.

Schools in Seoul began the celebrations a day earlier with special assemblies and patriotic rites. One such meeting was held in Citizens' Hall to honor individuals who had participated in the Movement. The elderly speakers recalled the spring of 1919 and exhorted the young audience to build a new Korea with the same spirit of dedication and selflessness.⁶¹

VII. CONCLUSION

By taking a leading role in the March First Movement, Protestantism stood to gain greatly. It recouped the appeal it had lost among the Korean populace. A new upturn in its membership enrollment concretely reflected this gain, as noted by Wasson: "Since 1910 the curve representing the total number of Southern Methodist members and probationers had been steadily going downward; in 1920 the curve turned sharply upward again, and within five years there was a net gain of 102 percent. In each of the other churches in Korea also the year 1920 marks the beginning of a period of growth. . . . This period of rapid growth was ushered in by the Independence Movement."⁶² Also important, though difficult to quantify, was the renewed trust and acceptance the missionaries came to enjoy among the Koreans. Of this

61. Baldwin, "March First Movement," 3.

62. Alfred W. Wasson, *Church Growth in Korea* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1934), 98.

gain, Wasson states that “the charges against the missionaries [that they instigated the uprising], instead of discrediting them in the minds of the people, put them in greater favor. They were looked upon as comrades in spirit even though they remained neutral in political action.”⁶³

In addition, Protestantism gained something much more enduring—its right to be considered a legitimate religion of Korea. By virtue of having contributed so passionately and manifestly to Korea’s struggle for political freedom, Protestantism acquired nationalistic credentials few Koreans could gainsay. Later, when the nightmare of Japanese occupation ended, such credentials would stand Protestantism in good stead. For as South Korea rapidly industrialized—especially after the Korean War (1950–53), when millions of dislocated people migrated to cities in search of work, yearning for new structures and meaning in the midst of it all—the Protestant proselytizers were able vigorously to engage in their work without having to worry about taunts that they were disseminating a foreign religion, as might have been the case had they been proselytizing in China or Japan.⁶⁴

In sum, by the time the March First Movement ended as an event and began to emerge as a towering national monument, the spiritual interests of Protestantism had become well associated with the real interests of the Korean nation. It is an association that constitutes one of the decisive factors in the rise of Protestantism in Korea.

63. Wasson, *Church Growth*, 102.

64. On the difficulty Christians are having in mainland China, see Martin and Byler, “What’s Happening to Christians In China?” To see how Korean Protestants parlayed their nationalistic credentials into evangelistic success, see Lee, “Born-Again in Korea,” 121.