

The Declaration of Korean Independence

March 1, 1919

We hereby declare that our Joseon is an independent state and the Joseon people are an autonomous people.

We hereby make the great cause of human equality clear by announcing it to the whole world, and hereby teach all of the following generations to perpetually own their proper rights to national self-existence.

We declare it by relying on the authority of five-thousand years of history; proclaim it by combining the loyalty of twenty-million people; insist on it for permanent and constant autonomous development; and propose it in order to accept and advance with the great atmosphere of world reform arising from the manifestation of human conscience. This is the divine order of heaven, the general trend of the era, and the fair exercise of the right to coexistence and harmony of all humankind.

Nothing under heaven can stop or suppress this.

Ten years have passed now since we, for the first time in thousands of years of history, experienced the pain of a foreign yoke by becoming a sacrifice to the relics of a bygone era, the policy of aggression and authoritarianism.

How much were we stripped of our right to survival? How much were we obstructed in our spiritual development? How much were we damaged in our national dignity and glory? How much did we lose of our fate to contribute to the great tide of world culture through originality and creativity?

Alas, to expose past injustice, to escape from present suffering, to eradicate future threat, to excite and extend the shrinking, disappearing national conscience and state honor, to achieve the rightful development of individual persons, to not leave an embarrassing legacy to our poor sons and daughters, and to lead to the perpetual and complete bliss of the posterity, the most urgent task is to ensure national independence.

Today, when twenty-million individuals each harbor a blade of knife in his heart, and the common character of humankind and the conscience of the era protect them with the army of justice, the shields and spears of humanity, as we march to conquer, are we not able to crush the powerful? Even when we stand back, we plan. What then will stand in our way of expanding our will?

We are not to blame Japan's lack of integrity since the 1876 Treaty of Amity for eating away its firm promise time after time.

Scholars on the podium and politicians in the real world colonize our age-long occupation, treat our cultural nation as barbaric, and seek nothing but the pleasure of a conqueror.

We are not to reproach Japan's lack of fidelity for ignoring our age-old social foundation and excellent national mentality.

Busy with rebuking ourselves, we cannot blame others.

Busy with preparing the present, we cannot condemn the recent past.

Today, our responsibility solely lies in the construction of self, never in the destruction of others.

As a solemn command of conscience, it is to explore the new destiny of ourselves, never to hate and exclude others through past resentment and temporary emotion.

It is to rectify the unnatural and irrational state of error, which has fallen prey to the vanity of Japanese politicians yoked by old ideology and old power, and return it to the natural and rational grand principles that ought to govern politics and economy.

Behold the record so far: the result of an annexation that did not originally derive from a national demand is widening the hostility between the two nations with conflicting interests, forever incompatible, under makeshift coercion, discriminatory inequality, and statistical formality.

Should we not clearly recognize that to correct the past wrongs through bravery and resolution and to open up a friendly new phase based on genuine understanding and sympathy is the shortcut to avoiding disasters and bringing in blessing between the two?

And to restrain through brute force twenty-million people harboring resentment not only is not a condition that guarantees perpetual peace in East Asia, but also thereby intensifies the fear and suspicion against Japan among four-hundred-million Chinese people, who are the main pillar of East Asian security. It is obvious that all the East Asian states, as a result, will invite the misfortune of collective decline and fall.

Today, our Joseon independence at once makes the Joseon people achieve their rightful enjoyment of life; makes Japan leave its cunning path and complete its grave responsibility as a supporter of East Asia; and makes China escape from insecurity and fear (from which it cannot be saved, even by its own ignorance), thereby taking a necessary step towards world peace and human happiness, an important part of which is East Asian peace.

How could this be a matter of petty emotion?

Oh, a new world opens before our eyes.

The age of brute power goes and the age of moral justice comes.

The humanitarian spirit refined and raised in the past whole century is about to start projecting the light of new civilization to the history of humankind.

New spring arrives to the world and urges the revival of all things.

The situation yesterday is like steel cold weather that makes it hard to even breathe. But today, a warm spring breeze and sunlight are about to shake and spread the vein of the new energy. Having met the returning fate of the universe and ridden the changing tide of the world, we have no scruple and no hesitation. We shall fully protect our inherent right to autonomy in order to abundantly enjoy the pleasure of free life, and demonstrate our self-sufficient originality in order to connect the national essence to the greater world that is in full spring bloom.

We hereupon rouse ourselves.

Conscience stands with us and truth advances with us.

Men and women, old and young, vigorously get up and leave the gloomy old nest to accomplish the joyful revival, along with all the things in nature.

Spirits of hundreds-of-thousands-year-old ancestors secretly help us and the energy of the whole world protects us from outside. The beginning is more than half of the whole. Now we just keep dashing forward to the bright light ahead.

Three Articles of Allegiance:

As our declaration today is a national demand for justice, humanity, survival, and dignity, show only a liberal spirit and never flee to an exclusive emotion.

To the last person and to the last minute, readily announce the rightful opinion of the nation.

In any action, respect order the most so that our argument and attitude remain thoroughly open and fair.

National Representatives of Joseon, March 1st, 4252nd year since the foundation of Joseon.

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