

The Korean Students' Declaration of Independence from Japan on February 8, 1919: A Comparison with the US Declaration of Independence in 1776. - Yearn Hong Choi

2019 marks the centennial year of Korea's independence from Japanese occupation.

The February 8, 1919 Declaration of Independence organized and delivered by Korean students in Tokyo, heralded the March First Independence Movement in the Korean Peninsula three weeks later, and then led to the establishment of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai in April 1919.

This paper provides a comparative analysis between the first Korean Students' Declaration of Independence (DoI) and that of the United States' independence from British rule. Despite the 143 years separating the two different nations located in two different continents, they presented many interesting similarities in terms of their motivation of declaring independence, with detailed and concrete complaints against the two colonial governments. The inherent driver of both declarations was the desire to have the government rule by the consent of the governed, in contrast to the tyrannical rule by the respective British Crown and the Japanese colonial state. However, the two differ as the United States eventually declared the revolutionary war against the British rule, while the Korean DoI expressed this through the rhetoric only. The US Revolutionary War started in 1775 in resulting in a dramatic victory in 1783.

The paper also posits whether the two declarations are derivations of man's natural intellectual products, crossing over different cultures and continents. Thomas Jefferson's declaration might have established a positive precedent to Lee Kwang-soo, the author of the Korean DoI. The two authors share a common esteem of humanity and democracy due to their intellectual growth and their political, social and educational backgrounds.
