

Special Issue: A Longue Durée Revolution in Korea: March 1st, 1919 to the Candlelight Revolution in 2018 (Table of Contents)

Edited by Jae-Jung Suh

The year 2019, the centennial of the March 1st, 1919, witnessed an outpouring of historical scholarship assessing the complex set of events since “the starting point of Korea’s modernity in earnest.”¹ Among a flood of conferences and publications that ensued, one group of scholars stood out for its attempts to stand above a nationalist historiography and situate what it calls the “March 1st revolution,” rather than the more widely used “March 1st Movement,” within a regional and global time. Its scholarship was unique in highlighting the *sui generis* nature of Koreans’ historical experiences without falling into the trap of nationalist historiography while at the same time bringing to relief common challenges shared by East Asia and the world during the modern period.



It did so by engaging 1919 in a dialogue with 2018, the year of massive public protests. To its eyes, the “candlelight revolution,” in which Korean citizens not only brought down the corrupt and reactionary President Park Geun-Hye but also ushered in a “spring of peace” on the peninsula, and the “March 1st Revolution of 1919” were part and parcel of a *longue durée* revolution that wrestled with what Paik Nak-chung once called the “double project of modernity” of adapting to and overcoming modernity.² For over a century, Koreans in the South have been going through a capitalist revolution while at the same time struggling to find an alternative that would resolve many of its contradictions; and Koreans in the North have experimented with socialism to tackle the same double project of modernity. Their unification will have to be not only a completion of a nation-state building but also a synthesis of their experiences that helps them move beyond modernity. This special issue of the Asia-Pacific Journal presents three articles representative of this historiography.³ They are an English translation of chapters from *Paengnyōnŭi pyōnhyōk* (*100 Years of Revolutionary Change*) edited by Baik Youngseo (白永瑞).

The volume brought together leading Korean historians to reflect upon the significance of the March 1st “Revolution” from the vantage point of the recent “candlelight revolution” as well as to shed light on the contemporary changes as part of the century-old and still unfolding revolution. The introductory essay, by Suh, offers a critical overview of the century of

history wars in Korea to situate the following three articles in the context of Korean historiography.

The second article, by historian Bruce Cumings, discusses Japan's colonization of Korea in the world system where the Empire of Japan sought to transform East Asia into a core-semiperiphery-periphery relationship. Korea was modernized to the extent that its capitalist development fitted its status as a semi-periphery; and its limits and deformities also grew from its structural position. In the first half of the twentieth century when the Great Britain and the United States, as great powers of the Asia Pacific, accepted Japan only as a lower partner, Japan aspired to rise toward global stature "like a moth toward a flame." In the following article, Baik Youngseo, a historian of Chinese modern history who a leading Korean proponent of an East Asia discourse who has sought to transcend national boundaries in twentieth century East Asian historiography without reproducing the limits of Japan's earlier East Asia History school, develops Cumings' argument further by drawing parallels and differences between the March 1st and the May Fourth movements. Baik elaborates on how new subjects of the Korean and Chinese movements emerged out of their colonial and semicolonial experiences. He also engages in a learned discussion of how the Korean vision of *kaebyŏk* (a great opening of a new heaven and earth), having emerged out of Koreans' revolutionary experiences, is full of potential to tackle the "double project of modernity." In the last article, Paik Nak-chung characterizes both the March First and the candlelight movements as "the unfinished revolution, a revolution in progress" for their goal to establish a democratic, independent, and egalitarian nation state remains unfulfilled. The modern project remains incomplete and still in progress. The candlelight demonstrations were a continuation of the revolution that began a century ago, the

unfinished revolution that has yet to be completed in a way that will revolutionarily transform the division system in the whole Korean peninsula. Paik argues that the thawing of the inter-Korean and the U.S.-North Korea relationships, which immediately followed the candlelight demonstrations, must be seen as part of the revolution.

It remains to be seen how the *longue durée* revolution might unfold in the coming months as the term of the Moon administration, ushered in by the "Candlelight Revolution," draws near its end. The self-claimed "candlelight government" has carried out important reforms although its reforms fall short of revolutionary changes.⁴ No matter how one evaluates the developments of the past several years, everyone will agree that we have yet to see the *kaebyŏk*. It is with an anticipation of a next stage of the "incremental and cumulative" revolution that we present this special issue.

1. [Korea's Modern History Wars: March 1st 1919 and the Double Project of Modernity](#) - Jae-Jung Suh
2. [Korea, A Unique Colony: Last to be Colonized and First to Revolt](#) - Bruce Cumings
3. [The 1919 Independence Movement in Korea and Interconnected East Asia: The Incremental Unfolding of a Revolution](#) - Baik Youngseo
4. [On "Eradicating the Vestiges of Pro-Japanese Collaborators"](#) - Paik Nak-Chung

This is the Table of Contents for The Special Issue: A *Longue Durée* Revolution in Korea: March 1st, 1919 to the Candlelight Revolution in 2018

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Notes

¹ Im Hyoung-Taek, "3.1undong, han'guk kŭnhyŏndaeesŏ tasi mutta," *Paengnyŏnŭi pyŏnhyŏk: 3.1esŏ ch'otbulkkaji (One Hundred Years of Change 百年の变革: From 3/1 to the Candlelight)*, edited by Paek Yŏngsŏ (Baik Youngseo), (Seoul: Ch'angbi, 2019), 48.

² Capitalist modernity presents many late capitalist developers such as South Korea, most of whom have experienced colonial and/or neocolonial exploitation with challenges of both adapting to capitalism and overcoming its contradictions. Paik Nak-chung, "The Double Project of Modernity," *New Left Review* 95, September/October 2015, 65-66.

³ They are selected from an anthology, *Paengnyŏnŭi pyŏnhyŏk: 3.1esŏ ch'otbulkkaji (One Hundred Years of Change: From 3/1 to the Candlelight)*, edited by Paek Yŏngsŏ (Baik Youngseo), (Seoul: Ch'angbi, 2019). A Japanese translation is available. 百年の变革: 三一運動からキャンドル革命まで, 白永瑞: 編, 青柳 純一: 監訳 (東京: 法政大学出版局, 2021).

⁴ While it sought to "democratize the economy" by, for example, improving the protection of stockholders' interests, penalizing unfair practices in contractor-subcontractor relationship, and limiting labor flexibility, not only did it fail to fully implement its policies and institutionalize them, but it also stopped short of seriously addressing such issues as irregular workers and even reversed some of its earlier policies. 김경필."문재인 정부 전반기의 경제민주화: 계획, 실천, 과제." *경제와사회* (2020): 278-301; 윤홍식."문재인 정부 2년 반, 한국 복지체제: 개발국가 복지체제의 해체와 과제." *비판사회정책* 66 (2020): 131-174.