

THE WILSONIAN TOOLBOX

The Wilsonian Arguments of the Korean Independence Movement

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ABSTRACT: Following the founding of the League of Nations and as the wave of idealism that came to be known as the Wilsonian Moment swept the planet, the Korean independence movement gathered to appeal against Japanese colonial rule. This article sets out to uncover how the idealism of Wilsonianism and the establishment of the League of Nations provided independence movements such as the Korean with a toolbox of arguments along with a platform on which to be heard. It also analyses how these arguments changed from the Koreans' initial appeal in 1919 to an attempt made in 1932 following a period of increasing conflict surrounding Japan through the 1920s and early 30s. This article demonstrates how the inspirational effect of the Wilsonian Moment and the League of Nations had profound effects on marginalized movements such as the Korean and their ability to argue their case in the world in the face of political turmoil, international crises, and global power struggles.

KEYWORDS: Korea, Korean independence movement, the Wilsonian Moment, League of Nations.



Introduction

On the afternoon of March 1, 1919, 29 men gathered at a restaurant in downtown Seoul and read a declaration of Korean Independence aloud to the unprepared passersby. This was not the first nor the last time Korean Independence had been declared, but the incident became the spark that led to months of protests and violent clashes with the Japanese colonial government. It has since become known as the March First Movement (Shin & Moon 2019: 401-402).

The March First Movement and Korean Independence efforts came at a moment in history commonly referred to as the Wilsonian Moment. On the heels of the First World War and spurred on by notions of national self-determination and 'right over might' presented in the lead up to the Peace Conference in Paris, suppressed groups across the world gathered in movements to seek justice for their cause on the newly established international stage.

This article argues that the rhetoric and reasonings used by front figures of internationalization, such as US President, Woodrow Wilson, provided colonized peoples worldwide a toolbox that could be used to argue their case and the establishment of international organizations such as the League of Nations offered an international platform to be heard.

However, as the case of Korea shows, the Wilsonian Moment, the right of self-determination and the League of Nations would turn out to be limited in its reach. While the European map was redrawn to allow for national self-determination, nations such as Korea would have to wait their turn to have its sovereignty reinstated. While the Wilsonian Moment was indeed impactful, world politics and the recent rise of Korea's colonial ruler, Japan, as a Great Power put a stop to the independence movement's progress.

The Korean movement kept fighting for its national independence from Japan until it was finally won in 1945 (Ha 2019: 7). This article presents the arguments used and the evolution of these across time from the initially idealistic appeals to the newly established League of Nations in 1919 to the disillusioned attempts to be heard in 1932. It also aims to show that, despite the idealism of internationalism, the Korean independence leaders were deeply aware of the continued dominance of the Western powers and had to play the game according to their rules.

First, however, both the Wilsonian inspiration for the movement and its arguments as well as the opposition it faced in the world order and Japan's newly acquired international influence must be understood.

The Wilsonian Moment

On January 8, 1918, American President, Woodrow Wilson, held a speech before Congress. The "Fourteen Points"-speech, as it would become known, established the president as one of the leading men of internationalism (Manela 2007: 17). His fourteen points would become foundational for the idealistic Wilsonianism that he inspired. Manela has defined the term "the Wilsonian Moment" as the introduction of internationalism and rise in anti-colonial movements that followed which would become the beginning of the end of the imperial order of the world (Manela 2007:225).

Of the fourteen points, two were particularly impactful in causing the idealistic wave of independence, anti-colonial and democratic movements to wash across the world. The fifth of Wilson's points demands that colonial claims should be reconsidered, not only based on colonial governments' claims, but on the interests of the population concerned.¹ Although Wilson would not use the term before February 1918, this point presents the idea of the national right of self-determination: the right of a population to choose what nation it belongs to. This became a key argument adopted by many of the Wilsonian movements (Manela 2007: 17).

The fourteenth point proposes a platform on which political independence and territorial integrity would be guaranteed to "great and small states alike (Wilson 1918)." This platform was to be an international association of nations formed under covenants that ensured its purpose. This platform would be established in the form of the League of Nations as a result of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

The right of self-determination was not afforded to many of the peoples arguing for independence. Manela argues that while Wilson never foresaw the influence he would have on colonized peoples in the world's "periphery", he was not opposed to their independence. Instead, he appears to have believed in a process of "tutelage" to bring self-government to these peoples – in time (Manela 2007: 25). Ambrosius and Akami are not as gentle in their analyses. According to Ambrosius, Wilson was strongly Eurocentric in his orientation and did not consider non-Western peoples civilized enough to self-govern (Ambrosius

¹ Woodrow Wilson, 'President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points (1918), National Archives, 21 September 2021.

2017: 109). Akami highlights the paternalism in Wilson's and European representatives' views (Akami 2001: 21).

The Korean Independence Movement was one of many to be influenced by and to adopt the rhetoric of Wilsonism during the Wilsonian Moment. They would build their arguments on the principles offered by Wilson's Fourteen Points and come to view the United States as a beacon of democratic development. However, the realities of the world at the time would prove to be difficult obstacles in the march for independence.

The great powers:

The US, Great Britain, France, and Italy – and Japan?

The new international world order and the League of Nations was built on centuries of European dominance. Officially the League was meant to serve the interests of everyone worldwide. In reality it was founded by the winners of the First World War and dominated by the interests of the Great Powers (Steiner 2007: 350).

Traditionally, the Great Powers had been Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain, and to some extent the United States (Motin 2022: 138). However, following the Great War, Austria-Hungary was no more, and Germany had been defeated. While France, Great Britain, Italy and the US maintained their positions as Great Powers and would come to be known as the Council of Four during the Peace Conference, the unexpected defeat of Russia in 1905 by a unanticipated threat introduced a new Great Power to the scene: Japan.

Japan had built its international influence since the Meiji Restoration of the 1860s. With the reestablishment of imperial rule and its isolationist policy left in the past, Japan took inspiration from the Western powers in the rebuilding of their society and government, particularly in its military and imperialistic pursuits (Koga 2020: 576-578).

Japan had won the Sino-Japanese War against China, the otherwise hegemonic power of Asia, in 1895, and the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 (Koga 2020: 577). In 1902, the burgeoning imperial Japan signed the first Anglo-Japanese Alliance with Great Britain and re-established this alliance in 1905.² It was this

² *AGREEMENT OF ALLIANCE OF 1905*. (Agreement of Alliance between Japan and Great Britain, 1905, Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance).

alliance that drew Japan into the Great War on the side of the Allies. The Japanese fleet became an essential part of the fight against Germany in the oceans of East Asia and the Pacific (Burkman 2008: 4-5). As important a factor as the alliance with the British may have been, Japanese interests in German-controlled territories in Shandong, Manchuria and the Pacific played a vital role.

Allied victory in World War I secured Japan the role of a Great Power in the void left by the defeated and dissolved nations that formerly held this position. Japan became one of the Big Five Nations to lead the Peace Conference in Paris and establishment of the League of Nations (Burkman 2008: 62).

However, the war had left Japan vulnerable to foreign pressures and financially tied to the simultaneous rise of the US (Burkman 2008: 6-8). Japan's position as one of the Five was by virtue of its navy fighting on the victorious side in the Great War. While Britain, the US, France, and Italy would meet in the Council of Four during the Peace Conference, Japan would fight for the inclusion of racial equality in the League of Nations Covenant. Racial equality would safeguard Japan's new position against racially motivated discrimination and ensure better treatment of Japanese migrants abroad. However, despite majority support for the principle, Wilson himself declared the motion failed due to lack of British, American, and Australian support (Burkman 2008: 80-86). This failure demonstrates how the League of Nations would not be a full break with the status quo.

The introduction of the mandate system saw the German and Ottoman territories put under international supervision. The previous colonies and occupied territories would be under the mandate of selected Powers (namely Britain, France, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, and Japan). While colonized people saw the Conference as their chance to argue for liberation from colonialism, the resulting mandate system would instead institutionalize the concept of mandated tutelage: that the advanced and civilized nations of the world would be responsible for teaching the backward and weak people how to self-govern (Steiner 2007: 360).

While the Peace Conference and following League of Nations would provide the scene on which the Korean Independent Movement could argue its case, the audience casting judgement was a mix of Korea's colonizer and their allies who had other things to worry about than a small corner of East Asia and an interest in maintaining a system of the strong dominating the weak.

The Korean Question

For centuries, Korea had been a tributary state of China, but a sovereign kingdom in its own right. It remained reserved in terms of international relations even when the Chinese conducted trade with Western states and Japan actively reformed and modernized itself (Motin 2022: 132). It would be Japan that opened the then kingdom of Joseon to trade in 1876 through the Treaty of Ganghwa (Motin 2022: 141). This treaty clearly established the Korean independent statehood, stating “Chosen (Joseon) being an independent state enjoys the same sovereign rights as does Japan.”³

Caught between Chinese, Russian, and Japanese interests, the Korean kingdom spent decades trying to secure its sovereignty, jumping from alliance to alliance with nations it deemed powerful. Thus, in 1882, Korea and the US signed a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance (Motin 2022: 142). The first Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 even stated that Japan and Great Britain was “specially interested in maintaining the independence and territorial integrity” of Korea (First Anglo-Japanese Alliance 1902).

Japan’s imperial ambitions proved too great, however. Japanese interest in Korea was not only due to the potential for economic growth and extra material resources and manpower, but also strategic and military considerations (Motin 2022: 134). The Korean Peninsula was a defensive liability if controlled by an enemy power, but the bridge to a potential invasion of Manchuria in Northern China (Ha 2019: 5). Under German tutelage, Japan increased its military presence and political influence over Korea until it officially became a Japanese protectorate early in the morning on November 18, 1905 (Motin 2022: 146). Korea did not surrender its independence easily, though, with the still emperor Gojong reaching out to Germany, the US and the Second Hague Peace Conference over the following couple of years for help, claiming that the protectorate treaty had been signed in duress (Motin 2022: 146). Despite a level of distaste towards the growing Japanese influence in East Asia, the appeals of the emperor went unanswered by the Western powers and in August 1910, Korea was officially annexed and made a Japanese colony (Ku 2021: 52).

³ *Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between the Empire of Japan and the Kingdom of Corea*, 1876, Article I.

The colonial period was marked by assimilation policies. The goal of the Japanese leadership was to turn Koreans into Japanese (Seth 2016: 158). The first decade of colonial rule was a decade of violence and militant suppression of the Korean people. Korean nationalists were arrested and tortured, Korean citizens discriminated against based on their ethnicity and the March First Movement itself resulted in violent clashes with Japanese authorities (Seth 2016: 158-160). However, the movement resulted in a policy shift towards the so-called “cultural policy”.

The era of cultural policy” lasted through the 1920s and saw some restrictions on speech lifted. At the same time, surveillance and police presence was increased (Seth 2016: 161). Despite some violent protests throughout the 1920s, the decade of cultural policy was largely peaceful. However, following Japan’s expansion into Northern China in the Manchurian Incident in 1931 and increased militarism as well as an increase in violent attacks by Korean nationalists and communists led to almost 15 years of much harsher assimilation policies than in the 1910s (Seth 2016:163-165).

Due to the strict Japanese control of Korean nationalists, many of the independence efforts was conducted by Koreans abroad. Following the March First Movement, a Provisional Government was formed in April 1919 and would operate out of Shanghai (Seth 2016: 160). Chosen to lead the government was Rhee Syngman, a highly educated Korean-American and a personal friend of President Wilson (Fields 2019: 54-55). Rhee was only one of many American-educated Koreans who would lead the Independence Movement and would eventually become the first president of the Republic of Korea.

Another American-educated Korean was Kim Kyusik, a Princeton-graduate. As the provisional secretary of foreign affairs, Kim was chosen to represent Korea and present an appeal for independence at the Peace Conference in Paris (Roanoke College 2019). This would become one of many, as Korean Associations from across the world would continue to appeal to the League of Nations and the eventual Secretary General, Eric Drummond.

The Wilsonian toolbox

The Claim for Korean Independence was submitted to the Peace Conference in April 1919. Copies were also sent by letter in May the same year to British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and US President Wilson by Kim Kyusik.

The 11-page appeal details Korea's historical independence, Japanese transgressions and abuse of power and a warning against the threat of Japanese imperialist intentions. The appeal is infused with Wilsonian idealism, referring directly to Wilson's Fourteen Points in its introduction:

The Conference meets in order to secure a settlement of the affairs of the member nations in terms of the principles set forth in President Wilson's Fourteen Points. The 'evident principle' running through the 'whole program' is defined by the President in his message to Congress on January 8, 1918, as 'the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 1).'

In the effort to argue for Korean Independence, three overall categories of arguments become apparent:

- 1) The Legal Argument
- 2) The Right of Self-determination
- 3) *Japan Contra Mundum*

The legal argument

The first category, the legal argument, is the foundation of the claim, but would also only be truly viable at the prospect of a fair and equal international system judging the claim based on the interests of the population concerned, in this case the Korean people.

The argument draws on multiple treaties from the end of the 19th and early 20th century. The Korean claim is that Japan has broken multiple of these treaties by annexing Korea.

According to the claimants, Korean independence and sovereignty had been legally established on multiple occasions and by multiple parties. Japan recognized Korean sovereignty and independence in the Treaty of Ganghwa of 1876 and again in the Treaty of Defensive and Offensive Alliance of

1904, the US in the treaty of 1882, China in the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, Great Britain in both the First Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 and in an otherwise unspecified treaty of peace and commerce with Korea itself (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 2).

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was especially important to the claimants, who states:

The independence of Korea, which was expressly recognised in the first Anglo-Japanese agreement, was significantly omitted in this renewal of the alliance.

This sinister omission was quickly followed, twenty days later, by the conclusion of the Treaty subjecting Korea to the protectorate of Japan. It is safe to say that this transaction is without parallel in civilized history (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 2).

Incidentally, this is the closest the Korean claimants would get to accusing another great power than Japan of transgressing against legal documents and sacrificing Korean independent statehood.

The pointed finger quickly turned back to Japan when the appeal accuses the empire of colonizing only for the benefit of Japan itself:

It is also well to remember that 'most of these reforms, valuable as they are, may be found in a well-regulated penal colony' (c) and that all of them have been effected or introduced at the expense of the Korean taxpayer **in the interest and for the benefit of the Japanese Settler** for whom the Japanese Authorities desire to make Korea an attractive field of colonisation (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 6).

It is important to note that the formatting of the above quote is as found in the original document, suggesting that the words in bold text held significant weight to the writers.

As a contrast to Japanese colonial policy, British rule of India and US control of the Philippines is described as the type of paternalistic tutelage through which strong nations would teach the weak how to self-govern (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 7). While the Korean claimants appear to have supported this type of system, at least in so far that it is beneficial for their argument, the intentions of Japan are described as less than noble: "Except in the sense that cattle or slaves must

be taken care of if they are to be of value to their owner, the welfare of the Korean People is not an aim of government with Japan (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 7).”

In other words: Japan had not only violated treaties, but also transgressed against the single acceptable reason to dominate another nation. Therefore the international society should declare the nullification of the annexation treaty.

The Right of Self-Determination

The right of self-determination was a key aspect of the Wilsonian Moment and resulting movements, and while the term itself is never directly used in the claim, the principle is clearly foundational for the appeal. As such, the document highlights the historic and cultural unity of the Korean people:

The Korean people were a nation, with a language and a culture of their own, before Japan ceased to be a land of warring tribes and unlettered people.

(...)

This nationhood of the Korean People had lasted for more than 4,200 years when Japan consummated her work in Korea by the Treaty of August 22, 1910. And save for an intervening period when their liberties were assailed, the Koreans lived through these forty-two centuries as an independent nation, their country forming one of the separate states of Asia (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 1).

However, the appeal claims, the Japanese government was guilty of severe abuse of power in its attempts to assimilate the Korean people into Japan and removing all traces of a separate Korean cultural identity and history:

The teaching of Korean history is prohibited. And imprisonment, torture, banishment or worse might be the penalty if some Korean should be tempted to recite to children of the soil a traditional story or song or some folklore telling how men fought and died for Korea in other days (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 4).

Another important aspect of the right of self-determination is the opinion and interests of the people. The appeal states that Japan did not have Korean interests at heart, but also that “Against this extinction of Korean sovereignty and the incorporation of their country as a province of Japan, the Korean People and Nation have strenuously protested and do still protest (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 3).”

This brings us to the third and curious argument that is found throughout the appeal: Japan was like Prussia – only worse.

Japan Contra Mundum

Under the headline “*Japan Contra Mundum*”, Japan Against the World, the appeal states:

In addition to these reasons connected directly with the fate of the Korean People, the vital interests of the world – particularly the Asiatic interests of France as well as the Asiatic and Pacific interests of Great Britain and the United States – demand the dis-annexation of Korea and the liberation of her People from Japan (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 7).

In a twist against the idealism of a new world order based on equality and fairness, this category of argumentation clearly presents the Korean Independence Movement’s world view: the United States, Great Britain, and France, as the only powers greater than Japan with their own interests in Asia and the Pacific, would be the only nations strong enough to and interested in stopping Japanese expansion. To stoke the fire, the Korean claim sought to present Japan as the greatest threat to these nations and their interests.

Not only was Japan expanding into Korea, they claim, by hindering trade and missionary work, Japan sought to “EXCLUDE FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN FAR ASIA” as the claim states in bold and capital letters (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 7).

It would not end there, though, as according to the Korean claimants, Japan would pose a danger to the non-Japanese world, especially “the three Latina and Anglo-Saxon Powers” through their “continental policy”:

This policy aims, first, at the seizure of the hegemony of Asia through the **Domination and Control of the Man-Power and the "Natural Resources " of China**—possible only by the Japanese possession of the continental point d'appui of Korea—and, next, at **the Mastery of the Pacific Ocean as the sole means of forcing an entrance for Japanese emigrants into the rich lands of the Australias and the Pacific Seaboard of the United States** (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 7).

To make the threat of Japan even clearer to the Western Powers, the claimants draw on Western frames of reference by drawing direct comparisons between Japan and Prussia.

Under the headline that simply says “Prussia and Japan”, the following comparison between the two nations is made:

Like Prussia in her two wars against Austria and against France, Japan "prepared" for her two wars against China and against Russia; and as Prussia became the leading military Power in Europe, so Japan has become the leading military Power in Asia as a result of her "defensive" wars against the two countries that stood in the path of her continental ambitions. And in quite a true sense, it may be said that Prussia and Japan are the two modern Powers which have profited greatly from the business of war.

If there be any difference between these two predatory Powers, the same lies in the deeper immorality of Japan (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 2).

To truly underline the importance of aiding Korea and stopping Japan, the appeal warns that the continental policy was in fact only the first step of an even larger goal inspired by the Prussian tutelage under which Japan modernized its military:

Japan was building towards a policy of world domination (The Claim of the Korean People 1919: 10).

The Wilsonian Disappointment

13 years after the establishment of the League of Nations and the Claim for Korean Independence, the general secretary of the League, Eric Drummond, would receive another 11-page document. This time it

was a petition by letter dated to November 14, 1932, and signed by Doo Ok Chung and Henry Cu Kim of the Korean National Information Bureau operating out of Hawaii.

Whereas the Korean appeal of 1919 had been written in the midst of the idealistic Wilsonian Moment and with great hopes for the future of internationalism, this letter was written in a time of crisis. In September 1931, in response to reports of a bomb exploding on the Southern Manchurian railway, Japan launched an invasion of Manchuria. Within days China had filed an appeal with the League of Nations, turning the local incident into an international issue (Burkman 2008: 166-167).

The League's conclusion to the incident would prove disastrous. Unable to agree on sanctions or condemnations, the League simply ordered Japan to leave Manchuria and Japan refused (Steiner 2007: 743). Instead, Japan began the process of withdrawal and officially withdrew its membership of the League in 1935 (Burkman 2008: 173-175).

The multiple unanswered appeals for liberation, concurrent intensification of the colonial assimilation policies in Korea, and recently the apparent proof that the Korean Independence Movement's warnings of the Japanese threat had been correct led to a great deal of frustration and disillusionment with the idealism of the Wilsonian Moment. This is evident from Chung and Kim's rhetoric:

The Korean question was always avoided by European and American statesmen because they had the wrong conception of the political situation of the Far East through the influence of Japan's diplomacy and publicity (Kim & Chung 1932, 2-3).

In the place of Wilsonian ideals is cold security politics: Japan's expansion must be stopped as it is a threat to every other nation's interests in Asia and the Pacific. According to Kim and Chung:

Korea is the Belgium of Asia and as a close neighbor to China and Russia she will be needed in securing the sacred cause of peace in the Orient by restoring the impence and the territorial integrity of Korea. Korea's appeal not only merits but demands the earnest consideration of the League Council (Kim & Chung 1932: 5).

While the long and independent history of Korea is emphasized, the argument based on the right of self-determination is set aside in favor of argumentation based on international security and the interests of

the Great Powers. The *Japan Contra Mundum* argument has clearly become the primary focus of the petition.

A legal argument is also used by Kim and Chung, although it takes a different form than the one used in the claim of 1919. The petition refers to documents dating back to the 19th century in which other nations pledge their support to Korea in the case that it should be unjustly oppressed by other powers:

In 1882 the United States of America pledged to Korea her good office by President Arthur, Great Britain in 1885, Italy in 1884, Germany in 1884, Russia in 1885, France in 1884, Austria in 1892, China in 1899, Belgium in 1901, Denmark in 1902, each deliberately covenanted with Korea, that 'if others deal unjustly and oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices on being informed of the case to bring about an amicable arrangement (Kim & Chung 1932: 6).'

In response to a hypothetical counter argument that “the absorption of Korea by the Empire of Japan be a *fait accompli*, and therefor beyond your consideration”, the writers state that “no such act is ever final, when the result is oppression or breach of treaty covenants.” This statement is followed by historical examples to prove their point:

History supplies us with many illustrations of this inexorable truth, of which Poland, Greece, Finland, Bohemia and others are examplars. The conscience of the world sustains the cause of such people, and its peace is imperilled until justice hears and responds to their appeals (Kim & Chung 1932: 6).

While Kim and Chung only directly accuses the European and American powers of ignoring the question of Korea once, the entire petition is heavy with insinuated allegations of passivity and hypocrisy by the League of Nations and United States. They state that it is “high time for serious thought on the part of the Powers, when there is yet time” and, referring to attacks on Chinese civilians in Shanghai by Japan, ask very pointedly: “Could this (be) a justified act of a member of the League of Nations (Kim & Chung 1932: 2)?” If the League intends to return Manchuria to China, Kim and Chung writes, the same principle “must be applied to Korea if they are to be applied at all (Kim & Chung 1932: 5).”

The petitioners end their lettering by presenting a solution to the threat from Japan against the rest of the world. However, gone is the trust in Wilsonian ideals and tone of subservience:

Korea does not ask for her country's improvement; she demands the exercise of those treaty covenants with other nations upon which she has a right to rely for her protection. The fate of Korea may befall China, unless the present tendency of Japanese imperial expansion in Manchuria is checkmated either by China herself or by a concerted action of the League of Nations and the United States of America in the Eastern theatre of international politics (Kim & Chung 1932: 11).

No longer a case of idealism and the hope of national self-determination, the Korean Question was now a matter of international peace and security. A matter that demanded the action of international society.

Conclusion:

The principles attributed to President Wilson in the time of the Peace Conference following the First World War would not only become foundational for the creation of the League of Nations. The principles of national self-determination and the equality of nations inspired colonized peoples across the world to fight for their freedom and independence. The establishment of the League of Nations was believed to usher in a new era of internationalism, fairness and inclusion.

One of the many groups to be inspired by the Wilsonian Moment and the ideas it presented was the Independence Movement in Korea. After a decade of Japanese colonial rule, young Koreans sought together and turned to the League of Nations for aid in 1919.

The first appeal of this young movement and the men who led it was laced with idealism. The Wilsonian principle of national right of self-determination was a central part of their argument. Referring to the centuries old Joseon-dynasty, the Korean movement-leaders disputed the Japanese right to annex the kingdom and accused the colonial regime of violating the Korean people's right to its own culture.

Making use of the newly formed League of Nations, an international platform on which international legal claims could be handled, the Koreans argued that Japan's actions violated international law and

ethics. Finishing their appeal for independence, the Koreans warned the World's nations of the threat the Japanese imperial intentions posed.

The right of self-determination, the legal argument and the warning against Japan's threat to the world were all made possible by the League of Nations and Wilsonian Moment. Wilsonianism offered the inspiration and ideological foundation; the League provided the movement with a platform on which to argue its case and an audience with the ability to respond.

However, the League did not respond to the Koreans' appeal. Consequently, they kept trying. Following a string of perceived violations against Chinese sovereignty by Japan and the League's ineffective response, the 1932 letter sent by members of the Korean movement to the general secretary of the League of Nations clearly shows the disappointment they felt.

While the right of national self-determination is still present in the letter's arguments, the idealism of 1919 is almost entirely replaced by appeals to the Western Power's own interests and warnings of Japanese expansion, yet it is also tinged with barely veiled accusations against these same Powers of inaction and consequently culpability in Japan's violations.

The weight of the arguments of self-determination, legality and the threat of Japan changed from the time of the 1919 appeal to the 1932 letter due to developments like Japanese expansionism, the League's inability to successfully respond to it, and the desperation felt by the Koreans as Japanese colonial rule became more restrictive over time. However, the fact remains that these arguments were central to the Korean Independence Movement's case in both 1919 and 1932 and all were the result of the Wilsonian Moment, the idealism it sparked, and the international platform offered by the League of Nation.



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