

# Carrying the Lessons of Sam-Il-Jeol Into the Present

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The March 1st Movement, also known as Sam-Il-Jeol, marks one of the most significant moments in Korea's history. On March 1, 1919, millions of Koreans peacefully gathered to declare their independence from Japanese colonial rule. What made this movement remarkable was not only its scale but its spirit. The protesters chose nonviolent resistance, believing that moral courage and unity were stronger than any empire. Although the movement did not immediately achieve independence, it awakened a powerful national consciousness and inspired future generations to continue the struggle for freedom and dignity.

To understand why Sam-Il-Jeol still matters, it is essential to recognize the conditions that led to the movement. Korea had been under Japanese rule since 1910, a period marked by cultural suppression, economic exploitation, and political oppression. Koreans were denied basic freedoms, including the right to speak their language openly and preserve their traditions. More than a century later, the world is still shaped by conflicts over identity, human rights, and justice. Many communities continue to seek the same values that motivated the March 1st activists: freedom, equality, and the right to be heard. The movement reminds us that the struggle for human rights is ongoing and that progress often begins with individuals willing to speak out against unfairness.

Another lasting lesson of Sam-Il-Jeol is the importance of national identity and cultural pride. During the colonial period, Koreans were pressured to abandon their language, traditions, and history. The March 1st Movement was not only a political act but also a declaration that culture and identity are worth protecting. Today, globalization connects us more than ever, but it can also make cultural differences easier to overlook. Sam-Il-Jeol encourages us to value our heritage and to respect the identities of others. It reminds us that cultural diversity is not something to hide, but it is something to celebrate.

For me, the lessons of Sam-Il-Jeol feel especially personal. When I immigrated to the United States at eight years old, I struggled to balance my Korean identity with the pressure to fit in. I remember hiding my

Korean snacks during lunch and feeling embarrassed when my parents spoke to me in Korean at school. Learning about the March 1st Movement helped me understand that preserving my culture is not something to be ashamed of—it is something generations before me fought to protect. That lesson became real to me this year when I noticed a classmate being treated differently because of his accent and background. Some students avoided him or made quiet jokes, and I recognized the same kind of exclusion I once felt. Wanting to make sure he didn't feel alone, I chose to sit with him, include him in group work, and treat him with the respect everyone deserves. These small actions reminded me that the values of the movement, which are protecting identity, standing up for others, and choosing compassion over silence, are not just historical ideas. They are the responsibilities I carry with me every day.

Another moment that deepened my understanding of Sam-Il-Jeol happened in a quieter way. For years, I let my teachers and classmates mispronounce my Korean name because I didn't want to seem "too foreign." But as I learned more about how Koreans in 1919 fought to preserve their language and identity, I realized that my name is part of that heritage. Gently correcting people felt like a small act, but it taught me that honoring my identity is also a form of courage.

Sam-Il-Jeol also teaches us that peaceful resistance can be more powerful than violence. In a world where disagreements often escalate into hostility, the movement shows that courage does not require aggression but clarity of purpose and the willingness to act even when success is uncertain. At the same time, it reminds us that hope itself is a form of resistance. The people who marched in 1919 did not know when independence would come, yet they believed their actions mattered. Today, when the world feels uncertain—whether because of political conflict, social division, or global crises—their example encourages us to persist. Change often begins with small, courageous steps.

In the end, the March 1st Movement is not just a historical event. It is a reminder that the fight for dignity and human rights is ongoing. The spirit of Sam-Il-Jeol lives on whenever people choose justice over silence, unity over fear, and hope over resignation. That is why its lessons remain essential in the world we live in today.