

## March 1st Independence Movement: A Day of Great Historical Significance

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*Seodaemun Prison*

Ninety-eight years ago, on March 1, 1919, a small group of Korean patriots launched the “Mansei” independence movement, hoping to throw off the rule of Imperial Japan, which had annexed and colonized the peninsula in the early years of the 20th century. As revolutions go, it was far from glorious and the Japanese reprisals were quick and violent. Christian churches and followers of the indigenous Cheondo-kyo religion were a particular target, and in the end it was to be another 26 long years before Korea was finally liberated at the end of World War II.



*Yu Gwan Soon*

However, True Father explained that this tragic uprising played a crucial role in laying the foundation for the birth of the Messiah in Korea, saying, “I was meant to be conceived and born during a period of patriotic fervor. The returning Lord must be born in a nation that God can claim, even if only conditionally ... otherwise it would be as if he were only floating in the air, without solid ground on which to stand.”

Perhaps the most prominent martyr and patriot of this time was the courageous teenage girl Yu Gwan Soon, known by some as the “Joan of Arc” of Korea. Father said she stood in the position of Eve. At the age of 16 she was arrested, tortured and eventually executed for her role in the March 1, 1919 uprising. Her body was cut into six pieces and displayed around the capital in the hope of cowing the populace, but this brutality backfired, as it always does.

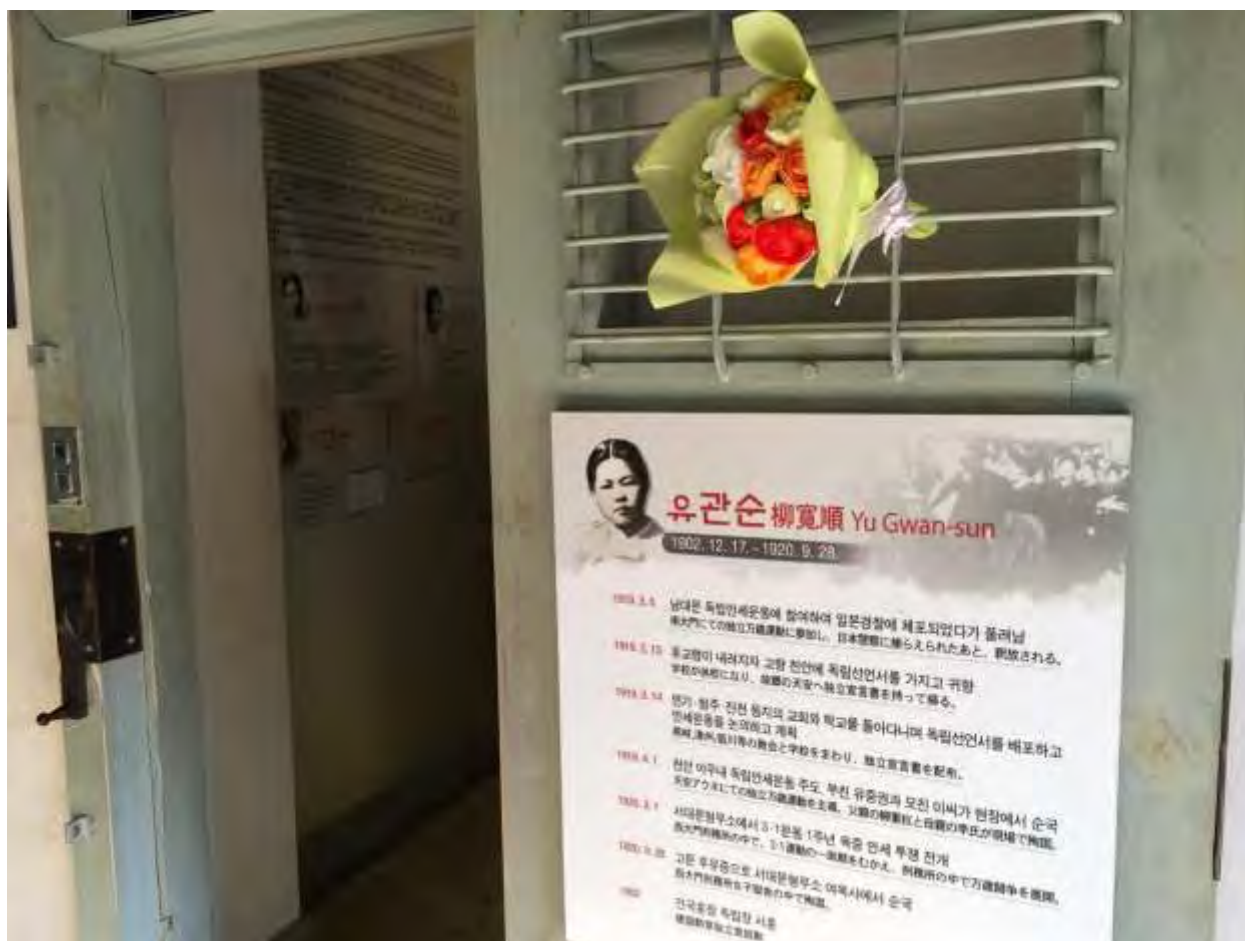
On a recent trip to Seoul, I had the opportunity to learn a little more about the patriots of the

Korean Independence Museum, and the infamous Seodaemun prison where Yu Gwan Soon

was imprisoned and tortured. Like many Unificationists, I knew of Seodaemun prison as the place where True Father was briefly and wrongfully imprisoned in 1955, but had little idea of the sorrowful place it holds in Korean history.

The overwhelming narrative of the Seodaemun prison museum is of unjust imprisonment and heroic resistance. Soon after entering, visitors are led down to the “Underground Torture Rooms” where there are many disturbing exhibits featuring monstrous interrogation techniques, including many forms of water torture, instruments for slow removal of finger and toenails, and spiked cages. There are ropes and nooses for the notorious “airplane torture,” vertical and horizontal “coffins” where prisoners could be confined in appalling discomfort with the goal of weakening them before interrogation, and much more.

Outside the cellblocks, the prison grounds include workshops and small factories for forced labor, exercise facilities specifically designed to keep prisoners apart, and the notorious execution block, where photography is still prohibited to this day. So many were killed that the Japanese authorities found it necessary to build a secret exit tunnel through the prison walls so that the corpses could be removed and destroyed without causing further uproar.



In his autobiography, *As a Peace Loving Global Citizen*, True Father writes about his direct experiences with several of these tortures, but until I actually saw the evidence of these with my own eyes, I have to confess it didn't quite register how bad and brutal it must have been. All the more amazing then that at the end of the war, Father actually helped his former captors and enemies and their families to quietly escape back to Japan.

I strongly recommend a visit to any Unificationist keen to learn more about Korea's history and the life course of True Parents. The museum costs less than \$2, is open most days and is easily reachable by subway. In case you're on the way to the airport, the staff can help you store your luggage.