Korean Newspapers and the “Irish Problem”:
Japanese Censorship in Colonial Korea, 1920-1930

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Introduction

Censoring Korean newspapers was no easy task for Japanese colonial authorities, to which pamphlet manufacturer Tsune Midori (d.u.) and censor Kaneda Kaname (d.u.) can attest. As soon as the evening edition was released around 4-5 p.m., they skimmed through the articles, and with nervous expressions, ran to grab the nearest available telephone. After connecting to the newspaper’s Korean representative, usually the editor-in-chief, they demanded, “Stop the rotary press, please” and “delete everything from this page, this paragraph, this line to that line.” And then they notified, “this article has been charged with disrupting public safety, please hand over all copies to the police.”¹ The editor-in-chief responded, “What exactly about our article was bad?” “The entire article on page 2,” they replied.²

The truth was, decisions whether to let an article be published in full, or with some lines censored, or have it banned from circulating were often made on the spot. Unlike other forms of published content, daily newspapers published too frequently—often twice a day—to have each issue be carefully examined. With very little time between the latest issue coming off the printing press and into the hands of Korean readers, they had to be censored at the same time as copies were being printed. When censors told newspaper editors through the phone to momentarily stop the rotary press, it was because the lines or paragraphs they found offensive were being printed as they spoke. But they had no guarantee Korean editors would actually follow their orders; newspapers sometimes kept the rotary press running as the censors ordered them to stop and distributed censored articles after deleting the paper’s serial number.³

Tsune and Kaneda’s depiction of an anxiety-ridden censorship process was the result of the Japanese colonial government’s precarious balancing act following the March 1st

¹ Tsune qtd. In Yi Min-ju, Cheguk kwa komyŏl: Ilche ha sinmun tongje wa chegukchŏk komyŏl ch’eje, 69-70.
² Ibid.
³ Pak Yong-gyu, Ilche ǔi ῥŏlŏn ch’ulp’an panggal tongje, 186-187.
Independence Movement in 1919. Blaming the nationalist uprising on the previous administration’s oppressive rule and ignorance of Korean society, a new colonial administration sought to alleviate some of the worst restrictions on Korean public life while ensuring that they remained under strict surveillance. One of the most consequential elements of this strategy was the legalization of Korean-language publications in early 1920, through which Japanese leaders hoped to better surveil Korean nationalist thought. But newspapers and magazines do not merely reflect discontent and the spread of “baseless rumors.”4 The realization that mainstream publications could themselves generate nationalist discontent became a great source of anxiety for the Japanese Special Higher Police (Tokubetsu Kōdō Keisatsu), which would pass legislation attempting to formalize and codify censorship standards in the next few years.5

Korean newspapers disseminated nationalist thought in various forms, much of which looked outward to place Japanese rule of Korea in a global context. Despite underdeveloped journalist facilities and communication technology, Korean journalists went to great lengths to report on anticolonial struggles around the world,6 and in the early 1920s, they focused on one in particular: the Irish War of Independence. As a colony which had uniquely achieved independence in the early 20th century, Ireland immediately became a subject of fascination and inspiration. In the early 1920s alone, nearly one thousand articles on the Irish Independence War were published in the two most popular Korean newspapers, the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo,7 and more articles appeared regularly in major literary magazines such as Kaebyŏk, Tongmyŏng, Samch’ölli, and Pyŏlgŏn’gon.8 While the Irish War of Independence was not the only foreign event that gave inspiration to the Korean nationalist movement (newspapers also reported on

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4 Yi Yŏn, Ilche kangjŏngi Chosŏn ŏllon t’ongjesa, 278.
5 Yi Min-ju, Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl, 64-65.
6 Yi Jin, “Tonga Ilbo mugi chŏnggan iyu ga . . . Ilche ‘nonjo pakkwŏra’ appak” (Tonga Ilbo, May 26, 2020); Yun Tŏg-yŏng, Segye wa singminji Chosŏn ŭi minjok undong, 175.
7 This figure was calculated using the Naver News Library search engine.
anticolonial struggles in, for example, India, Egypt, and the Philippines), no colonial struggle garnered Koreans’ consistent interest as did Ireland’s.\(^9\) In 1926, One Chosŏn Ilbo article compared Korean interest in the “Irish problem” to that in Hangul itself.\(^10\) The Tonga Ilbo’s dedicated reporting and enthusiastic support of Irish independence fighters drew the ire of Japanese censors, who, in September 1920, gave the company the second-highest penalty it could give to a newspaper: an Indefinite Suspension of Publication (mugi chŏnggan).\(^11\)

We must explain why there were so many articles on the Irish War of Independence, for their existence defies expectations of Korean press capabilities and international awareness during the period 1920-1930: Why would Koreans become so interested in Ireland, a small country which newspapers admitted had little direct relevance to Korea? And did newspapers manage to publish so many articles about Irish anticolonialism under Japanese colonial rule?

Few works, even those dedicated solely to exploring the colonial-era Korean press, mention Irish independence articles, much less answer questions about their existence and popularity. Two recent, important academic works addressing Korean fascination with Irish independence are Han Sŭng-hun’s article “The 1920 Tonga Ilbo’s Reporting on the Irish War of Independence and its Meaning” (2019) and Yun Tŏg-yong’s book The Nationalist Movements of the World and Colonial Korea (2023), which includes a chapter on the Tonga Ilbo’s detailed reports on the Irish War of Independence. In addition, the Tonga Ilbo itself, in 2019 and 2020, published several articles about the newspaper’s interest in Ireland and Ireland’s impact on anti-Japanese resistance, likely in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the March 1st Movement and the Tonga Ilbo’s founding. These sources affirmed my observation that Irish independence articles were quite popular in the early 1920s and played an important role in

\(^10\) “Aeran munje e kwan haya” (Chosŏn Ilbo, November 28, 1926).
\(^11\) Han, “1920 nyŏn Tonga Ilbo,” 226.
Korea independence activists’ ideas about what independence should look like in Korea. My research agrees with the recent scholarship that Irish independence is an important and under-discussed topic of the early Korean press and aims to extract just what was so appealing about Ireland in particular to Korean journalists and readers, and how that changed over time. My research also connects a detailed, textual analyses of Irish independence articles with scholarly insights into the colonial Korean press and Japanese censorship from Ch’oe Min-ji and Kim Min-ju, Ch’oe Chun, Hwang Min-ho, Kim Min-hwan, Pak Yong-gyu, Park Heonho, Yi Min-ju, Yun Tŏg-yŏng, and Yi Yŏn.

That Korean journalists celebrated Irish military victories, political achievements, and prayed that Ireland achieve “absolute independence” are fascinating considering that military struggle, Korean political participation, and “independence thought” were precisely what Japanese rulers had hoped to prevent by liberalizing publishing laws after March 1st, 1919. I argue that the existence of so many of these articles proves that Irish independence was a seminal event that widened Koreans’ horizons on the kinds of anti-colonial resistance that was possible, and that Japanese attempts at controlling Korean discourse often came short of expectations. After the March 1st Movement, the Japanese press gravely underestimated the nationalist, anticolonial zeal of Korean journalists and readers, as well as the publishing capabilities of Korean newspapers, creating an environment in which many nationalist and politically subversive articles could get past overwhelmed and overworked censors. Among such subversive articles, Irish independence was a particularly attractive topic because Ireland had achieved independence as a colony using both nonviolent compromise and violent struggle, appealing to a broad range of Korean readers. Responding to the plethora of Irish independence articles, Japanese authorities ordered an Indefinite Suspension of Publication on the Tonga Ilbo (at the
time, the most popular Korean-language newspaper) in 1920, as well as a legislative crackdown and bureaucratic reorganization from 1925 to 1926. While these efforts, in addition to the peaceful conclusion to the Irish Independence War in 1922, contributed to the decline in frequency of articles about Ireland from the mid 1920s onwards, they failed to limit such discourse because legal loopholes and censorship continued to be incomprehensive, and, as one article from 1933 put it, the Irish Free State had become a “spectacle”\(^\text{12}\) during an age of imperialism.

**Japanese Motives for a Korean Press**

The emergence of a legal Korean press was rooted in Japanese policymakers’ belief that ruling Korea through force alone was not sustainable. After Japan formally annexed Korea in 1910, it ruled Korea through open repression and discrimination described as “Military Rule.” Korea’s first Governor-General, Terauchi Masatake (1852-1919), considered any form of Korean cultural and educational activity or output to be sedition,\(^\text{13}\) and he particularly disliked newspapers.\(^\text{14}\) He banned almost all Korean newspapers and even restricted Japanese newspapers to “just one per region.”\(^\text{15}\) While there were a handful of Korean newspapers and magazines that circulated in the 1910s, many of them were published by Koreans studying abroad in Japan, focused on religion, and did not last more than 2 years before being shut down.\(^\text{16}\) Terauchi instead emphasized reliance on the official press of the Korean Government-General, which had a Japanese (*Keijō Nippō*), Korean (*Maeil Sinbo*), and English (*Seoul Press*) version. Yi Yŏn in his book, “The Control of the Korean Media during the Japanese Occupation,” writes that, during 1910-1919,

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\(^{12}\) Ham Sang-hun, “Chaech’a tongyo hanŭn Aeran tongnip undong ŭi hyŏnsang, yurae, changnae (4)” (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, December 8, 1933).


\(^{14}\) Yi, *Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl*, 82-83.

\(^{15}\) Matsuzaki Tokiben qtd. Yi, *Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl*, 82-83.

\(^{16}\) Hwang Min-ho, *Ilche ha singminji chibae kwălyŏk kwa ŭi kyŏnghyang*, 105.
one could hardly find magazines, books, newspapers, or any published materials in Korean outside Keijo Imperial University or within the Government-General.\textsuperscript{17} However, Terauchi’s crackdown on Korean publications did not stop the production and spread of “underground newspapers,” Korean newspapers and magazines which circulated illegally and secretly.\textsuperscript{18} These included newspapers printed domestically and those published abroad. Such ‘underground newspapers’ played a crucial role in spreading nationalist ideas among the Korean people, and were a contributing factor to the March 1st Movement.\textsuperscript{19} What started out as a handful of activists reading aloud the Korean Declaration of Independence at a restaurant in Seoul spread into a nationwide protest. While anti-Japanese sentiment had been present in Korea since Meiji Japan’s first diplomatic and economic forays into the peninsula in 1876, the size and spread of the protests on March 1st dwarfed anything that had ever happened in Korea before. According to Korean independence activist and historian Pak Ŭn-sik (1859-1925), over 2 million people—around 10\% of the Korean population—had participated in independence demonstrations.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, peasants were by far the movement’s biggest participants, unprecedented in a country where strict class divisions had deprived lower classes of political agency. Of those arrested for suspected involvement on March 1st, two-thirds of them were farmers or working-class laborers.\textsuperscript{21}

While the March 1st Movement ultimately failed to secure Korean independence, it caught the Japanese colonial government completely unprepared and left it in a state of shock. While ‘Military Rule’ had had its critics, its “barbaric”\textsuperscript{22} treatment of Koreans was resoundingly

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{17} Yi, \textit{Ilche kangjŏngi}, 151.
\textsuperscript{18} Yi, \textit{Ilche kangjŏngi}, 277-278.
\textsuperscript{19} Yi, \textit{Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl}, 82-83.
\textsuperscript{20} Pak Ŭn-sik, \textit{Han’guk tongnip undong hyŏlsa} qtd. in Ch’oe Jun, “Singmin t’ongch’i sidae ūi ŏllon t’ujaeng, kū kŏt ũn hanggŏ ū p’yosang,” 28.
\textsuperscript{21} Ch’oe Min-ji and Kim Min-ju, \textit{Ilche ha minjok ŏllŏn saron}, 15.
\textsuperscript{22} Tachibana Naō qtd. in Yi, \textit{Ilche kangjŏngi}, 261.
\end{footnotesize}
blamed by the Japanese public for causing the March 1st Movement. Unable to improve his public image, Governor-General, Hasegawa Yoshimichi (1850-1924), who had succeeded Terauchi in 1916, resigned, and his successor Saitō Makoto (1858-1936) ushered in a new era of colonial administration in August 1919 called “Cultural Rule.” Saitō was one of many Japanese intellectuals, including the incoming Prime Minister Hara Takashi (1856-1921) and the political writer Yoshino Sakuzō (1878-1933), who argued that ruling Korea by the sword alone had threatened national security, damaged Japan’s international reputation, and left Japanese administrators dangerously uninformed about their colonial subjects. He relaxed overt discrimination between Japanese settlers and Koreans by increasing civilian policemen while decreasing military policemen and relaxing legal restrictions on Korean businesses and political organizations.23 A major part of the “Cultural Rule” reforms was the legalization of privately-owned Korean-language newspapers.

Saitō’s concern that Japan was too ignorant about Korean society reveals that legalizing the publication of Korean newspapers was a strategy less of appeasement and more of co-optation. While, on the surface, Saitō’s administration promoted his reforms as a liberalization of the press, addressing Korean people’s demands, and giving Korean people “a chimney to let out the smoke,” these were not at all concessions to the Korean people.24 Saitō and his allies recognized that Japan had gravely underestimated the popularity and power of the Korean independence movement, and they believed that, through newspapers, they could predict future uprisings before they happened. Reacting to the March 1st Movement, pro-Japanese Korean Min Wŏn-sik (1886-1921) claimed that “If we had had even one Korean newspaper, we might have been able to detect the emergence of malcontent ideologies such as national

24 Yi, Ilche kangjŏmgi, 295.
self-determination on the page before the outbreak of disorder,” and argued that pro-Japanese Koreans such as himself could use newspapers also to spread pro-Japanese propaganda.\(^{25}\)

Writing from the Japanese point-of-view, Shirakami Yūkichi (1884-1965), a department head of the Special Higher Police, writes that, in the wake of the March 1st Movement, Japanese administrators prioritized knowledge acquisition over immediate suppression:

> There was a movement among the Korean youth to start publishing newspapers in Korea, and many among them were important leaders of the March 1st Movement. Worried about what sort of bad situations might unfold by granting such political instigators the right to publish, the high-ranking members in the Government-General absolutely opposed giving the Korean youth this right. However, I thought that this was something that should not happen. Otherwise, how will we achieve the slogans ‘Equal benevolence to all’ (ilsi tongin) and ‘expanding the mainland’ (naeji yŏnjang)? Allowing newspapers is indeed a big problem, but because it is a big problem, I explained to the Government-General that it is a good opportunity to see that there are no lies on the page inside and outside.\(^{26}\)

Shirakami’s explanation shows that the Japanese colonial government was well aware of the rewards and risks of allowing Korean newspaper publication. They recognized the risks of letting Koreans, still exhilarated from a large nationalist uprising, publish newspapers that could carry political content. However, a ban on Korean publishing had not stopped Koreans from publishing and distributing newspapers illegally, and the movement of the political discourse underground had prevented the Japanese government from knowing much about the very movement they wanted to defeat: who their leaders were, what they believed, and what they were planning.

Shirakami himself stated that the police information network alone could not completely monitor the activities and thoughts of Korean organizations, but, through newspapers, their ideas would become transparent.\(^{27}\) Creating a space where Koreans could express themselves, which included expressing grievances against Japanese colonial policy, could coax a secretive independence

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\(^{25}\) Pak, Ilche ū ōllón, 77.

\(^{26}\) Shirakami qtd. in Yi, Ilche kangjŏngi, 295.

\(^{27}\) Yi, Ilche kangjŏngi, 295.
movement above ground and allow for better surveillance of its leaders and activities. Any activity that went too far could simply be punished with suspension of publishing. For now, Japanese administrators felt that legalizing Korean newspapers allowed them to prevent a nationalist uprising better than criminalizing them.

**Korean Motives for a Korean Press**

Prospective writers and managers of Korean newspapers were well aware of the cynical Japanese motives behind allowing the publication of Korean newspapers and magazines. While the Japanese government planned to infiltrate and co-opt Korean cultural society, Korean intellectuals planned to take advantage of a loosening in press restrictions to promote Korean nationalism in a more indirect but long-term way. As direct protest had failed to deliver Koreans independence, they hoped to continue promoting Korean nationalism not through direct political struggle but through cooperative advancements in education, economy, and government, which would prepare the peninsula for independence in the future.28

Central to modernizing the Korean people was the creation of a modern press. Kim Chun-yŏn (1895-1971), who had studied political science and law in Japan, recalled meeting with Chang Tŏk-chun (1891-1920), a Korean resident in Japan who worked for various organizations supporting Korean workers and students in Japan: “Don’t we have to enlighten the masses? Running a newspaper will be a shortcut to that.”29 Pak Yong-gyu writes that men like Kim and Chang saw that founding a Korean newspaper was where Japanese and their own interests intersected: “Using the strategy of stressing the need to ‘understand the public sentiment’ to the Government-General and stressing the need to enlighten people and ‘cultivate

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28 Yun, Segye wa singminji, 39.
29 Pak, Ilche ŭi őllŏn, 83.
skills' to domestic audiences, these men pushed forward on newspaper publication.” This is a great example showing how the establishment of Korean newspapers was a product of both Japanese and Korean craftiness. Despite being colonized, Koreans were not merely pawns who got tricked. Knowing Japanese motives while also recognizing their own interests in running a newspaper, they used that to their advantage when negotiating with the Government-General. Looking more closely at the founding and beginnings of the two major newspapers, the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo, we can see more clearly how Korean newspaper managers and journalists exercised the agency, albeit limited, that complicated Japanese plans for press establishment and censorship. The collision between Japanese and Korean plans to out-wit each other and use the policies of Cultural Rule to their benefit produced results the Japanese government did not predict.

**Japanese Co-optation and Korean Agency**

Knowing the power of Korean-language publishing, the Japanese government was extremely selective about which companies it gave this coveted privilege. Those interested in establishing newspapers had to apply for a publishing permit from the Government-General, and permission to cover current events (i.e. political and economic issues) required paying a deposit, which, initially, “only three newspapers and a few magazines” could pay: the Chosŏn Ilbo, Tonga Ilbo and Sisa Sinmun, which began publishing on March 5, April 1st, and April 1st, 1920, respectively. These three papers became known as the Three Newspapers of the People.

What set the Chosŏn Ilbo, Tonga Ilbo, and Sisa Sinmun apart from countless other prospective newspapers was the identity of their founders. The Korean financiers behind these

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30 Pak, Ilche úi òllôn, 88-89.
31 Park Heonho, “Patterns of Censorship in Colonial Korea as Seen Through the Statistics of the Chosen shuppan keisatsu geppo (Publication Police Monthly of Joseon),” 94.
newspapers were granted this source of extraordinary sociopolitical influence because they were either explicitly pro-Japanese Koreans who could use newspapers to spread imperial propaganda to their fellow countrymen or Korean business elites whose extensive ties to Japanese politics and business would prevent them from promoting radical ideologies (i.e. Korean independence and socialism). Min Wŏn-sik, who was the president of the Sisa Sinmun, led the Kungmin Hyŏphoe, a pro-Japanese organization. Ye Chong-sŏk (1872-1955), president of the Chosŏn Ilbo, led the Taejŏng Sirŏp Ch’inmokhoe, another pro-Japanese organization which was one of the few Korean political organizations that could exist during Terauchi’s Military Rule.\(^\text{32}\) As for the Tonga Ilbo, its first president was Pak Yŏng-hyo (1861-1939), a Japanese collaborator who was awarded the noble title of marquis from the Japanese Imperial government after Korea’s formal annexation in 1910,\(^\text{33}\) and was financed by Kim Sŏng-su (1891-1955), a wealthy capitalist who owned the profitable textile company Kyŏngsŏng Pangjik. Many of the newspapers’ editors-in-chief, publishers, and other senior journalistic positions had previously worked in Japanese newspapers such as the Maeil Sinbo, P’yŏngyang Iril Sinmun, and the Ōsaka Asahi Shim bun.\(^\text{34}\) It is also worth noticing that all of these papers were located in the capital, Keijō (Seoul). No Korean newspapers from other regions received a political-and-current-events publishing permit until 1924, highlighting just how restrictive running a daily newspaper was.

Despite the many ties Korean newspaper managers had to Imperial Japan, the Government-General’s control over the newspaper process was challenged from the newspapers’ founding. The Japanese strategy had been to allow no more than three daily privately-owned Korean newspapers, two of them (Sisa Sinmun and Chosŏn Ilbo) being explicitly pro-Japanese

\(^{32}\) Yi, Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl, 82-83.
\(^{33}\) Pak, Ilche ŭi ǒllŏn, 88.
\(^{34}\) Ibid.
and one (*Tonga Ilbo*) of them Korean nationalist. If you include the *Maeil Sinbo*, the Korean-language newspaper of the Government-General, three of the four major Korean-language daily newspapers would represent the imperial Japanese position. But this strategy immediately fell apart due to the agency of Korean journalists and readers. On August 14, 1920—only five months after its establishment—the pro-Japanese *Chosŏn Ilbo*, struggling to attract readers due to its pro-Japanese reputation, underwent a change in management that began a tumultuous journey towards becoming a “nationalist,” and eventually, socialist-leaning, newspaper. The *Sisa Sinmun* was also rejected by Korean readers, receiving the ignominious nickname of “the unread paper.” Soon after its founder Min Wŏn-sik was assassinated by a Korean nationalist in February 1921, the paper shut down. The various newspapers which would take the *Sisa Sinmun*’s spot as the “third paper,” though none of them achieved the influence that the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* did, all proclaimed themselves to be nationalist newspapers.

What is notable about these changes is that these changes were led not by company management but by journalists and consumers. From the beginning, the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo*’s employees had been split between “moderate” and “radical” members, and, in the *Chosŏn Ilbo*’s case, the radical faction successfully drove out the moderates led by Ye Chong-sŏk and installed a new president, Yu Mun-hwan (d.u.), and publisher, Kwŏn Pyŏng-ha (d.u.). The *Tonga Ilbo* was still considered nationalist, but even there, there was a division between more moderate members and radical members. This split was best shown between company leaders, such as Pak Yŏng-hyo and Kim Sŏng-su, and writers such as Yi Sang-hyŏp (1893-1957), Chang Tŏk-chun, Chang Tŏk-su (1894-1947), and Kim Myŏng-sik (1890-1943). And the fact that

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37 Ch’oe and Kim, *Ilche ha minjok*, 63.
38 Ibid.
39 Yun, *Segye wa singminji*, 33.
Korean readers had successfully boycotted the *Sisa Sinmun* to death demonstrates the power of Korean consumers in encouraging newspapers to become more nationalist, even at the cost of Japanese retaliation. After all, newspapers had to make a profit.\(^{(40)}\)

In addition to journalistic independence, daily newspapers had another advantage: daily publishing. Because they published at least two issues (morning and evening) per day, the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* could not be censored before they published. Magazines and other periodicals, which published less frequently (e.g. monthly), had to submit a draft of their issue to the Government-General and implement their edits before publishing.\(^{(41)}\) By contrast, daily newspapers were censored as they printed copies for distribution; if censors examining the latest issue objected to a specific line or article, workers would continue printing with the objectionable parts censored out.\(^{(42)}\) As a result, the censor Kaneda Kaname complained that Japanese censors had little time to deliberate whether an article merited censorship or reference the prevailing censorship standards—they needed to know all of that in advance.\(^{(43)}\)

The schisms and rebellions within the *Chosŏn Ilbo* and (later on) the *Tonga Ilbo* reveal that, from the beginning, the logistical control of censors over newspapers and ideological control of managers over journalists was limited. The elite status of company presidents and board are the key reason behind the common labeling of the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* as “bourgeois right-wing nationalist”\(^{(44)}\) newspapers, a label often used to wrongly assert that these newspapers were not authentically nationalist.\(^{(45)}\) While the Korean economic elite’s numerous ties to Japanese imperial governance prevented them from criticizing imperial rule themselves,

\(^{(40)}\) Ch’oe and Kim, *Ilche ha minjok*, 40-41.
\(^{(41)}\) Hwang, *Ilche ha singminji*, 100.
\(^{(42)}\) Pak, *Ilche ŭi öllŏn*, 35-36.
\(^{(43)}\) Kaneda qtd. in Yi, *Cheguk kwa kömyŏl*, 70.
\(^{(44)}\) Kim Min-hwan et al., *Ilche kangjŏmgji öllonsa yŏn’gu*, 5-6.
\(^{(45)}\) Yun, *Segye wa singminji*, 32.
the journalists whom they employed wrote quite radically anti-imperialist content. Scholars Ch’oe Min-ji and Kim Min-ju, who argue that Korean newspapers were insufficiently nationalist, acknowledge that, “unlike the newspaper management, journalists had an mentality of anti-Japanese resistance.” While the “moderate” Korean bourgeoisie such as Kim Sŏng-su and pro-Japanese political leaders often financed newspapers, it was journalists, who wrote the themselves, who had a greater and more immediate impact on Korean readers. Furthermore, the presence of multiple newspaper options gave Korean readers the power to reward and punish newspapers depending on their level of Korean nationalism. For these reasons, Yun Tŏg-yŏng claims that “the Tonga Ilbo was not a newspaper that represented the point-of-view of the upper-class, landowning, big bourgeoisie Kim Sŏng-su.” The same could be said about the Chosŏn Ilbo, which permanently became a nationalist and socialist newspaper by 1924.

**Korean Interest in ‘The Irish Problem’—1920s**

One of the most important ways in which journalists from the Chosŏn Ilbo and Tonga Ilbo expressed radical, nationalist sentiments was through their support for Irish independence, which became a popular topic in Korea almost immediately after both papers published their first issues on March 5th and April 1st, 1920 respectively. Irish independence was featured on the Tonga Ilbo’s first issue in an article called “The Funeral of the Independence Party Mayor.” The author reported that Tomás Mac Curtain, a politician of the pro-independence party Sinn Féin (We Ourselves) and the Mayor of Cork, had been assassinated by British police on March 20,

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46 Yun, Segye wa singminji, 60.
47 Ch’oe and Kim, Iche ha minjok, 64.
48 Yun, Segye wa singminji, 61.
50 Most Tonga Ilbo editorials from this time period do not include authors’ names in their editorials. As Han Sŏng-hun himself notes, it is difficult to establish the identity of such authors (“1920 nyŏn Tonga Ilbo,” 230). In the rare cases we do have author’s names, I have included it.
1920—11 days ago. Wearing traditional Irish clothes, 8,000 Sinn Féin members participated in the funeral procession, and the majority of the city did not work that day in solidarity.\(^{51}\) Despite it being only a paragraph long and of little direct relevance to Korea, being located on the second page alongside major domestic events such as the forced displacement of Koreans in Jilin Province and rising interest rates from Bank of Chōsen, as well as international events such as Woodrow Wilson’s announcement that he would not seek a third term as president—it must have received outsized attention.\(^{52}\) This was just the beginning: from then on, the *Tonga Ilbo* published news about Ireland nearly every day until September 1920, when it received its first major penalty by Japanese authorities—the Indefinite Suspension of Publication. The *Chosŏn Ilbo* launched its first mention of Ireland on May 20, 1920, a one-sentence report saying, “1000 British troops are reported to have landed in Ireland.”\(^{53}\) Its first article of considerable length was published two days later, which described British efforts to relocate Irish citizens in the south who were loyal to Britain,\(^{54}\) and began publishing regularly on the Irish Independence Movement after early June.\(^{55}\) By the end of 1920, the number of Irish articles in both newspapers had amounted to 260.

Korean interest in Ireland came during Ireland’s greatest anticolonial struggle during its centuries-long history of colonization. In the 1918 United Kingdom general elections, Sinn Féin, a political party advocating for Irish republican separatism, won in Ireland by a landslide. While Irish Home Rule, or self-government within the British Empire, had been a contentious topic in Irish nationalist and British Parliamentary circles since the late 19th century, London’s heavy-handed policies towards Ireland in World War I radicalized Irish politics from supporting

\(^{51}\) “Tongnipptang sjyang ūi changūi” (*Tonga Ilbo*, April 1, 1920).
\(^{52}\) *Tonga Ilbo*, April 1, 1920.
\(^{54}\) “Yŏng tae Aeranch’aek kyŏnghw” (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, May 22, 1920).
\(^{55}\) *Naver News Library*. 
Home Rule to republican separatism. Founded in 1905 by writer and politician Arthur Griffith, Sinn Féin originally supported a “dual monarchy” system similar to that of Austria-Hungary and “passive resistance,” but seized the initiative during World War I to establish itself as the political leader of Irish republicanism. After winning a plurality of votes in 1918, the elected Sinn Féin ministers refused to take their seats in Westminster and instead declared an independent Irish government (Dáil Éireann), and local military escalation between the Irish Republican Army and the Royal Irish Constabulary grew into the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921).

Portrayals of the Irish War of Independence in the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo in 1920 were resoundingly in support of Ireland. While Japanese authorities later accused the Tonga Ilbo in September 1920 for supporting “independence thought” through “ironic and coded language,” Korean journalists, through straightforward language, portrayed the Irish War as a critical opportunity to learn from an ongoing anticolonial movement.

One of the first Tonga Ilbo articles to be published wrote that,

“While Ireland itself is not very important, because it is a problem related to the rise and fall of the world hegemon that is Britain, the world is currently observing very closely on the problem’s progress. The influence and pertinence of [the Irish problem], especially for small and weak nations, which have the same fate as that of Ireland, is even more important.”

About two months later, an article wrote, “When one says ‘independence movement,’ one first thinks of Ireland. Today, the Irish people are waging the fiercest independence movement. As the world knows, Ireland has an area and population less than a quarter of Korea’s, but these people

57 Townshend, Ireland, 82.
58 Ch’oe, “Singmin t’ongch’i,” 36.
59 Yun Tōg-yŏng, “Aillaendū wa singminji.”
60 “Aeran munje ūi yurae (1)” (Tonga Ilbo, April 9, 1920).
have been fighting to escape the control of Britain for centuries.”

Articles from 1920 covered many kinds of current events, but they all came to the same general conclusion: Ireland is relevant to Korea, Ireland is similar to Korea, and Korea could really learn from the scale and ferocity of Irish resistance.

Despite limited communications capabilities, Korean journalists produced detailed, daily commentary on the war in Ireland. On April 7th, less than a week after its founding, a Tonga Ilbo article titled, “The Irish Volunteers’ Strategies of War” reported that the official newspaper of Sinn Féin’s volunteer soldiers was confiscated by the British because it contained Irish volunteer tactics, which included assassinations, ambushes, snipers, and the blocking of streets. In addition to announcing best practices for guerilla warfare to the public of a nation where sporadic military resistance was ongoing in Manchuria, the article justified such tactics by stating that their purpose was to defeat a greater evil: “the strategy of war that the armies of imperialism, which have the sole purpose of conquest, fear most is guerilla warfare, which does not let them rest safely for even one moment nor gives them an opportunity to destroy you.”

Two days later, another article detailed the daring escape of “independence leader” Éamon de Valera from Lincoln Prison in 1919, which involved him sneaking out a drawing of the prison key, Sinn Féin members baking a cake with a replica key inside, and smuggling it into the prison. In addition to military struggle, the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo detailed civilian resistance such as national strikes and fasting to protest the detainment of 56 political prisoners and the antiwar and pro-independence activities of labor organizations in America and Great

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62 “Aeran ŭi ŭiyongbyŏng ŭi chŏnpŏp” (Tonga Ilbo, April 7, 1920).
63 Ch’oe and Kim, Ilche ha minjok, 122.
64 “Aeran ŭi ŭiyongbyong ŭi chŏnpŏp.”
65 Tongnip suryŏng ŭi t’arok (Tonga Ilbo, April 9, 1920).
66 “Aeran p’aŏp hyŏngse taejung” (Tonga Ilbo April 19, 1920).
Britain. The predominance of strikes and labor organizations, as well as military struggle, indicates the influence of socialism among Korean journalists despite it being the bête noire of Imperial Japan. From the articles published in 1920, we see that Irish military and civilian resistance provided inspiration to Koreans, who reported Irish news to deliberately keep the ideas of direct independence, violent struggle, and socialism relevant in a peninsula where such ideas were strictly monitored and suppressed.

The Irish War of Independence also invited Korean writers to learn more about Irish history and culture, and compare them to those of Korea. Korean historical interest in Ireland is best exemplified by “The Origins of the Irish Problem,” a 13-part editorial series published from April 9 to April 21, 1920, in the Tonga Ilbo and is cited by Yun Tŏg-yŏng, Han Sŭng-hun, and Ch’oe Chun as a foundational early Tonga Ilbo article. Written during the Parliamentary debates over whether to grant Ireland dominion status, it condemned the British offer of a dominion as an effort to co-opt the Irish independence movement and the immorality of British colonial rule in general. But before moving on to detailed debates on Irish dominion or self-determination, it gave Korean readers a comprehensive introduction to a history of Ireland from its origins in “Celtic people who came from the middle of the Alps;” to British economic, religious, and cultural oppression; and to the ongoing war and its potential promotion to a colonial dominion. While the stated purpose of the first few editorials is to give historical context for why Ireland is where it is now, these editorials are not purely educational; the author subtly points out similarities between the Irish-British relationship to the Korean-Japanese.

For example, it refutes the superiority complex of Britain: “While, in Korea, everyone knows Britain as the strongest and richest country on earth . . . but it seems like there are few

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67 “Yŏng nodan kwa Aeran soyo” (Tonga Ilbo July 16, 1920).
68 Kim et al., Ilche kangiŏngi, 127.
69 Ch’oe, “Singmin t’ongch’i,” 36.
who are informed about its domestic history. Originally, Britain was not as powerful and large a country as it is today and was once little more than a small and isolated island in the middle of the Atlantic . . .”

This passage blurs the boundary between colonizer and colonized by showing how flexible it is across time and history. The implication is that, if the strong were once weak themselves, perhaps the weak will not remain so forever. The author elaborates on this by detailing how the current power dynamic between Irish and British people was once quite different:

In the olden times, the Irish were superior to the English. While the English people were conquered many times by the Romans, the Irish not only were never conquered by the Romans but also Northern Europeans who often attacked the Roman Empire’s northern border and could not cross the Irish Strait. Even when those Northern people did manage to invade, they not only could not withstand the power of the Irish people but eventually were assimilated by them.

While this is far from an objective or comprehensive account of early Irish history, that is clearly not the author’s purpose. By describing the Roman colonization of Britain and successful Irish resistance, the author argues that British power and Irish weakness is the result of specific historical developments rather than inherent superiority or inferiority, giving dignity to the Irish people despite their marginalized status. This rhetorical strategy is in line with Korean cultural nationalists’ goal to improve the reputation and prestige of Korean culture; even if Korea could not be politically independent, it could still become civilized through cultural development. It is worth noting how much this passage applies to Korea’s relationship with Japan. It was lost on contemporary Korean readers that Japan’s imperial ascent had begun only a generation ago, and that, in antiquity, Korea had been “more developed in the areas of culture and religion,” as even Japanese intellectuals such as Yanaihara Tadao (1893-1961) had said.

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70 “Aeran munje ŭi yurae (1)” (Tonga Ilbo, April 9, 1920).
71 “Aeran munje ŭi yurae (2)” (Tonga Ilbo, April 10, 1920).
72 Yanaihara qtd. in Yun, Segye wa singminji, 162.
“The Origins of the Irish Problem” also explores the contributions of the Irish diaspora in keeping the fight for independence alive. The author states the global influence of Wilson’s self-determination and describes the contributions of the Irish diaspora, particularly Irish-Americans, to the independence movement. Concluding a lengthy description of British colonial efforts to destroy Irish culture, the author states the futility of trying to destroy Irish national consciousness: “The nation, because it is something that is formed by chance, rises and falls, and therefore does not tangibly exist. But the people, because they are formed with great difficulty, cannot be destroyed so easily and therefore exist in reality.”  

The argument that the nation took precedence over the state across space and time was of particular relevance to Korea. Numerous political organizations and leaders had formed among diasporic communities during the colonial period, the most famous of which were the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai and Syngman Rhee and An Ch’ang-ho in America. While political activity in the peninsula was strictly monitored, Koreans abroad provided a crucial source of political thought, resources, inspiration, and proved that the Korean community transcended geographic and political boundaries.

There are also plenty of examples of Korean writers establishing even-less-subtle declarations of solidarity with Irish people, as one, titled, “The Irish People Fasting in Solidarity and Praying for [Terence MacSwiney’s] Release from Prison” does in response to the jailing of Terence MacSwiney, the Sinn Féin mayor of Cork, in August 1920:

I am on the eastern peninsula of Asia, and Ireland is on the western island of Europe, and our races and characters are different, and we have nothing in common. But in seeking to feed our souls for justice, we have much in common. And I cannot restrain the unspeakable emotion with which I hear of Terence James MacSwiney, whose emaciated body, caused by humiliation, is growing worse and worse in the dismal cave. How can this be, O cloudless heavens! Though I am unable to pray in form with the Irish people in

73 “Aeran munje üi yurae (3)” (Tonga Ilbo, April 11, 1920).
body and soul, yet my sincerity imitates their sincerity. And I pray earnestly, God help me!74

Terence MacSwiney died in prison on October 25th, 1920. His death was more than a statistic; Charles Townshend writes that MacSwiney’s hunger strike in prison was “the republican action which did most to radicalize Irish opinion in the autumn of 1920.”75 In addition to thousands of Irishmen, he was mourned by thousands of Koreans. This passage most effectively encapsulates Korean reactions to the Irish Independence War; while so different and far away from them, Korean readers found the Irish people a kindred spirit over their colonized status. In the first year of their existence, legal and mainstream Korean newspapers produced hundreds of highly detailed news reports that went beyond factual updates on the war and explored Irish history, economy, religion, and politics as a way of criticizing colonial rule in Korea. While arguments that Ireland deserved independence and that colonialism itself was an unsustainable form of governance were themselves not the most radical ideas circulating at the time, the fact that they could be published in a mainstream newspaper to millions of Koreans is remarkable. It is important to remember that press legalization during Cultural Rule was accompanied by an expanded police department and new censorship rules, making direct criticism of Japanese rule very difficult in reality.76 Also, absolute independence and violent struggle were causes that Korean cultural leaders had put on hold for the gradual, legal advancement of Koreans within the Japanese imperial system.77

Irish independence was also an important topic of interest among Japanese intellectuals and policymakers. Irish independence articles were published in major Japanese-language newspapers, as well as the Maeil Sinbo, the Korean-language paper of the Japanese colonial

74 “Aeran ok chung chŏlsik tongmaeng kwa simin ūi pangsŏk kido” (Tonga Ilbo, September 4, 1920).
75 Townshend, Ireland: The 20th Century, 94-96.
76 Yun, Segye wa singminji, 48.
77 Han, “1920 nyŏn Tonga Ilbo,” 251.
government. In fact, many Korean journalists got their sources about Irish current events from Japanese correspondents in London. Some Japanese intellectuals, such as Yanaihara Tadao, noted historical and cultural parallels between Ireland and Korea and attacked British colonial policies of forced assimilation, economic exploitation, and racial pseudoscience to criticize and warn Japanese imperial policymakers to change course. But more often, Irish independence was used to warn Japanese leaders against liberalizing their rule of Korea too much. British appeasement efforts such as granting dominion status and expanding suffrage had not only failed to deter Irish independence but had accelerated it, and thus Irish independence became an “exemplary lesson” of what not to do in Korea.

A brief survey of major Irish newspapers shows that Korean interest in Ireland was comparatively much greater than Irish interest in Korea, though it is worth noting that there were a few articles published that condemned Japanese rule in Korea and established a link between Korea and Ireland as fellow colonies and Christians. One article published in 1921 wrote that “Korea is being subjected by Japan to a system of repression which, although severe enough, is nothing approaching that which is exercised by the British Government upon Ireland.” Another article, titled, “Fellow Sufferers,” in a tone strikingly similar to that of the Tonga Ilbo article about Terence MacSwiney, wrote “It is a long step from Ireland to Korea, but there seems to be a link of fellowship between the two nations.” In the early-mid 1920s, Irish articles about Korea were far fewer in number than Korean articles about Ireland and focused on natural disasters, European voyages, and Japanese aggression as a problem of Asian instability. But the two

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78 Han, “1920 nyŏn Tonga Ilbo,” 226.
80 Han, “1920 nyŏn Tonga Ilbo,” 242.
82 “London Office, 68 Fleet St., E.C. Monday Morning” (Irish Independent, June 13, 1921).
83 “Fellow Sufferers” (Irish Examiner, June 14, 1921).
articles above show that the political link between Korea and Ireland was also a topic in Ireland itself, and when Irish articles talked about Japanese rule in Korea, they did not hesitate to mention its exploitative nature, although many came to the conclusion that, however badly Japan treated Korea, it was nothing compared to the Irish experience under British rule. 84

The Indefinite Suspension of Publication (Mugi Chŏnggan)

How were such articles allowed to be published in the first place? It is obviously not due to subdued Korean reporting; the majority of articles directly expressed anticolonial solidarity with Ireland. Neither can we attribute it to Japanese ignorance. These articles were in complete support of Irish independence and article series like the “Origins of the Irish Problem” were featured over many days. From their founding in March and April 1920 until the end of 1921, the Chosŏn Ilbo and Tonga Ilbo published, on average, over one Irish article a day, and articles on the Irish Independence War were mentioned until the mid 1930s.

Indeed, the Japanese government noticed and retaliated. On September 25, 1920, only 5 months after publishing its first issue, the Government-General ordered an Indefinite Suspension of Publication to the Tonga Ilbo which would last 108 days. What had been the last straw for the Japanese government was the publication of the article “Let us Reevaluate the Chesa 85 Problem,” which criticized the worship of objects sacred to the imperial family as idolatry. However, the Government-General explained in an official statement statement that, in addition to the attack on Japanese royal traditions, the Tonga Ilbo was guilty of a more serious crime: “Using the Irish Problem to satirize the hearts of the Korean people cheering on the British rebels to heighten the spirit of rebellion,” 86 and through the Irish independence Movement, speaking of the

84 “Korea—And Ireland!” (Evening Herald, January 25, 1921).
85 ‘Chesa’ (祭祀) refers to Korean ancestral rituals.
86 Yu, “Tonga Ilbo ch’angganho.”
“resurrection of Korea” and making Korean independence seem inevitable.\(^87\) Over the months of 1920, the Korean press’ staunch support of Irish independence had frustrated the Government-General enough to deliver its first major legal action against the *Tonga Ilbo*.

The Indefinite Suspension of Publication was the second-highest penalty a newspaper could receive, after a permanent shutdown by the government. It meant being forbidden from publishing for a variable amount of time that would be determined by the Government-General. The *Chosŏn Ilbo* was the first to receive an Indefinite Suspension of Publication on August 27, 1920, shortly after transitioning to a Korean nationalist management, for an article which reported on Korean independence demonstrations in response to an American legation’s visit to Korea, as well as an assassination attempt on Saitō Makoto.\(^88\) It had lasted only a week, but just three days after the ban was lifted (September 5), it published an article called “The foolish Korean Government-General Authorities, Why Did You Order a Suspension of Publishing to Our Newspaper?”\(^89\) which brought about another Indefinite Suspension of Publication lasting two months.

Receiving an Indefinite Suspension of Publication brought financial hardship (newspapers that could not publish could not make money). After being indefinitely suspended twice, the *Chosŏn Ilbo*, which was not as well-funded as the *Tonga Ilbo*, returned to pro-Japanese management under Song Pyŏng-jun (1857-1925), the leader of a pro-Japanese organization called the *Ilchinhoe*, and an instrumental figure in Japan’s annexation of Korea. It was not until 1924 that the *Chosŏn Ilbo* would once again be considered nationalist again, this time, until it, along with all other Korean newspapers, were shut down in 1940.\(^90\) But in the early 1920s, an

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\(^87\) “Ponbo parhaeng chŏngji wa ch’ongdokpu ŭi chujang” qtd. in Han, “1920 nyŏn *Tonga Ilbo*,” 226.

\(^88\) Yi, *Ilche kangjŏngi*, 288.

\(^89\) Yi, *Ilche kangjŏngi*, 288.

\(^90\) Ch’oe, “Singmin t’ongch’i,” 39.
Indefinite Suspension of Publication was a penalty that large Korean newspapers were willing to risk in order to attract readers and claim the role of the “voice of the Korean people.” The demise of the *Sisa Sinmun* and early financial troubles of the *Chosŏn Ilbo* shows that Korean readers, though not as powerful as the Government-General, could still inflict economic punishment on Korean newspapers which they viewed as insufficiently nationalist. Worried that the *Chosŏn Ilbo* might look more patriotic because it had already suffered two Indefinite Suspensions of Publication, Ch’oe Min-ji and Kim Min-ju believe that the *Tonga Ilbo* may have deliberately published “Let us Reevaluate the Chesa (祭祀) Problem” in the hopes of receiving the penalty themselves.91

Even from the perspective of Japanese censors, issuing an Indefinite Suspension of Publication was not a triumph over radical nationalism. Rather, the censors’ verdict reflected shock and disappointment that Koreans had not responded to relaxed press laws with gratitude and more moderate attitudes towards Japanese rule but had taken advantage of them to make discussions of independence and anticolonialism mainstream. Explaining its decision to issue the first Indefinite Suspension of Publication to the *Tonga Ilbo*, the Government-General explained, “At the time of founding, we had hoped Marquis Pak Yŏng-hyo would lead the *Tonga Ilbo* Company under a moderate ideology and promote the prosperity of the Japanese-Korean people and contribute to the development of culture.”92 A conversation between Maruyama Tsurukichi (1883-1956), the Government-General Chief of Police, and Kim Sŏng-su shortly after the *Tonga Ilbo*’s Indefinite Suspension of Publication reveals the stress and strategizing of both Japanese and Korean leaders behind nationalist press provocations in the early years of Cultural Rule:

91 Ch’oe and Kim, *Ilche ha minjok*, 64; Ch’oe, “Singmin t’ongch’i ” Han’guk sinminsna non’go,” 73.
92 *Tonga Ilbo* (February 12, 1921), qtd. in Ch’oe and Kim, *Ilche ha minjok*, 65.
Maruyama: I’ll ask you one thing, Mr. Kim. Did you think that insulting the symbols of the imperial family, to such an extent, would bring no consequences?

Kim: Doesn’t the fact that we suffered an Indefinite Suspension of Publication make it obvious?

Maruyama: At least you know that much . . . from here, the Tonga Ilbo must progress in a more reasonable direction. If you can promise me that much, we can end the Indefinite Suspension of Publication as early as tomorrow. What do you think?

Kim: You do not know what you are talking about. Because the Tonga Ilbo is the newspaper of not one person but of all 20 million (Korean) people, it’s funny to think that I can change this with a promise.

Maruyama: Mr. Kim, if even you are stubborn like this, the Tonga Ilbo will never again see the light of day.

Kim: Do you mean you will shut it down?

Maruyama: Of course. While it is not our original intent, we would have no choice.

Kim: Can you do this?

Maruyama: Why would you think we cannot?

Kim: We have received as severe a punishment as we can get; to receive another punishment would be strange, and to end the Tonga Ilbo because I spoke openly would mean the Cultural Rule of the Government-General would have no ground to stand on . . . 93

Kim called Maruyama’s bluff. On January 10th, 1921, 108 days later, the suspension on publication was lifted.94 While dialogue is sourced from a post-liberation biography of Kim himself, which has incentives to emphasize his Korean nationalist activities, it is nevertheless a great example of the negotiations and threats on both sides in this early stage of the Korean press, and proves that the Korean press actively contested the limits of colonial disobedience. That the Tonga Ilbo emerged from this incident relatively unscathed also proves the close

93 Inch’on Kim Sŏng-su chŏn qtd. in Ch’oe and Kim, Ilche ha minjok, 66-67.
94 Yi, Ilche kangjŏngi, 302.
relationship between the Tonga Ilbo management and Japanese administration; they were quick to forgive what might have ended smaller magazines. For example, Chang Tŏk-su, a well-known Marxist writer in the Tonga Ilbo, was able to study journalism at the University of Oregon in 1923, which, interestingly, was reported in an Irish newspaper in 1925. The same article also stated that Chang was now studying Political Science at Columbia University and writing a thesis on “the Marxian theory of government.”

Chang was not alone among his fellow journalists at the Tonga Ilbo, a company funded by one of Korea’s biggest capitalists, for having socialist sympathies.

While the Japanese administration folded their hand this turn, they began to address the legal and bureaucratic concerns that, in addition to ideological enthusiasm, had made comprehensive censorship nearly impossible in the early 1920s. At the start of the Cultural Rule period, Japanese censors, underestimating the amount Koreans would publish, had reformed publishing laws while hardly changing the censorship process or the structure of the related department. Daily newspapers published at least twice a day (morning and evening issue), and Japanese censors were so overwhelmed by the amount of material they had to examine that the job began straining their very health. We can safely assume that in the first few months, Japanese censors were quite overwhelmed by the volume of material they had to examine. Meanwhile, Korean journalism about Ireland evolved as the emergence of an independent Irish state became a realistic possibility.

95 “An Eastern Daily: Korean Editor Believes in Up-to-Date Methods” (Evening Herald, June 13, 1925).
96 Yi, Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl, 64.
Korean Interest in Irish “Self-Governance”

The Indefinite Suspension of Publication seems to have had little impact on newspapers’ interest in Ireland; Irish independence articles continued were mentioned frequently until 1922, and sporadically mentioned for the remainder of the 1920’s with a slight resurgence in the 1930s. A ceasefire in July 1921 saw a peaceful conclusion to the Irish War of Independence, and the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed in December 1921, established the Irish Free State, a self-governing dominion within the British Empire. While the Anglo-Irish Treaty saw the establishment of de facto self-rule, the provisions of the Treaty, including those that Ireland remain a unit within Great Britain and that members of the Parliament swear an oath of allegiance to King George V, meant that Ireland was not the completely independent republic that many Irish people had voted for in the 1918 general election. The growing divide between those who supported and those who opposed the Anglo-Irish treaty led to the Irish Civil War (1922-23), which resulted in the pro-treaty faction’s decisive win. As military hostilities (with Britain, then with anti-Treaty Irishmen) ended and the formation of a semi-independent Irish state began to take shape, the substance and authenticity of Irish “self-governance” provided new fuel for Korean interest in Irish current events. Articles written after the conclusion of the war focused less on epic narrations of Irish martyrdom and sacrifice but more on the postwar negotiations, international recognition, and Irish domestic politics, features that could support the argument that Ireland was at least a de facto independent nation. But articles from this period were still overwhelmingly in support of Ireland, not hesitating to describe the injustice of British colonialism and characterizing self-government as a transition state between colony and “absolute independence.”
Irish self-governance had been frequently discussed since the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo*’s founding in April 1920. In Parts 11-13 of “The Origins of the Irish Problem,” the author reviewed the basic arguments for and against making Ireland a dominion of the British Empire, but ultimately favored the side against for three reasons: “the history of Britain-Irish relations is too tragic”\(^97\) to be solved by promoting Ireland to a dominion, Irish independence enjoyed support from not only Irishmen but also radical politicians and laborers in Britain, and that British efforts to make Ireland a dominion were not concessions but a sly move to undermine the Irish independence movement.

The author offers a prescient analysis of Britain’s decision to offer Ireland the status of dominion, which mirrors Japanese motives for relaxing press restrictions, and of initiating Cultural Rule in general. He accuses Britain of offering dominion status as a “trick to eradicate ideas of independence,”\(^98\) which they resorted to only when it became clear that they were unlikely to maintain control by keeping the status quo: “The reason Britain is currently suffering significant pain regarding the Ireland problem cannot be denied as the price paid for merging through military force and using all means of power, politics, and experience to oppress the Irish people. Honestly, the Christian teaching that ‘he who wields the sword perishes by the sword’ feels one level truer.”\(^99\) This specific criticism is carefully chosen, for it applies to Korea during the era of Cultural Rule. After the March 1st Movement, Japanese authorities realized it was impossible to rule Korea through force alone and shifted their efforts from suppressing to unmasking the independence movement that had caused the unexpected mass uprising. Allowing Korean-language newspapers and magazines was part of the effort to co-opt the Korean intellectual class by giving them greater cultural autonomy while firmly within the boundaries of

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\(^97\) “Aeran munje ūi yurae (13)” (*Tonga Ilbo*, April 21, 1920).
\(^98\) Ibid.
\(^99\) Ibid.
Japanese colonial law. The founding of the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo was part of this co-optation effort, so the writer’s warning to readers about Britain’s self-serving motives behind granting Ireland more autonomy within the imperial sphere subtly points out the Japanese intentions behind liberalized press laws and reminds Korean readers that colonialism, no matter how enlightened, is inherently exploitative and that absolute independence should be the ultimate goal.

But there were complex layers to Korean views about Irish self-governance. Consider the article, “A Year of Governor-General Saitō’s Rule,” which evaluated Saitō Makoto’s first year in power and ran on the front page of the Tonga Ilbo from August 13 to August 16, 1920. While the author criticized Saitō’s political reforms as purely cosmetic, he argued that devolving more power in Korea to the Korean people would alleviate Japanese anxieties of Korean unrest, essentially arguing that Korean self-governance was the solution. To support his argument, the author used none other than Ireland. Speaking about William E. Gladstone, a British Liberal politician who had introduced the first Irish Home Rule bill to Parliament in 1886, the author praised Gladstone as a wise politician who had foreseen that Irish-British relations would worsen to the present state, and had tried to prevent it through “humane” rule, by which he meant self-governance. Had Gladstone succeeded in his efforts in 1886, the Irish War would not have occurred, implying that, had Japan ruled Korea more humanely, neither would have the March 1st Movement.

As the Irish Independence War inched towards a peaceful conclusion, Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo articles saw a rise in detailed political analyses of what an “self-ruled” overseas dominion actually was and what favorable assessments of “self-rule” would be. Whereas the

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100 Yi, Ilche kangjōngi, 278.
101 “1 nyŏn kan Chaedŭng ch’ŏngdok ŭi chŏngch’i” (Tonga Ilbo, August 16, 1920).
102 Ibid.
“The Origins of the Irish Problem” had famously opposed a dominion status because it sacrificed absolute independence, articles began to go into what Ireland could do as an overseas dominion. During December 1920, one article explained that, as Irish fighting grew fiercer, Britain was left with three options: govern Ireland as a dominion like South Africa or Canada; give Ireland additional rights such as having its own military, diplomatic relations, and tariffs; or resort to the harshest possible military force to end the independence war.\(^{103}\) As the prospect of a complete British victory and return to the status quo grew dim, debates over what Ireland’s endgame would be—if it should accept a dominion rule, how much independence was enough independence—dominated the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo*.

While Korean writers (as well as many Irish people) were still attracted to the achievement of complete independence of an undivided Ireland,\(^{104}\) the period 1921-1923 saw the rise of more optimistic assessments of Ireland becoming an overseas dominion. Using Canada and South Africa as proof of (what Korean writers viewed as) successful British dominions, Korean journalists hoped Ireland would follow the same path towards peace and prosperity within a more humane British Empire. A *Chosŏn Ilbo* article about the ceasefire signed on July 11, 1921 praised South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts’ instrumental role in mediating Irish and British leaders to a peace deal. The writer claimed that Smuts was uniquely qualified for this task because he, like the Irish, had fought the British in the Boer War twenty years ago, but then, as a “pro-British” Prime Minister of South Africa, “sang praises of the honor to be part of a just and free British Empire.”\(^{105}\) Another change reflected in this article was a growing disillusionment with violent struggle, which had been lamented but considered a necessary means of fighting colonial injustice. Smuts’ role in the peace deal was praised for “creating, in

\(^{103}\) “Aeran tongnip undong ūi wŏn’ìn” (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, December 12, 1920).

\(^{104}\) “Aeran taet’ongnyŏng ūi Yŏng chean kŏjŏlmun” (*Tonga Ilbo*, September 9, 1921).

\(^{105}\) “Aeran taet’ongnyŏng ūi hyujŏn sŏn’go” (*Chosŏn Ilbo*, July 16, 1921).
one day of stay, an air of peace,” especially since “until recently, Ireland had been a battlefield of winds of flesh and rains of blood,” where “retributive violence and riots were repeated infinitely.” The condemnation of violence in general is a markedly different attitude from the 1920 articles, which condemned violence as an instrument of colonialism while eagerly narrating the daring exploits of Irish independence fighters.

Korean writers’ growing support for home rule did not mean they had changed their stance on the justness of Irish independence. Korean writers remained as supportive of Irish independence as ever, and those who supported a dominion did so because they believed that Ireland would become de facto independent as more and more British colonies became self-ruled federation. One article from the Tonga Ilbo claimed that, while there was a need to carefully observe the status of the Irish people within the British empire, “the British Empire of today is not the British Empire of yesterday.” But this article is far from sympathizing with the British, colonial point-of-view. The writer was optimistic about Ireland’s future as a British dominion because he believed dominions were “de facto independent countries” and the transition of Canada, South Africa, and Ireland from colonies to dominions meant that, someday, Britain would be known as “a federation of free peoples.” In a complete reversal from “The Origins of the Irish Problem,” in which Irish dominion was refuted using the idea that “the history of Britain-Irish relations is too tragic,” the author makes a very optimistic prediction: “I believe that British-Irish relations will escape their tragic history and enjoy bright light, peace, freedom,

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106 Ibid.
107 “Yŏng Ae hyŏpchŏng sŏngnip Yŏngjeguk ŭi sŏngjil kwa Aeran inmin ŭi chiwi” (Tonga Ilbo, December 9, 1921).
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty itself expressed this concept as a “community of nations known as the British Empire,” which the writers likely translated into Korean as “chayu kungmin ŭi yŏnbang.” I have chosen to directly translate the Korean writing (a federation of free peoples) rather than copy the wording of the original treaty to highlight the author’s emphasis of “free peoples.”
111 “Aeran munje ŭi yurae (13)”
happiness, prosperity, and development.” Rather than a trick to distract Irish people from true independence, the author portrayed a dominion as the very transition to it.

But how did Korean writers support their optimistic views about a dominion when Ireland had clearly compromised with Britain? Overall, the Irish Independence War, while it did not achieve “absolute independence,” was seen as a success. While military uprising and foreign aid had fueled Irish independence during the war, the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo believed Ireland’s independence and sovereignty during peacetime would be upheld by a stable government, diplomatic recognition, and official participation in international affairs. An article published shortly before the ceasefire reported that the American Federation of Labor had passed a resolution calling on the United States government to recognize the Republic of Ireland and had lodged a complaint against Great Britain for the military abuses it had committed in Ireland. A few days later, another article reported de Valera calling on all of Ireland to celebrate America’s independence on the Fourth of July, and that crowds of Irishmen assembled with small American flags in their hands. The Tonga Ilbo marked an important occasion for Ireland after the Anglo-Irish treaty went into full effect in December 1922: Ireland would participate, for the first time, in an international tariff conference. Ireland’s ability to decide how it taxes its people and imposes tariffs (against Northern Ireland), it claimed, meant that it was a de facto independent nation.

Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo articles from 1921 through 1923 reveal that, as greater Irish autonomy became a realistic outcome of the war, they developed, in addition to Sinn Féin’s uncompromising anticolonial struggle, an interest in the political compromises they made with

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112 “Yŏng Ae hyŏpchŏng.”
113 “Aeran konghwaguk sŭngin” (Chosŏn Ilbo, June 27, 1921).
114 “Aeran kwa Mi tongnipche” (Tonga Ilbo, July 9, 1921).
115 “Aeran ŭi kukohejŏk sŭngin (Tonga Ilbo, April 7, 1923).
Britain to secure Irish autonomy. Han Sūng-hun writes that the uncompromising, violent, and populist nature of the war attracted Tonga Ilbo journalists and management, despite the fact that the Korean cultural movement sacrificed precisely those values for a top-down, nonviolent, and cooperative advancement of Koreans within the Japanese Empire. But according to Yun Tŏg-yŏng, the strategy used by Sinn Féin to lead Ireland to independence, was a mix of compromise and non-compromise. For example, they initially had participated in the British-organized 1918 Irish General Elections on a platform that advocated independence. Once they won, however, they refused to participate in Parliament in London and formed their own in Dublin, effectively declaring independence. While they fought Britain in a war, they also ended it using peaceful diplomacy and compromise, ultimately opting for de facto independence as a dominion within the British Empire. From Sinn Féin’s political success, Korean writers learned the importance of having a legalized political space and a nonviolent political strategy. The most revealing evidence to support this viewpoint is that, while the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo had supported the radical Sinn Féin over the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party during the independence war, they favored Pro-Treaty forces during the Irish Civil War in 1922-23. They ultimately wished for complete independence for Ireland, though, but also believed in working towards it through realistic means.

**Japanese Crackdown, 1925-1926**

While the Irish Independence Movement attracted a lot of interest in the early 1920s, foreign events in general were widely reported on with the help of Japanese correspondents in Europe.

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116 Han, “1920 nyŏn Tonga Ilbo,” 251-252.
117 Yun, Segye wa singminji, 177-178.
118 Yun, Segye wa singminji, 172-173, 178.
119 Yun, Segye wa singminji, 175.
and elsewhere. Kim Min-hwan’s research on the political beliefs of the two newspapers shows that, from 1920 to 1940, foreign current events were the topic of over 30% of Tonga Ilbo editorials and 36% of Chosŏn Ilbo editorials.\(^{120}\) This statistic is more remarkable considering that the proportion of articles covering foreign events remained similar in the 1930s, when the beginning of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria caused an even greater crackdown on the Korean press. The Tonga Ilbo tended to focus on Europe and America, while the Chosŏn Ilbo additionally focused on the Soviet Union due to their socialist leaning. In addition to the enduring interest in the outside world, the popularity of socialism and communism as a complement to Korean nationalism rose dramatically.\(^{121}\) We can see this through the fact that, from 1925 to 1926, the Chosŏn Ilbo faced its third and the Tonga Ilbo its second Indefinite Suspension of Publication, which they had not faced since the year 1920—both for publishing articles positively portraying the Soviet Union.\(^{122}\)

Increasing Korean interest in radical, international ideologies led to Japanese authorities’ cracking down on Korean publications in the mid 1920s. Previous laws such as the Public Safety Law (1907) and Order No. 7 (1912) were applied more strictly to newspaper articles expressing independence, radical, and communist ideologies. And new legislation was passed on May 8, 1925: the Safety Preservation Law.\(^{123}\) Concerned with the growing influence of socialism and communism in both Japan and Korea, the Japanese government criminalized, on paper, the “motives to change government bonds and the system of private property”, which, in reality, was any political dissent they found distasteful. In 1926, Japan restructured the police department,

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\(^{120}\) Kim et al., Ilche kangjŏngi, 56-57, 74.

\(^{121}\) Ch’oe and Kim, Ilche ha minjok, 123.

\(^{122}\) The Political Relationship between Korea and Russia” (Chosŏn Ilbo, September 8, 1925); “To the Korean Peasant from the Peasant International Headquarters (Krestintern)” (Tonga Ilbo, March 1, 1926). Yi, Ilche kangjŏngi, 289, 303.

\(^{123}\) Hwang, Ilche ha singminji, 110.
which, despite having been expanded, had not changed significantly since March 1st, 1919.\textsuperscript{124} Previously, the Special Higher Police had been responsible for stopping crime on the streets and on the printed page.\textsuperscript{125} In 1926, the Government-General divided the police force into two: the Public Safety Division, which would be responsible for keeping order in the streets, and Publication Division, which would censor published materials such as the press, radio, and film. In 1927, a Thought Section was established which could prosecute dissenters with “thought crime.” The consecutive legal reforms of ’25, ’26, and ’27 were the directly motivated by the unexpectedly large volume of published Korean content in the early 1920s:

In short, the direct reason behind the division of responsibilities was, in addition to the increase in work following a sharp rise in quantity of each published content type, movie censorship tasks, which had been managed in a few provinces, first became incorporated into the Police Department’s responsibilities. But, not even including this, it was because the tasks of the Special Higher Police increased so much that the officers’ health became a concern.\textsuperscript{126}

That these legislative crackdowns were implemented in the mid 1920s instead of at the onset of Cultural Rule in late 1919 is the first indicator that the Japanese government had underestimated Korean publishing power and had to dramatically upgrade its legal and bureaucratic resources. This shows Korean newspapers were at the forefront of disseminating nationalist, socialist, and other dissident ideas to the public, and that Korean newspapers took the initiative at the beginning of Cultural Rule, forcing Japanese policymakers to react.

These legislative changes did coincide with a decrease in the mention of Irish articles, but had a mixed impact when it came to changing the political orientation of the Tonga Ilbo and Chosón Ilbo in the 1920s. We see a decrease in mention in Irish Independence Articles by 1923, but the decline in Irish interest can also be attributed to the end of the major events leading to the

\textsuperscript{124} Yi, Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl, 63.
\textsuperscript{125} Yi, Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{126} Yi, Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl, 67.
Irish Free State—the Irish Independence War, Anglo-Irish Treaty, and Irish Civil War. The Irish State had achieved de facto independence as a British dominion by defeating not only British troops but also anti-Treaty Irish discontents.

The Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo responded to the specialized and nationally-controlled censorship in different ways. Ch’oe Min-ji and Kim Min-ju write that the Tonga Ilbo, which had been considered the most nationalist paper in the early 1920s, began to submit to stricter Japanese censorship guidelines, which manifested in two scandals. In 1924, an editorial titled “The Aspirations of the People” gained notoriety by criticizing the recklessness of the anti-Japanese movement and arguing Koreans should campaign for political rights “within the range allowed in Korea.”127 This article was met with immediate backlash, including calls by Korean students in Japan to boycott the paper and a condemnation of the newspaper by the Shanghai Provisional Government.128 The other major scandal happened when Pak Ch’un-gŭm, a leader of a pro-Japanese organization, lured Tonga Ilbo owner Kim Sŏng-su and president Song Chin-u into a restaurant, threatened them with a pistol, and demanded 3,000 won. Both compiled with Pak and declined the press charges against him, even denying to prosecutors that anything major had taken place between them.129 That one of the most powerful Korean businessmen and the president of a nationalist newspaper submitted so meekly to a pro-Japanese thug made the Tonga Ilbo look like a pawn to the Japanese, and the Tonga Ilbo began suffering a decline in credibility. The Chosŏn Ilbo began the opposite trajectory; in 1924, it returned to Korean nationalist management130 and, taking advantage of the Tonga Ilbo’s declining popularity, sought to take its spot as the “Voice of the People” in the mid 1920s. Unlike the Tonga Ilbo, the Chosŏn

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127 “Minjokchŏk kyŏngnyun” (Tonga Ilbo, January 2-6, 1924).
128 Ch’oe and Kim, Ilche ha minjok, 128-129.
129 Ch’oe and Kim, Ilche ha minjok, 135-136.
Ilbo after 1924 took a firm stance against self-government in Korea, viewing it as a betrayal of the independence movement.\(^{131}\)

Regardless of the decisions made by newspaper management, Japanese efforts to tighten censorship and co-opt newspaper management were still by no means comprehensive; in the late 1920s, the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* were still considered havens of nationalist and socialist thought. Prominent Korean communist Sŏ Tae-suk said at Comintern in 1928 that even though he considered the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* “liberal bourgeois” newspapers, it was so hard to publish socialist materials under Japanese censorship that these papers were still the best way to communicate socialist thought with the masses.\(^{132}\) Ch’oe Min-ji and Kim Min-ju also acknowledge that, from 1923 to 1928, socialist and nationalist movements grew rapidly.\(^{133}\) Part of the reason was that the majority of newspaper readership was young people, the generation most receptive to these ideas, so the newspapers employed journalists from Korea Communist Party and other leftist organizations such as the Puk’unghoe, Sŏl Ch’ŏngnyŏnhoe, and Hwayohoe\(^ {134}\) in the mid 1920s.\(^ {135}\) The presence of dedicated members of these organizations in public-facing newspapers despite the legislative crackdowns by the Japanese government shows the power of Korean readers as consumers to challenge imperial plans to co-opt their newspapers.

More quantitative evidence reveals that advanced censorship reform could not contain nationalist articles. While Yi Min-ju, in *Empire and Censorship*, argues that articles supporting Indian, Irish, Philippine independence tended to be censored,\(^ {136}\) censorship statistics proves that the vast majority of Irish independence articles were not removed from newspapers. From 1926

\(^{131}\) Ch’oe and Kim, *Ilche ha minjok*, 144.

\(^{132}\) Kim et al., *Ilche kangjŏngi*, 127.

\(^{133}\) Ch’oe and Kim, *Ilche ha minjok*, 166.

\(^{134}\) Kim et al., *Ilche kangjŏngi*, 130.

\(^{135}\) Kim et al., *Ilche kangjŏngi*, 133-134.

\(^{136}\) Yi, *Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl*, 92-93.
to 1930, a total of 490 articles were confiscated from Korean newspapers.\textsuperscript{137} Those censored for reporting on “the independence and nationalist movements of other peoples” amount to only 19, though it is possible articles about Irish independence were placed under other categories. Because there are a total of 1,450 articles from Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo mentioning Ireland from 1920 to 1930,\textsuperscript{138} it becomes mathematically clear that the vast majority of articles mentioning and supporting Irish independence appeared in Korean newspapers.\textsuperscript{139} Further supporting this evidence is the fact that Korean and Japanese records of important articles confiscated in the Tonga Ilbo (both Korean and Japanese records) show no articles on the Irish Independence movement.\textsuperscript{140}

One of the reasons Korean newspapers got away with publishing so many articles on Irish independence was that they found many ways to escape censorship of newspaper articles. The simplest was disobedience:

A high speed rotary press can produce 100,000 copies per hour. The rotary press which newspaper companies in Seoul had access to could print 20,000, if you increase the speed, 30,000 copies per hour. If a newspaper company which had two of these machines were to be told “please stop the machine,” they could nevertheless keep the machine running while saying, ‘we have stopped the machine,’ and after printing every copy, censor the very last copy to submit to the government while releasing everything else.\textsuperscript{141}

The Japanese and Korean battle for the control of newspapers was not only an ideological but also a math problem. A newspaper company possessing two of these machines could each print at least 40,000 copies per hour—meaning that every second Japanese censors delayed meant over 11 copies potentially released to the public. Taking advantage of their printing

\textsuperscript{137} Yi, Cheguk kwa kŏmyŏl, 86, 159. By comparison, Yi Min-ju (the author) writes that 504 articles were confiscated from 1920 to 1925, with 13 flagged under “independence and nationalist movements of other peoples.” Yi Yŏn calculates a slightly lower figure of 443 articles confiscated from 1920 to 1925, and 469 articles confiscated from 1926 to 1930 (300). I have chosen to include Yi Min-ju’s figures because they categorize the confiscated articles by topic.

\textsuperscript{138} Naver News Library.

\textsuperscript{139} Naver News Library.

\textsuperscript{140} Ilchŏng ha Tonga Ilbo apsu sasŏlchip; Onmon shinbun sashiosae kiji shūroku (Tōa Nippō).

\textsuperscript{141} Tsune Midori qtd. in Pak, Ilche ūi ŏllŏn, 186-187.
capabilities, newspapers tried to publish articles carrying sensitive content as quickly as possible, before Japanese censors, over the phone, ordered them to stop—but as Tsune Midori details, sometimes journalists even defied censors’ orders.\textsuperscript{142} If a newspaper did not want to directly defy the censors, they could also replace sensitive content with symbols such as circles, asterisks, and x’s so that the majority of the article could still be published and read.

However, such tactics did not escape the notice of Japanese censors. Even if censorship evasion did not succeed, newspapers could still present the failed opportunity as a badge of honor, writing in place of the censored article, “Regarding the issue we published on [this date] with [this serial number], we have removed the parts that drew the ire of the authorities and published it in an extra edition. We sincerely apologize to our readers for the delay.”\textsuperscript{143} However, the accumulation of minor fines, arrests of writers, and more severe penalties like the Indefinite Suspension of Publication, which, if it lasted long enough, could financially starve even the biggest newspapers, were enough of a punishment to discourage Korean newspapers from defying censors too often. Pak Yong-gyu, who describes many of these tactics, acknowledges that the biggest censorship came in the form of Korean self-censorship to prevent financial loss.\textsuperscript{144}

Conclusion

My research on Korean articles on Ireland from the 1920s to the 1930s aims to prove that there were greater opportunities for Koreans during Cultural Rule to express nationalist thought in daily newspapers than is commonly assumed. Japanese censorship policy was underequipped to comprehensively surveil Korean published material, Korean businessmen used their raw capital,\

\textsuperscript{142} Pak, Ilche ŭi ŏllŏn, 187.
\textsuperscript{143} Kim Sang-man qtd. in Yi, Ilche kangiŏngi, 302.
\textsuperscript{144} Pak, Ilche ŭi ŏllŏn, 192.
elite connections, and modern printing technology to keep newspapers afloat during legal and financial difficulties, newspaper writers defied the politically moderate stances of their bosses to include pro-independence and socialist themes in their articles, and Korean readers held newspapers accountable for insufficient displays of nationalism through boycotts. As one of the few successful anti-colonial uprisings in the early 20th century, the Irish War of Independence was a crucial source of political inspiration for Korean writers of the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo in the 1920s. The tactics used by Sinn Féin included diplomatic compromise as well as violent militancy, attracting Koreans who longed for another popular uprising, and those who sought an elite-led peaceful advancement of Korean culture and civil society without directly challenging Japanese imperial rule—at least, in the short term.

While Japan ultimately achieved its goal of preventing a successful Korean uprising, it did not achieve the goal of establishing a subtle but extensive control over Korean nationalist thought. Tsune Midori’s anecdotes of Japanese censors frantically on the phone with Korean newspaper editors as hundreds of copies were printed as they spoke, telling them to delete a certain line, paragraph or the entire article certainly does not create an image of sophisticated control. And that hundreds of articles that not only sympathized with Ireland but compared Ireland’s independence struggle to Korea’s would certainly have not been Cultural Rule politicians’ idea of the Korean press being merely “a chimney to let out the smoke.”\(^{145}\)

Such research dispels a declining (at least in academic circles) but still prevalent and concerning trend in representations of Korea’s colonial past: focusing a disproportionate amount of attention on colonial rule’s capabilities and not its limitations. Kim Kyu Hyun brilliantly expresses this point:

\(^{145}\) Yi, Ilche kangjŏngi, 295.
In many Korean-language works of history, the colonial powers tend to be portrayed as if they always knew exactly what they were doing, were unavering in their sense of direction, and never suffered from self-contradictions or self-doubts in developing and practicing their ideological programs. It seems likely that the reality was far more complex.\(^{146}\)

The reason for Cultural Rule and for the existence of a legal Korean press in 1920 was itself a result of Japanese shock over the March 1st Movement and turbulent changes in colonial governing philosophy. The Korean press in the 1920s took shape due to Japanese limitations (e.g. small, overworked newspaper censorship department, sheer volume of daily newspapers publishing) in addition to capabilities (e.g. financial and legal penalties, political co-optation). Kim Kyu Hyun included this statement within the wider context of criticizing Korean and Japanese historiographies of colonial rule denying agency to Korean subjects. Koreans did not merely respond to Japanese demands and colonial changes; actions such as Korean readers boycotting the pro-Japanese *Sisa Sinmun*, journalists defying their bosses and writing articles filled with radical ideologies, and newspaper management taking advantage of logistical loopholes to avoid censorship meant that Koreans actively shaped the colonial press atmosphere. And newspapers’ interest in Ireland also shows us that the first modern Korean journalists were far more internationally-minded and curious than we often give them credit for.

To further illuminate how Korean newspapers adapted to the circumstances of colonial rule, analyses of Japanese newspaper articles on Ireland (including those of the Government-General of Korea) and a study of Korean articles on Ireland from 1930 to 1940, a more comprehensive survey of the Korean press—that is, looking beyond the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* to include Korean magazines and smaller, regional publications—and Japanese-language sources will be very helpful. Detailed reports and effusive support of Ireland

and other anticolonial, nationalist struggles in smaller publications even in the 1930s will go a long way in proving that Japanese colonial ideals were forced to compromise once they reached the Korean peninsula, not least because Korean journalists and newspaper management found ways to express nationalist thought in an environment of strict, colonial censorship.

(Word Count: 12,162)
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*Tongpuga yŏksa chaedan*, 2021.


Bibliographic Essay: Uncovering Early Korean Interest in Ireland

My interest in colonial-era Korean newspapers began with a donation. Through a Korean class I took in my sophomore fall semester, I heard about and got a new job at the Center for Preservation and Conservation. A Korean scholar had donated hundreds of books about Korean history, but because the Center, at that time, had no full-time Korean-speaking staff, they could not prepare the books for circulation in Yale libraries. As a technical assistant, I learned how to prepare books for library use, find and proofread library records, and occasionally make new records myself. But the job’s most rewarding aspect was in the books themselves: most of them were old primary and secondary sources difficult to come by even in academic settings. I had just gained proficiency in academic Korean and was learning Hanja, so I could access older Korean sources such as an autobiography of Kim Ku, a South Korean Civics textbook from 1968, and a study of Korean bureaucrats during the Japanese colonial era. By taking some time to quickly skim the introductions of some of the books I processed, I was exposed to important and fascinating areas of Korean historical research.

One of the most fascinating books I came across was Ilche ha Tonga Ilbo apsu sasŏlchip (A Collection of Tonga Ilbo Articles Seized under Japanese Rule). Seeing that the articles featured had been censored for overly nationalist content, I was immediately curious what Koreans felt were the important issues of the 1920s and 1930s. Once I got accustomed to mixed Hanja-Hangul script, highly Sinitic writing style, and references to contemporary events I did not yet know about, I was startled to see that a newspaper article of a few pages could illuminate the political zeitgeist of a decade more effectively than a hundred pages of a textbook. While historical records may be the closest thing we currently have to time machines, I think that
newspaper articles, which are written to be easily understood by a general audience and are about the most relevant and debated issues of the time, capture the emotions and psychology of the past best. Articles such as “My Japanese Friends, Do you Know the Korean People’s Pain,” “The Language of the People,” and a letter from An Ch’ang-ho to Korean people described Korean colonial issues with a subtlety and depth and vividness that I had not expected. These articles, which could have been read by my great–great-grandfather, show that the people of one hundred years ago knew more than I had thought.

Eager to learn the historical background behind those articles, I took Professor Hannah Shepherd’s “Korea and the Japanese Empire” the next fall. As a Korean-American, I had heard frequently about the Japanese colonial era, but the narrative I had been taught was oversimplified and dichotomic, portraying Japanese actions as completely barbaric and Koreans as either martyrs or traitors. The form of Korean resistance most frequently represented in popular culture was violent action. It was not until taking Professor Shepherd’s class that I learned about the cultural and political ways in which Koreans from the late 19th century tried to resist foreign aggression and develop Korea without sacrificing national sovereignty or cultural uniqueness. Most Koreans under colonial rule were not submissive victims or uncompromising zealots but patriotic and pragmatic people who tried to find ways to exercise personal, economic, and political agency within the bounds of colonial law and power. I was particularly fascinated by the era of Cultural Rule (1920 to early 1930s), when Koreans were given limited freedoms while facing more subtle and sophisticated strategies of colonial repression. The contradiction between limited freedoms (e.g. increase in freedom of expression) and sophisticated repression (e.g. expansion of Japanese censorship) invited me to think about how Koreans used limited cultural and political opportunities to campaign for the rights and independence movement into colonial
rule, and to think broadly about what kinds of colonial agency were available between the extremes of military martyrdom and complete cooperation.

Writing my final paper about the *Tonga Ilbo* (a major Korean newspaper) and Japanese censorship, I found many examples of Korean newspapers pushing the boundaries of what was considered appropriate nationalist content. Because my primary source was a collection of especially provocative articles, I wanted to explore just how representative it was of Korean newspaper articles in general. How did Korean writers take advantage of the new press opportunities of the Cultural Rule period? To what extent were they co-opted by the Japanese, and to what extent could they promote nationalist thought? Answering these questions became the goal of my senior thesis, and I began the process by asking Professor Hwansoo Kim, a renowned scholar of modern Korean and Japanese Buddhism, to be my advisor. Professor Kim’s expertise in modern Korean and Japanese studies greatly aided the progression of my research, as well as my reading and interpreting of early 20th century Korean sources.

While looking for a specific topic within Korean newspapers in the colonial era, I came across an interesting theme several times: Irish independence. Articles mentioning “Ireland” in the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* peaked in the early 1920s and continued to be mentioned regularly until the early 1930s. I thought that Korean writers’ interest in Ireland’s independence struggle was evidence of their interest in anticolonial movements around the world, as well as the less-than-comprehensive nature of Japanese censorship. Through my research, I wanted to explore if there were any direct connections between the Korean and Irish independence movements, if the extensive reporting on Ireland’s independence struggle was a tactic for Koreans to spread anticolonial themes while not directly supporting Korean independence, and what Irish independence articles reveal about Korean agency during the colonial era.
The first step in my research was to compile primary sources: memorable and significant Irish independence articles. Because articles from the *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* had been digitized through the *Naver News Library*, I had convenient access to primary sources. During the summer before senior year, I read many *Tonga Ilbo* and *Chosŏn Ilbo* articles mentioning Ireland from 1920 to 1933, prioritizing editorials, long articles, and ones which went beyond reporting facts and expressing anticolonial sentiment and solidarity. I found it difficult to choose a few because so many articles expressed anticolonial sentiment and clearly sided with the Irish rather than simply reporting the events which transpired. To compare Irish independence articles with other provocative articles, I read the *Ilche ha Tonga Ilbo apsu sasŏlchip* (A Collection of *Tonga Ilbo* Articles Seized under Japanese Rule), which contained articles considered by colonial authorities to have been problematically nationalist. Because the Irish independence articles I had read were quite subversive, I was disappointed to see that not a single Irish independence article made its way into the collection of seized articles. I also read the two main secondary Korean-language sources I had at the time on newspaper censorship, Ch’oe Min-ji and Kim Min-ju’s *A History of the Korean Press under Japanese Rule* and Yi Yŏn’s *The Control of the Korean Media during the Japanese Occupation*. They did not mention Ireland either.

Despite the lack of representation of Irish independence articles in primary and secondary source literature, I was determined to explain why they appeared so frequently in the early 1920s and mentioned consistently into the mid 1930s. At this point, Professor Kim advised me to look specifically into Japanese censorship policy in Korea to see if the multitude of Irish independence articles could be explained by a failure of censorship policy. We were particularly interested in answering the questions, “why do we have all these Irish articles?” and “Why were they allowed to exist?” While Japanese censorship was likely not comprehensive, Irish
independence articles were published with such great frequency that the Japanese could not have ignored it. It was my task to look into the nuances of censorship policy to explain those questions.

After meeting with Dr. Jude Yang, Yale’s Korean Studies Librarian, I received a series of books about Japanese censorship policy in Korea. I realized the importance of language skills in historical scholarship: English books specifically about Japanese censorship of the Korean press in the Cultural Rule era would have been much harder to find. These books formed the foundation of my knowledge of the Korean press, and helped me come to the conclusion that Japanese censorship was far less centralized than they would have liked it to be. For example, the government seriously underestimated the content of published material, Japan was principally concerned with Soviet communism and socialism, big companies like the Tonga Ilbo and Chosŏn Ilbo were in a better position to survive censorship penalties than smaller companies, and daily newspapers published so frequently Japanese censors had to examine newspapers as they were being published and distributed to readers. However, these books did not mention Ireland. Because of this temporary setback, I tried to modify my portrayal of the plethora of Irish independence articles as one important example showing that Japanese censorship was less comprehensive than we thought.

The weakness of this approach was that it did not make a strong statement on the strategic importance of Ireland, and did not give me much of an opportunity to connect my primary source analysis to my secondary sources. I needed secondary literature which talked about Irish independence articles as an important part of the Korean language press. Over the winter break, I had a breakthrough: I found secondary literature about Ireland. The most important of these were Han Sŭng-hun’s “The 1920 Tonga Ilbo’s reporting on the Irish War of
Independence and its Meaning” (2019) and Yun Tŏg-yŏng’s The Nationalist Movements of the World and Colonial Korea (2023), both of which affirmed my observation that Irish independence articles were quite popular in the early 1920s and played an important role in Korea independence activists’ ideas about what independence should look like in Korea. In addition, I found a few Tonga Ilbo articles from the present that explained their impact on the Tonga Ilbo’s mentality of anti-Japanese resistance. They concluded that Korean writers looked directly to Ireland as a model for a successful independence movement, attracted to both its tactics of compromise and armed struggle. They hoped that, like Ireland, Korea could eventually become a self-ruled dominion. Irish articles were a key reason behind many censorship penalties, including a temporary halt of publishing imposed on the Tonga Ilbo a few months after its founding. These studies affirmed my theory that Irish independence was not simply one example, but an essential part of early Korean newspaper content, that it was one of the reasons behind an Indefinite Suspension of Publication imposed on the Tonga Ilbo.

Reading both Korean newspaper articles on Irish independence and researching scholarly work on Korean interest in Ireland marks an important point in my journey studying East Asian history. Growing up, I thought history was about the study of what happened in the past, but from the very first history class I took at Yale, I learned that knowing what happened is merely the starting point of historical research; piecing together what the people of the past thought of themselves and the world they lived in, and how their understanding of their world shaped the actions they took was what convinced me to become a history major. Uncovering Korean journalists’ and readers’ fascination with the Irish independence movement was truly a rewarding and illuminating experience, one which taught me not to underestimate the knowledge
of not just Korean intellectuals but also the everyday Korean newspaper readers, who lived in a world far less connected than it is today.