



KOREAN  
WOMEN'S  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

## Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs

Lim Sung-heon, Chief of the Patriots Entitlement Bureau

This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> (1919) Independence Movement of Korea. On this occasion, we had the chance to interview Lim Sung-heon, chief of the Patriots Entitlement Bureau, about Korean policies for patriots and veterans including the discovery of and rewards for female independence activists. The interview was held at the office of the Patriots Entitlement Bureau, the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs, the Government Complex Sejong, from 13:00 to 14:00 on March 06, 2019. Cheong Hyun-joo, president of [History-Women-Future](#), acted as the interviewer for the event.

**The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs has been promoted to ministerial level and has done its utmost to fully honor persons of national merit. In order to do so, The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs has been crafting sincere policies for patriots and veterans in order to make Korea widely known as a nation that always remembers people's dedication to their homeland and rewards them for their services. In particular, it has revised criteria for reviewing meritorious achievement to more actively discover and reward persons of distinguished service to Korea's independence movement and worked hard to remove blind spots in offering financial and moral support to patriots such as female independence activists and righteous army participants who have not been effectively recognized by the Ministry.**



[Lim Sung-heon, chief of the Patriots Entitlement Bureau](#)

**Chung Hyun-joo** (Hereinafter Chung): Nice to meet you. My name is Chung Hyun-joo and I am the president of [History-Women-Future](#), an organization for women who have been forgotten in Korean history. In this context, I was chosen as the interviewer for this occasion. I would like to thank you, chief of the Patriots Entitlement Bureau, for giving this opportunity. Commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement, this interview is designed to shed new light on independence activists, especially female independence activists who have not been recorded or remembered in our history.

**Lim Sung-heon** (Hereinafter Lim): Very nice to meet you. My name is Lim Sung-heon, chief of the Patriots Entitlement Bureau under the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs. Commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement, this interview is published in <Gender Review>, a publication of Korean Women's Development Institute. In this regard, this interview is deemed to be very meaningful.

**Chung:** Late last year, the government announced twelve strategies for three areas for *the Comprehensive Plan for the Commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement and the Establishment of the Korean Provisional Government*. Could you tell us your specific plans for this initiative? Also, how are the current government's events for honoring independence movements distinguished from their predecessors?

**Lim:** For the *Comprehensive Plan for the Commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement and the Establishment of the Korean Provisional Government*, the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs has promoted and implemented various projects together with Korea citizens. The commemorative program mainly consists of 'remembrance and inheritance,' 'honorable treatment and appreciation,' 'participation and integration.' The first, the second, and the third are composed of 12, 8, and 6 projects, respectively. In other words, a total of 26 projects have been actively carried out by the government. These projects are designed to help Korean citizens remember the spirit of patriotic martyrs who tried to make the international community recognize that Korea is an independent state with national sovereignty. At that time, one hundred years ago, breaking down the barriers of region, generation, and religion, all the Koreans participated in the initiative with one accord. These will lay the ground for Koreans to create another '100 years full of new hopes' based on national integration.

The main characteristics of such programs can be summarized as follows: First, consulting Korea's history academia and experts in history, the date on which the Korean Provisional Government was set up changed from April 13<sup>th</sup> to April 11<sup>th</sup>. Second, the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs has chosen and announced the Independence Activist of the Month. This year, one female independence activist was selected in January, February, and May, respectively, which are higher in quantity than in years past. Specifically, in January, Yu Gwan-sun, the symbol of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement, was chosen while in February, Kim Maria was selected to commemorate the February 8<sup>th</sup> Independence Declaration. In May, which is Family Month, Kim Soon-ae, a member of a famous independence activist couple, was named as independence activist of the month. Third, the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the February 8<sup>th</sup> Independence Declaration made by Korean students in Japan, which is deemed to have been the beginning of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement, was celebrated in Tokyo to shed new light on its historical significance. Fourth, the Korean government plans to send its official delegations to commemorative events held abroad and to support events celebrating independence movements, which are held in more than 40 nations across the world.

**Chung:** The discovery and promotion of independence activists are deemed to have been the focus of the public attention and generated conflicts among stakeholders. I would like to know how the government has implemented research on all of the prison records for the Japanese colonial period and how the project can be understood in terms of the discovery of female independence activists. On February 20<sup>th</sup>, Dong-A Ilbo released data from research on prison record cards. Do you have any plan to use such data?

**Lim:** The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs conducted research on the list of all the prisoners for the Japanese colonial period across the nation (administrative divisions: cities, eups, and myeons) from March to November last year and checked records on 5,323 prisoners imprisoned on charge of engaging in independence movements. Among them, 2,487 persons have yet to be rewarded for distinguished service to independence. These people will be sufficiently considered in the process of rewarding independence activists.

The list of persons watched by Imperial Japan reported by Dong-A Ilbo is already being used in the process of reviewing and rewarding

independence activists. However, supporting evidence, reasons for disqualification, and activities after engaging in independence movements are comprehensively examined and checked, so that some of those on the list have yet to be rewarded.

**Chung:** The review and evaluation process should reasonably improve to include those who have been excluded from the list of recipients, especially female independence activists accounting only 2% of the group. What specific measures are you discussing to resolve this issue?

**Lim:** Mass media and the National Assembly have pointed out that reward criteria are excessively strict. In the same vein, it is necessary to adjust the scope of and criteria for giving rewards in order to properly evaluate independence activists who dedicated their lives to achieving independence. To this end, we led related organizations to conduct research in the second half of 2017 and consulted experts in January to February, 2018. In April, we revised and enhanced such criteria.

**Chung:** During the Japanese colonial era, if their family members engaged in independence movements, married women are deemed to have supported them to concentrate on such movements. In this case, it may be difficult to review and reflect their diaries or notes in independence movement data. In connection with this, what measures are you taking?

**Lim:** Commemorating the 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of National Liberation Day in 2018, the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs delivered rewards to 177 patriotic martyrs and patriots including six former Baehwa Women's School students who actively took part in the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement and Mrs. Huh Eun, a wife of the grandson of Lee Sang-ryong (whose pen name is Seok-ju) who supported armed struggles against Japan. Specifically, the Order of Merit for National Foundation (Patriotic Medal: 31 activists; National Medal: 62 activists), the National Foundation Medal, and Presidential Citations were given to 93, 26, and 58 independence activists, respectively. Among them, female activists numbered 26.

Moreover, the government made related experts to conduct research (Jan. 12<sup>th</sup> to May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018) in order to discover female independence activists, thereby newly identifying 202 female independence activists.

Since rewards were given in 1949, the Order of Merit for National Foundation, the National Foundation Medal, and Presidential Citations have been delivered to 10,965, 1,280, and 3,266 independence activists,

respectively. Among them, female activists numbered 433 (about 3%).

The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs will further solidify cooperation in data gathering with related organizations (the Independence Hall of Korea, the National Institute of Korean History, the National Archives of Korea, local governments, and cultural centers), continuously collecting data at home and abroad and thereby removing blind spots in discovering and rewarding unknown female independence activists, righteous army members, and others.

**Chung:** In connection with the aforementioned question, the activities of gisaeng (Korean trained courtesans who entertained men with music, conversation and poetry) and laborers have been identified, mainly relying on indirect data such as oral statements and so on, without primary records, photos, and prison records. What measures are you preparing to resolve this issue? In other words, you have mentioned that basic requirements including 'three-month or longer prison lives' are revised to improve the review and assessment system. Please elaborate on this.

**Lim:** Key improvement measures mainly consist of four items. First, the requirement of 'three-month or longer prison lives' was abolished, thereby making it possible for those who were sentenced to shorter than three months in prison to be rewarded. Second, in connection with female activists, their personal data and activities can't be easily and effectively collected. Given this, direct and indirect data such as diaries, memoirs, and notes, as well as circumstantial evidence on the activists who are members of their family, will be used to enable related parties to be rewarded if their roles in and support for independence movements are found to be true. Third, if they were expelled from school due to their engagement in independence movements, students will also be rewarded. Lastly, even in the case where they participated in socialist movements after liberation for national integration and if they neither contributed to nor actively engaged in the establishment of the North Korean regime, such independence activists will also be assessed to make a decision on a case to case basis.

The revised criteria have applied since the 2018 National Liberation Day. Among 638 recipients chosen until the Independence Movement Day of this year, a total of 435 activists have been rewarded in accordance with the new criteria.

Among 638 recipients selected during this period, female activists numbered 133. Considering that female recipients have numbered 299 over the 70 years since 1949 when the rewarding system was initiated,

significant achievements are deemed to have been made in terms of discovering female independence activists.

This year, we will also make related organizations conduct additional research on female independence activists and civilian militia to discover and reward independence activists who have not been recognized.

**Chung:** If the reward criteria are revised to be eased, related parties are expected to claim that the level of awards for existing male and female independence activists should be further raised. How will you deal with this issue?

**Lim:** Pursuant to the current Awards and Decorations Act, the level of awards can't be adjusted. A revision to the Act proposed by a lawmaker to cope with this issue is pending at the National Assembly. If it passes the Assembly, we will prepare specific guidelines and devise re-assessment plans accordingly.

It has been pointed out every year that the level of awards for female activists, especially for Yu Gwan-sun, the symbol of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement, should be further raised. In relation to this, public petitions have been made, calling on the National Assembly to enact a Special Act. In accordance with such social needs, we decided to award her the Order of Merit for National Foundation (the Republic of Korea Medal) additionally, commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement. Regardless of existing awards for her independence activities, this decision was made by recognizing that Yu Gwan-sun helped people set up proper historical views and promote their patriotism and contributed to improving the value of non-violence, peace, and democratic human rights and to facilitating national integration.

**Chung:** Independence activists in Hawaii, the US mainland, and Latin America have been less discovered and recognized than those in Japan and Manchuria in China. Koreans working on the sugar cane fields in Hawaii, the US mainland, and Latin America collected war funds, received education for competence cultivation and held a variety of meetings in order to achieve Korea's independence. Do you have any plans to carry out research on such activities?

**Lim:** We have made continued efforts to discover and reward those who engaged in independence movements in foreign countries by collecting related data. The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs has gathered independence movements-related data possessed by various institutions in

overseas nations by employing local experts and sending its officials on a business trip. This year, we will also do our utmost to collect such data regardless of gender. Given that independence activists are consistently rewarded every year, they should be carefully and quickly discovered. Discovering activists in a speedy way, we have worked hard to reward their second and third generations, if independence activists themselves can't receive awards technically.

Exemplary activists in the Americas are as follows: Ahn Chang-ho (1962, the Republic of Korea Medal), Park Yong-man (1995, Presidential Medal), Hong Eon (1995, Independent Medal), and Kang Young-so (2011, Independent Medal). Their roles are deemed to be important but each and every one of Koreans living in the Americas played a very significant role in promoting independence movements. Between 1904 and 1905, many Koreans moved to Hawaii to work as migrant laborers. As of 1910, more than 7,700 Koreans are known to have worked as laborers in Hawaii and the US mainland. They did not waste money that they earn every day. They did not hesitate to financially support independence movements in the name of independence funds and contributions to the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement. At that time, the funds that they offered were used to maintain the Korean Provisional Government for 26 years and to support Yun Bong-gil's heroic act in Hongkou Park in Shanghai. In this regard, the discovery of independence activists in the Americas is deemed to be very important.

**Chung:** In connection with projects for commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement and the Establishment of the Korean Provisional Government, written judgments, news articles, official gazettes, and other records should be studied and reinterpreted. Do you have any plans to handle this issue?

**Lim:** The Korean government has made sincere efforts to gather independence movements-related data in order to discover every female independence activist who has been forgotten. In particular, it is very significant to discover and gather written judgments and prison records which are evidentiary materials. As mentioned earlier, last year, we visited local governments across the nation to collect prison records for the Japanese colonial period and found the list of 2,487 activists who have yet to be rewarded.

This year, we plan to gather first trial records for the Gyeongseong District Court for the Japanese colonial era, as well as collecting the registers of schools in Seoul, Gwangju, South Jeolla Province, Busan, and

South Gyeongsang Province that participated in student movements in order to commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Student Anti-Japanese Movements. We expect that more female independence activists will be found in the process.

**Chung:** Of course, it is important to discover new female independence activists. However, in terms of livelihood, female independence activists are now deemed to be inferior to their male counterparts. Have you ever researched this issue? If yes, please tell us what measures you plan to take.

**Lim:** The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs has studied the living conditions of independence activists by activist, region, and age. Most of them are male and no separate research only on female activists has been carried out.

In particular, patriots who are alive at home and abroad number 41, only two of them are female. The other patriots died of old age and the bereaved family members are registered and managed as beneficiaries.

**Chung:** Since Pi Woo-jin took over (May 2017) as new Minister, what changes have been made in terms of policy? Her unique career and the fact that she said, "I will become a soldier even in another life" grabbed special attention. How is she distinguished from her predecessors in the context of policy and projects?

**Lim:** Paying special attention to patriots and veterans, the Moon Jae-in administration promoted the status of our organization to the level of Ministry and thereby laid the organizational foundation to treat persons of national merit in the most honorable way.

In accordance with the national slogan, "A Nation that Never Forgets Your Dedication to Your Homeland," we have done our utmost to devise sincere policies for patriots and veterans.

This year, we raised subsidies for patriots and veterans by 5%, one of the highest levels in history, and increased special subsidies for persons of distinguished service to independence by 50%. Moreover, setting up a new system for financial support for (grand) sons and daughters of independence activists who are in financial trouble, the government has spared no efforts to ensure the honorable treatment that they deserve.

If a person of national merit passes away, the flag of condolence is delivered in the name of the president to help the bereaved family hold



an honorable funeral. Also, the government has strengthened funeral and burial services by introducing new funeral support services for those suffering from financial difficulties for the purpose of implementing people-oriented sincere policies for patriots and veterans.

We improved official evaluation criteria to more actively discover independence activists and to expand rewards for them. Furthermore, leading related institutes to conduct research to actively discover and reward female independence activists and righteous army members, the government has eliminated blind spots in rewarding them.

Also, building the memorial hall for the Korean Provisional Government, restoring the headquarters of the Korea Liberation Army, and replacing articles exhibited at the building for the Korean Provisional Government in Chongqing, China, we have strengthened the establishment and preservation of historic sites to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Establishment of the Korean Provisional Government.

Introducing citizens' participation in evaluating prospective patriots and veterans and leading the song "March for the Beloved" to be sung at the ceremony for the May 18<sup>th</sup>

Democratization Movement, we delivered our message for national integration. At the same time, the status of independence and democratization-related anniversaries including those for the February 28<sup>th</sup> Democratization Movement and Student Independence Movements was promoted to the government's official events, changing the date on which the Korean Provisional Government was set up to April 11<sup>th</sup> to prevent controversy surrounding the issue. Likewise, the Korean government has done its utmost to devise and conduct policies for patriots and veterans that effectively reflect public opinions.

**Chung:** I know that you are very busy preparing projects for celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement and the establishment of the Korean Provisional Government. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule.

**Lim:** Thank you very much!