

Independence activist Lee Ui-gyeong, author of 'The Yalu River Flows'

Participated in League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression and Korean Youth Diplomatic Corps; after exile, pursued independence activities in Europe
Attended 1927 Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, declaring Korea's resolve for independence to international community



August's Overseas Korean of the Month: Patriot Lee Ui-gyeong

The Overseas Koreans Agency (Commissioner Lee Sang-duk) has selected literary figure and independence activist Lee Ui-gyeong (1899-1950, pen name Lee Mireuk) as the Overseas Korean of the Month for August 2025. Lee promoted Korea's independence and disseminated Korean culture in Europe.

Born in Haeju, Hwanghae Province, in 1899, Lee Ui-gyeong participated in the March 1 Independence Movement of 1919 while attending Kyung Sung Medical College (now Seoul National University College of Medicine). He spearheaded efforts to build public support for independence by serving as editor-in-chief of the

Korea Youth Diplomatic Corps and publishing and distributing promotional materials, such as the Diplomatic Bulletin and the Warning Statement to Remember the National Humiliation.

Path to independence beginning with March 1 Independence Movement

When his activities were discovered by the Japanese authorities, he fled to Shanghai to escape persecution and took on the task of training nurses at the Korean Red Cross, which was established by the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea to carry out relief missions.

While in Shanghai, his interactions with the family of independence activist Ahn Jung-geun further strengthened his national consciousness. In 1920, he traveled to Germany via France with Ahn Jung-geun's cousin, Ahn Bong-geun, to continue the independence movement in Europe.

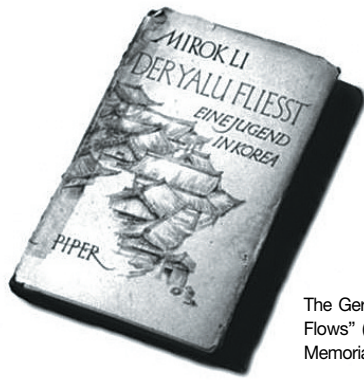
When the League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression convened in Brussels, Belgium, in 1927, he was studying zoology and philosophy at the University of Munich, and he participated by forming a delegation with Lee Gyeok-ro and Hwang Woo-il, who were studying in Berlin, and Kim Beop-rin in France.

Anti-Japanese imperialism struggle reaches Europe

The delegates drafted a resolution titled "The Korean Question," translating it into German, French, English and other languages to inform the international community about their homeland's plight and their resolve for independence.

After earning his doctorate in zoology from the University of Munich in Germany in 1928, Lee found it difficult to utilize his expertise. He decided to change the course of his life, adopting the pen name Lee Mireuk and embarking on literary pursuits.

In particular, his 1946 German-language novel "The Yalu River Flows," written in autobiographical form and covering his childhood, participation in the March 1 Independence Movement, and exile, dealt with the purity of the human spirit and familial love preserved even in the face of dehumanizing circumstances. It resonated



The German first edition of "The Yalu River Flows" (1946) (Provided by the Lee Mireuk Memorial Foundation)

deeply, offering solace and hope to Germans grappling with post-war loss.

Transformation into literary figure Lee Mireuk

A German magazine selected the novel as the "Best German language book of the year," and it was later included in German textbooks, widely read by Germans, and spread the life of our people and the sentiments of Korea among locals.

This literary work also greatly contributed to building mutual trust between Korea and Germany. According to a 2009 memoir about the German loan program by Dr. Baek Young-hoon, who served as interpreter during former President Park Chung-hee's 1964 visit to West Germany, it is said that the German government's decision to provide Korea with a 150 million-deutsche mark (approximately \$30 million) loan without conditions was influenced by the trust and empathy Germans developed toward Korea through Lee's works.

Final path as educator

From 1948 onward, he walked the path of an educator, teaching Korean Studies and Eastern Philosophy at the Department of Oriental Studies at his alma mater, the University of Munich. He passed away in March 1950 due to stomach cancer.

Germans remembered him as a true humanist and a "fully realized human being." His student Wolfgang Leander Bauer, who was so captivated by the professor's character that he switched his major from medicine to Oriental studies and later became a professor at Munich University's Department of Oriental Studies, expressed his respect, calling Lee, "A man and writer who proved the most noble values of life by setting himself as an example."

In recognition of his contributions, the Korean government posthumously awarded him the Presidential Commendation in 1963 and the Order of Merit for National Foundation, Medal of Patriotism in 1990. In November 2024, his remains, previously interred in Grafelfing, Germany, were repatriated to Korea and laid to rest at the National Cemetery in Daejeon.

"Patriot Lee Ui-gyeong carried the cry of the March 1



The repatriation ceremony for the remains of independence activist Lee Ui-gyeong is held at Incheon International Airport Terminal 1 on Nov. 16, 2024. After a memorial service at his grave in Germany the previous day, his remains returned to his homeland after 105 years. (Provided by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs)



A memorial service for the repatriation of the remains of independence activist Lee Ui-gyeong is held at the funeral hall within the Grafelfing Cemetery in Germany on Nov. 14, 2024, ahead of the repatriation. (Provided by the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs)

Independence Movement all the way to Europe and, through literature, made the world aware of the greatness of our homeland and people," Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Lee Sang-duk said. "To honor Lee's noble spirit of independence on this year's August 15 Liberation Day, marking the 80th anniversary of Korean independence, we have selected him as the Overseas Korean of the Month for August."

The OKA identifies compatriots who have contributed to the development of the Republic of Korea or enhanced the status of Koreans in their countries of residence, selecting and announcing them as the Overseas Korean of the Month each month.

The previous honorees are Kim Pyeong-jin (1926-2007), former president of the Jeju Development Association in Japan, for March; Hong Myeong-gi (1934-2021), former chairman of the M&L Hong Foundation, for April; Im Cheon-taek (1903-1985), independence activist, for May; Park Byeong-heon (1928-2011), former head of the Korean Residents Union in Japan, for June; and Park No-hak, former president of the Return of Detained Sakhalin Koreans Association, for July. 장