

Shinmin Prefecture Summary

Min

2021

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A short historical summary of the forgotten Korean project known as Shinmin Prefecture and Korean People's Association in Manchuria. This was a self-governing region of around two million people from 1929 to 1931.

1. Inception

Many Koreans gathered in Manchuria to avoid oppression from the Japanese Empire, following the Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula, forming their own society there. Kim Jong-jin, inspired by anarchism under Yi Hoe-yeong, aspired to “create a society in which all were equal without privilege and discrimination, free to develop and improve as they pleased”. He believed that in order to achieve a revolutionary movement it was necessary to maintain a long struggle with a detailed plan and robust organization and that Manchuria was an appropriate spot for a base. He divided and surveyed the region before reporting the results to Kim Jwa-jin, suggesting a reformation of the Shinmin prefecture in order to prevent invasion by Marxist-Leninists. His aim was to defeat those who espoused “scientific socialism,” and hold a long struggle against Japanese imperialism.

Meanwhile, in Manchuria, Korean anarchists created an organization called “Freedom Youth Organization”(FYO, ~~XXXXX~~) whose members were working throughout. Kim Jong-jin, along with Yi Dal and Kim Ya-bong, gathered all members and formed “Black Friend League”(BFL, ~~XXXX~~) focusing on propagating anarchism. More youth organizations converged under the activities of “Black Friend League” and formed “North Manchuria Korean Youth League”(NMKYL, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~) which also studied anarchism with a focus on enlightenment of the population. Kim Jong-jin and Yi Eul-gyu subsequently established the Korean Anarchist Federation in Manchuria (~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~) using “North Manchuria Korean Youth League” as a base.

Meanwhile, nationalists in Manchuria failed to unify the factions of three prefectures, and their innovative congress disbanded without making much progress. As a result of their expropriating resources from the populace while reigning over them, the nationalists were losing support and the populace was leaning towards the Marxist-Leninists. Feeling threatened by this development, the nationalists and anarchists joined forces to create the Korean People's Association in Manchuria (KPAM; ~~XXXXXX~~).

2. Management

“North Manchuria Korean Youth League”, through their Announcement(~~<XX>~~), exposed Japanese ambitions to invade Manchuria and made clear of their opposition to political struggle as they were too reformist. They also opposed capitalism and foreign rule and they sought to respect the will of the individual. They established the rule of free association, thus rejecting centralised governance.

The programme of the Korean Anarchist Federation in Manchuria had proposed a society without rulers, advancing free development via mutual aid and free association, work according to one's ability, and consumption based on one's needs. They sought to revolutionize the minds and lives of the peasants and build an ideal society in order to advance the liberation efforts. Their immediate programme was as follows:

1. We strive to reform the lives of Korean-Chinese people and to cultivate their anti-Japanese, anti Marxist-Leninist ideology.
2. We strive to foster the organization of our fellow compatriots through the self-governing cooperative structures to promote the economic/cultural improvement of Korean-Chinese people
3. We strive with all our might for the education of the youth in order to strengthen the anti-Japanese force and the cultural development of young people.
4. We, as one farmer, run our own lives with our own strength through collective labor with the farmer population and, at the same time, focus on the improvement of the lives of farmers and farming methods as well as cultivation of ideologies.
5. We carry a responsibility to research our own affairs and to regularly report self-criticism.
6. We have the obligation of friendly cooperation and common operation with ethnic nationalists on the anti-Japanese liberation front.

According to the rules of the KPAM, its members were comprised of revolutionary Koreans (Article 2). Those living in the region for longer than three months had rights and obligations including donation of funds, enlisting in the military, voting and passive suffrage (Article 19). As its central institution, they installed the representative, executive, conference agencies (Article 6) and military, farming, education, and economy committees (Article 5). The representative agency was the top resolution agency (Article 7) which was held every January by those gathered by the executive agency (Article 13) and the head was picked by the executive agency to chair the meeting (Article 12). The executive agency was composed of between 15–21 members (Article 11) and handled the affairs decided at the meeting (Article 8). Their terms lasted for only one year (Article 18). The conference agency, composed of members from each committee, handled connections between committees and PR decided by executives (Article 9).

Each regional division of the KPAM was the agriculture association and therefore served as a regional administration handling matters ranging from executive, judicial, finance, to education, security, picking between 5 and 9 members to carry out each task. They also installed the associations of education and security to handle the matters respectively.

The KPAM sought maintenance of the region in order to cement organizational foundation. Meanwhile, they focused on building elementary (XXXX) and middle schools (XXXXX). They also built rice mills in order to protect the Korean peasants from the trickery of Chinese merchants.

3. The Fall

The prefecture began to disintegrate following the assassination of Kim Jwa-jin by a XXX (“Hwa yo pa”) Communist Party member, Gong Do-jin, when the Marxist-Leninists attempted to dismantle the nationalist organization as the conflict between both factions escalated. KPAM blamed and executed figures like Kim Bong-hwan and Yi Ju-hong which brought further condemnation and more assassination attempts from Marxist-Leninists.

The association moved its headquarters to Jilin and sought to unite the ethnic organizations against the Communist Party once more and subjugate the Marxist-Leninists. They also tried to

calm the local population by addressing a range of structural problems. They quickly ran out of funds, however, so were forced to request money during a meeting in Beijing (XXXXXXXXXX). They got the money and planned to use it to rebuild the commune, however, ten members were arrested by the Chinese police who were collaborating with the Japanese embassy. Police immediately confiscated the funds. China-based Korean anarchists quickly gathered around Manchuria to reconvene and rebuild Shinmin efforts.

After gathering, anarchists tried to restructure and enlighten the population once more but their efforts remained in vain for two reasons. There was an internal division in the association and a conflict between nationalists and anarchists. Anarchists soon found themselves rejected from the main positions of the association as the conflict worsened. The nationalists assassinated Yi Jun-geun, Kim Ya-un, and Kim Jong-jin, thus, finally closing the chapter of the Shinmin prefecture as the anarchists fled from Manchuria.

4. Why It Failed

The KPAM did indeed operate in an anarchistic manner. It was structured in accordance with anarchist principles of bottom-up organization, based on free association. Each region would send their share of delegates who would manage the main issues of the association, and the general association would take care of all paperwork, decide on foreign affairs, and public relations. Each region would hold a meeting to choose delegates and write proposals to the main branch. However, due to the situation in Manchuria, the lacking state of the Shinmin prefecture forced the association to adopt a top-down approach whereby they would select a couple of candidates for each structure and hold elections respectively.

However, the KPAM had a fundamental flaw. Whilst it was operated and structured by anarchist principles, it was not unified by anarchism nor did every member agree with anarchism. For example, one phrase of their programme says, “[w]e strive for the complete independence of the nation and thorough liberation of the people”. This meant they did not deny the state but rather that they acknowledged it. Despite the state being one of the top authoritarian oppressors of the people according to anarchists, anarchists in Shinmin deviated from their principles. They recognised the state in order to collaborate with the nationalists because they needed the regional base from them. This “non-anarchistic” element eventually led to internal divisions within the association, but also between the anarchists and nationalists. Despite nationalist ideology having fundamental differences with anarchism, anarchists cooperated with nationalists. This was a self-contradiction. The anarchists carried a risk by sharing a regional base with the nationalists instead of establishing their own and, unfortunately, this collaboration ultimately led to their defeat.

5. Aftermath

After anarchists fled from Manchuria to mainland China, they resumed their focus on terrorist activities. Unlike in Korea and Japan, there was no Korean populace with whom to rally the movement and because the efforts to build a base for liberation movement were shattered, the only remaining option for Korean anarchists at the time (this being the early- to mid- 1930s) was

direct terrorism.

They were heavily discouraged by the failures of Shinmin and having to live abroad, this encouraged them towards nihilist terrorism. The remaining anarchists began collaborating with nationalists like Kim Koo as both groups had a common objective — to achieve liberation through terrorism. Kim Koo and nationalists possessed the funds whilst the anarchists had the people to carry out assassinations. The anarchists also had prior experience of cooperating with nationalists in Shinmin. The anarchists loathed the Marxist-Leninists after they killed Kim Jwa-jin and this was a key factor in the fall of Shinmin, which ultimately led to anti-ML activities.

Source

Dr. Yi Horyong (이희용), *한국의 독립운동사* — *독립운동사* (한글서체), 2015), 332–360.

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