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Kim Joa-jin (1889–1930)

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Kim Joa-jin (aka “Baekya”), an anarchist military leader sometimes compared to Nestor Makhno, is largely remembered as a Korean patriot, particularly for his achievements as general and commander of the Korean Independent Army in Manchuria. Born to a wealthy family, he was inspired by ideas of social justice from an early age, setting free his family’s slaves at the age of 18. Entering the fight for independence from Japan, in 1919 he organized the Buk-ro gun-jung-sea (Northern Military Administration Office Army) and founded a military academy to train Korean soldiers against the Japanese army. The next year he became a national hero when his army wiped out an entire division of the Japanese Imperial Army at Chungsan-ri in Manchuria, winning the Koreans’ first military victory against the Japanese army since 1876. At this time, he became increasingly influenced by the anarchist ideas of his close relative Kim Jong-jin. In 1925 he organized the Sin-min-bu (New People’s Society) to build a new society along egalitarian and libertarian lines. In 1929 he formed the Han-jok chong-yun-hap-hoi (General League of Koreans) in Manchuria, supported by all Korean anarchists in China, to form a new commune-type organization. For the first time in Korean history, he attempted to put anarchist ideas into practice in rural villages in the Shinmin province of Manchuria (where some 2 million Koreans lived), establishing an autonomous region which lasted from 1929 to 1931. In 1930 Kim was assassinated by a Communist Party agent while repairing a cooperative’s rice mill.

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