

“Black comrades” against the Japanese occupation

Ilyaros

January 6, 2017

In the second half of the 19th century, small Korea, and formerly a frequent target of aggressive campaigns of neighboring China and Japan, became one of the main goals of Japanese colonial expansion. The Japanese power that gained strength saw Korea as its potential possession. Preparations for the colonization of Korea, however, faced certain problems, among which were the attempts of the Korean people to defend their independence, and the positions of China and the Russian Empire. However, after the Russo-Japanese War 1904–1905, Japan still managed to establish a protectorate over Korea. 22 August 1910 Korea was finally annexed to Japan and passed under the control of the Japanese governor-general.

Of course, such a situation could not please the advanced part of Korean society. Moreover, in the Japanese Empire, all non-Japanese people were treated as second-rate people, and Koreans were no exception. However, since Japan was nevertheless more developed not only militarily and economically, but also culturally, a country, revolutionary ideas popular in Japan began to spread in Korea. So anarchism penetrated Korean land — an ideology that at some point became dominant in the East Asian revolutionary movement.

Unlike European countries and even from the same Japan, in Korea at the beginning of the twentieth century, anarchist ideas were firmly connected with the idea of Korean nationalism, more precisely, liberation nationalism, aimed at achieving national independence and liberation from Japanese imperialism. Therefore, the theory and practice of the Korean anarchist movement in this period stories countries had their own specifics, significantly different from European and even Japanese anarchist tendencies. However, the history of Korean anarchism in the first third of the twentieth century is inextricably linked with the history of the anarchist movement in Japan and, to a lesser extent, in China. Korean anarchists of that time were influenced by their Japanese like-minded people, from whom many ideas and slogans were borrowed. On the other hand, the roots of Korean anarchism went to the peasant national liberation movement. It was the peasantry, which then constituted the overwhelming majority of the Korean population, periodically rebelled against the Japanese colonialists, which allowed the anarchists to consider the peasant masses as not only potentially, but also truly revolutionary.

Korea was greatly influenced by the revolutionary events in neighboring Russia. K 1918–1919 most of the Korean revolutionaries were in exile in neighboring China. Since China had its own

scores with Japan, it fairly quietly provided political asylum to both Korean and Japanese revolutionaries. It was in emigration in China, under the influence of Chinese and Japanese anarchists, that Korean revolutionaries began to accept anarchist ideas.

One of the first Korean anarchists was Xing Chaeho (1880–1936) — a native of the notable surname Xing, whose ancestor was among the developers of the Korean alphabet. Having received a good home education, Xing Chaeho, already in his youth, showed great promise as an expert on Confucian literature and traditional Korean and Chinese poetry. In 1898–1905 Xing Chaeho studied at Songjungwan University. It was during this period that he began his acquaintance with European philosophical literature. Under the influence of the ideas of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, Xing Chaeho gradually began to deviate from the traditional Confucian philosophy. Having settled down after the university in the Khwanson Sinmun newspaper, Xing Chaeho was already completely formed as a Korean nationalist, an opponent of the Japanese occupation. The greatest hatred among Xing Chaeho was caused not so much by even the Japanese authorities, as by the representatives of the Korean aristocracy, who, having forgotten about their national dignity, cursed favor with colonial officials. At the same time, while criticizing the Japanese colonial authorities, Xing Chaeho was very interested in the Japanese revolutionary movement, including anarchists. Gradually, he became increasingly convinced of the need to affirm social and political justice in a revolutionary way.

Like many other politically active Koreans, Xing Chaeho chose the path of emigration. In 1910, he left Korea and settled in Russian Vladivostok. Here he lived until 1913, collaborating in one of the Korean nationalist newspapers. In 1913, Xing went to China, where he settled in Shanghai. At that time, Shanghai was one of the most important economic and cultural centers of China, so it was not surprising that the majority of both Korean and Japanese political émigrés lived in Shanghai. Nevertheless, Xing, who was fluent in Chinese, moved to Beijing in 1915, where he got a job in the Chinese publications Beijing Jingbao and Zhunhuabao. In China, Xing Chaeho lived a very long time. In 1919, he was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Provisional Government of Korea in Exile, which was located in Shanghai. But, speaking in favor of a revolutionary struggle against the Japanese colonialists, Xing criticized the president of the Provisional Government of Korea, Lee Synman. In the end, political differences with Lee Synman forced Xing Chaeho to withdraw from his work in the Provisional Government and return from Shanghai to Beijing.

In 1920, Xing Chaeho began to edit the magazine “Sogvan” (“Dawn”), which was originally in Marxist positions. But then, in Marxist ideas, Xing Chaeho became disillusioned. Most likely, the reason for this was the fear that the powerful Soviet Russia would be able to subjugate little Korea to its political influence. Anarchism for Xing Chaeho, in the first place, was a political ideology unrelated to any of the major states of the world. In 1921, Xing Chaeho founded the Korean anarchist magazine Cheongo (Heavenly Drum), in which he began publishing articles and materials from the world anarchist movement. The magazine, by the way, was published in Chinese, which opened access to it and the Chinese reader.

At the beginning of the 1920’s among Korean revolutionaries, both anarchists and representatives of other political movements, the viewpoint on the need to deploy an armed insurgent struggle against the Japanese colonialists is becoming increasingly stronger. Thus, the “Yyoldan” Society — “Union of Justice Enthusiasts”, founded in 1920, set as its goal the conduct of armed operations against Japanese government agencies and officials in Korea and China. Japanese authorities accused social activists of conducting bombing attacks on police stations in Busan,

Layers and Seoul, shelling of the East-colonization society and the Korean Industrial Bank. But these actions, despite wide media coverage, did not have a significant impact on the situation in Korea. Making sure that the path of solitary sabotage could not lead to the liberation of Korea, the organizers of the society, to which Xing Chaeho joined, decided to proceed to the formation of a mass anti-Japanese movement. First of all, they hoped to raise the workers and peasant masses of Korea to fight against the colonialists, and after the national liberation revolution, the question of the future political and economic structure of an independent Korea could be solved.

Back in 1919, the Northern Military Administration, a Korean anarchist rebel team operating in Manchuria, was created. Its founder and leader was Kim Chvazhin (1889–1930, in the photo) – a native of a noble Korean family who received a military education and then worked as a school teacher. In 1917, he joined the Korean Liberation Corps, a military-political organization that operated in Manchuria and in Shanghai and, apart from political activities, was engaged in extorting money from the Korean bourgeoisie.

At the beginning of 1920, the strengthening of ties between Korean and Japanese anarchists continues. The union of the Korean anarchist Pak Yol and the Japanese anarchist Kaneko Fumiko was very symbolic. Pak Yeol was born in 1902 year in Mungun Kensan Pukkto province. In the 1919 year, due to suspicions of participation in the national liberation movement, he was forced to drop out of a Seoul high school. To continue his education, Pak Yeol went to Japan – to Tokyo, where he got a job as a peddler of newspapers. By this time, the young man was already sympathetic to anarchism, so he quickly became acquainted with Tokyo-like-minded people and created with them his own group, the Society of Discontented People (Futei-sha). This organization, like many other anarchist groups in Japan, China and Korea, set as its goal the implementation of “direct action” actions against the authorities.

During his life in Japan, Pak Yeol (pictured) met his peer, Kaneko Fumiko of Japan. She was a little younger – she was born in 1903 in Kotobuki in Yokohama, in the family of police detective Fumikazu Saeki, who belonged to a samurai family, and a simple peasant Kikuno Kaneko. By the time Kaneko Fumiko grew a little, her father had left the police service and started abusing alcohol. In the end, he left the old wife. Kaneko Fumiko’s mother also did not stay long alone and soon married. The girl stayed with the maternal grandparents. They decided to move to Korea.

From 1912 to 1919, Kaneko Fumiko lived in Korea – in the house of her childless aunt. In fact, she was a housekeeper with her relatives, although she had the opportunity to attend school. In 1919, sixteen-year-old Fumiko returned to Japan, to Yokohama, and in 1920, she moved to Tokyo. Here she got a job selling newspapers, met with activists of the Christian mission of the Salvation Army, and then with Japanese socialists. At the same time she attended classes at night school, where she met Hatsuo Niyama, a Japanese girl who became her friend and mentor in an anarchist ideology. At the same time, the fateful acquaintance of Kaneko Fumiko with Pak Yeol also happened. The young Korean immediately attracted the girl and they became revolutionary comrades-in-arms, and then beloveds.

Together with Pak Yol Kaneko Fumiko took part in the creation of the “Society of the Discontented”. It is likely that this small organization would have been able to continue to function if 1 of September 1923 had not occurred the famous “Great Kanto Earthquake”. It brought great human casualties and massive destruction to Japan. The authorities feared that the consequences of the earthquake could take advantage of radical left forces to organize an uprising. In addition, the country’s leadership was also concerned about the possible prospect of an anti-Japanese uprising in Korea.

Across the country, repressions against activists of the revolutionary movement began. First of all, the police arrested the Koreans and the Japanese who collaborated with them. Pak Yolah was also taken into custody. Kaneko Fumiko, as a friend of the Korean revolutionary, was also arrested. After a brief investigation, Pak and Fumiko were found guilty of high treason. They were accused of allegedly preparing an attempt on the life of the Japanese emperor, and for this purpose they intended to acquire an explosive device. While imprisoned, Kaneko Fumiko wrote her autobiography, which today is considered one of the most reliable documentary sources on the history of Japanese and Korean anarchism of the early 1920s.

In the end, Pak Yol and Kaneko Fumiko were sentenced to death. Shortly before the sentencing, they were given the opportunity to officially become husband and wife. It would seem that nothing could save the young anarchists from inevitable death. However, the Japanese emperor ordered mercy on both Pak Yol and Kaneko Fumiko. The death penalty was replaced by life imprisonment. But Kaneko Fumiko broke the sentence and demanded her be executed. In 1926, she committed suicide in a prison cell. Pak Yeol's nerves were stronger — he found the strength to survive a long imprisonment and spent twenty-two years behind bars. In October, 1945, Pak Yeol, was liberated by US forces. After the release, the 43-year-old anarchist, who spent the year in prison in 22, returned to his homeland. During the Korean War, he moved to North Korea, where he lived the second half of his life, having died in 1974, at the age of 72.

However, the conviction of Pak Yolu and Kaneko Fumiko did not affect the further development of the Korean anarchist movement. In 1928, Korean émigrés, who were part of the Union of Korean Anarchists of China, founded the Eastern Union of Anarchists, which included representatives from a number of East Asian countries and territories — China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam. The publication of the magazine “Dong-Bang” (“East”) began. Since the publication of the press required a lot of money, activists of the organization began to forge financial documents. For this was arrested one of the veterans of the Korean movement Xing Chaeho. He was sentenced to ten years in prison. In 1936, he died in the prison of Yeosun.

Nevertheless, the Korean anarchist movement continued to exist, extending its activities to the inner part of the country. Anarchist groups emerged in Seoul and Pyongyang. In 1929, the Korean Federation of Communist Anarchists was created, the backbone of which was the activists of the Society of Black Comrades, which operated in Kwanso. In July 1929, the Union of Korean Anarchists of Manchuria was established, which worked in the city of Helim in North Manchuria. In Shanghai, the South-Chinese Union of Korean Youth acted. At that time, the anarchist relationship with the pro-Soviet elements in the Korean revolutionary movement became complicated. Thus, in 1930, under unexplained circumstances in Shanghai, Kim Chvadzhin, who was considered one of the leaders of anarchists, was shot dead. But the most serious blow to the anarchist organizations of Korea was dealt by the Japanese secret services in the 1930s, when, in connection with the outbreak of hostilities in China, the Japanese leadership seriously concerned about the problem of neutralizing all the revolutionary and opposition organizations in the country. Many prominent anarchists found themselves behind bars, from where they could only come after the defeat of Japan in World War II.

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