

『 Korean "military sexual slavery by Japan" who were taken against their will』

"It is so bitter and resentful. Give my youth back"

Lee Yongsoo (1928. 12 13 ~)

"Give my youth back"

I was born on December the 13th, 1928 in what is now Book-Gu, Goseong-Dong in Daegu, as the only daughter in a poor family. I had nine family members including my grandmother, father, mother, one older brother and four younger brothers. I entered Dalseong Normal school [nowaday's elementary school level] but had to quit within a year because of the financial situation of my family. I then studied at night-time classes when I became 13. When I took the night-time classes, I was called 'Yasuhara Iryo-ohshu'(安原李容洙). I sang with an organ accompaniment and learned Japanese. I was not really good at studying but loved singing. The male Japanese teacher at the night-classes also told me that I was a good singer. I studied for about one year but had to work at a factory during the day time, so I often skipped classes.

Caring for younger brothers instead of mom

My mom worked as a nanny for a rich family near Sujeong Normal-school so I had to raise my younger brothers. The house that my family lived in and a field that we used for farming was owned by the rich family.

From nine to thirteen years old, I worked at a cotton factory run by a Japanese man in Chilseong-Dong. When the machine lifted the cotton, it was really dusty. After I saw a person get pulled into the machine and break their head, I got scared and didn't want to go to the factory anymore. But there was no other way to live without going to the factory.

At the age of fifteen, I received Jeongsindae training at Chilseong Elementary school. Males and females stood in a line, did a bit of stretching and trained to march in a line. We walked back home keeping the line.

In the fall of 1944, I was sixteen. Back then, my dad was working as a delivery man carrying sacks of rice. I had a friend called Boon-soon whose mother sold liquor. One day, when I came over, her mother said "Look at you, you don't even have proper shoes. If you go with my daughter Boon-soon, there is everything. You will get fed well, and will help your family get wealthy." Back then, I did not dress up very well.

A few days later, I saw an old man and a Japanese guy standing at the top of a mound at the corner while I was playing with Boon-soon, picking fresh water snails. The old man pointed at us with his finger and the Japanese guy came down towards us. The old man was gone soon after that and the other guy waved for us to come. I was scared and ran to the other side leaving Boon-soon there.

Then a few days later, Boon-soon visited me at dawn, knocked on my window whispering "Come out here". I came out to Boon-soon quietly. I didn't talk to my mom but just came out to chase after Boon-soon. I was wearing a black skirt, long cotton shirt with buttons and dragged gedda (Japanese style sleepers). The Japanese guy that I saw at the riverside was there. He seemed less than forty years old. He was wearing national suit and a field service hat. He gave me a bag with clothing and told me there is a dress and a pair of leather shoes inside. I glanced inside and there was a red dress and leather shoes. As a young girl, I was so excited to get such a gift. So I followed him not thinking of other possibilities. There were five girls including me.

From there, we went to the station and took a train to Kyung-ju. That was the first time that I took a train. At Kyung-ju, we went to a motel. When I was washing my hands at the spring in front of the motel, I saw a purple flower. I had never seen the flower before, so I asked and heard that it was a 'Doraji flower (balloon flower)'. I spent about two days there and he brought two more women. So there were seven females. From Kyung-ju, the train passed Daegu. I saw my home through a broken crack in the window of the train. Suddenly, I remembered my home and missed my mom so much. I cried out that I should go back to my mom. I pushed away the clothing, resigned that I didn't want it anymore, and cried asking to let me go back home. I passed out from tiredness of crying so I don't know how long I traveled. It seemed like several days.

Afraid of beating

We arrived at a house in Anju Phyungan-Do. It was a four-roomed thatched house with a garage. In that house there was one old lady who took care of the place. She was always wearing a long shirt and loose pants and wrapped a towel over her hair. There was nothing much to eat, so they gave us potatoes and sorghum (wild grain) instead of regular meals. I felt so hungry so sometimes I stole and picked an apple.

The Japanese man who brought us from Daegu punished us often whenever one of us made a mistake. He made us stand on top of a round bat holding two full water bottles, or beat our palms and soles with round pulling sticks that people used to straighten laundry. If we were a little late when he ordered us to bring water, we were beaten. Because I was so scared of him punishing or hitting us so often and easily, I tried to read the situations and react quickly.

As winter came, the land was frozen and the wind became severe. We worked every day pulling radishes out from the field and brought them back in a sack. I felt so cold and my hands were frozen working wearing only a single layer of clothing. When we said that we were cold, he beat us again. So we tried to thaw our hands behind him and shivered the whole time.

At Anju, he took the two women who joined us later, so there were only five of us left. We stayed about a month there and took a train to Daeryun.

We slept one night at a motel in Daeryun. The next day, the guy gave us steamed buns and soup. I remember it being delicious since I felt so hungry and it was foreign food. We departed Daeryun on a boat, and I heard that

there were 11 boats that departed together. It was a huge boat. We were lifted onto the final boat. There were many Japanese navy soldiers. We were the only females on the boat.

The new year of 1945 arrived on the boat. When the boat stopped in Shanghai, the soldiers got off but we women were not allowed. They made me stand on a dock and sing where the soldiers gathered together. So when I sang, one of the officers gave me two rice cakes. I brought them back to the group and shared it with them. We came back on board the boat but the bombardments were severe so the boat was turned off and on. One day, the boat was bombed. Some other boats were almost broken and ours was also in chaos as it was hit on its head. It was a mess outside of the boat, too. The boat was shifting so much and I was almost went out of my mind suffering from sea sickness. My head was splitting in two and I couldn't tolerate the nausea. Throwing up, I crawled to the bathroom and one soldier tried to drag me somewhere. I pushed him and struggled to escape him biting his arm. I was too young and weak to fight him off as he slapped me and threw me aside. Like that, I was raped by him. I could not know who he was. Like that, I experienced it for the first time from a man but did not know what had just happened. I just realized that the Japanese guy brought me for this purpose.

I heard that the boat was almost broken and we would all die. Someone told me to wear a life-jacket. I thought I was going to die now. I thought it might be better. But the boat continued to sail. I was not the only one who had been raped. Boon-soon and other women also told me that they were raped too. From that time, we were raped often on the boat. My eyes were all swollen because I was always crying. Back then I was young and terrified so I trembled all over. As I look back, I feel so bitter and resentful but I did not know what was happening. I could not ever look at the soldiers straight because I felt so scared.

One day, I opened the window of the boat and gazed at the ocean. I wanted to jump out of the boat to the waves. I felt too scared looking down the dark and rough waves, so could not bear to throw myself to the waves.

Lose consciousness from electric torture

I arrived in Taiwan. When I tried to walk to get off the boat, my bottom did not feel like belong to me. I had lumps around my crotch and blood had clotted around the wound. I could not close my legs because my bottom was so swollen so I walked with a waddle. The man who brought us from Daegu was the owner of the Comfort site. We called him as 'Oyaji' [which means owner in Japanese]. I was the youngest among the women. Boon-soon was one year older than me, and the other women were about eighteen, nineteen and twenty.

They ordered me to enter the room but I resisted so the owner dragged me to a room by pulling my hair. In that room I was tortured with electrical shocks. He was ruthless. He pulled out a phone cord and tied my wrists and ankles. Then he shouted "Konoyaro!" and dialed the phone many times. Fire flew out of my eyes and shook my body. Finally I couldn't bear anymore so I cried out begging for mercy. He dialed the phone once again then I lost consciousness. I woke up and found myself all wet, I guess he might have poured water on me.

The comfort site was a two story house built in Japanese style and had twenty rooms. When we arrived, there were already many women. About 10 women who looked older than us were wearing Kimonos. There was a Japanese lady, who was the wife of the owner and his concubine was a Korean woman. The owner beat his wife and concubine often. We wore dresses that the women who came ahead of us handed us. The owner ordered us to call the ladies "Nesang (older sisters)" and listen to them. We took turns and did their laundry and cooking. There was not much to eat either. We had plain white porridge or grain porridge.

I still easily get scared. It was worse back then and I always shrink in my body from fear of being hit by the owner. I didn't get beaten by the soldiers but I was beaten by the owner a lot. I couldn't think of running away. How could I think of running away while I knew nothing about where I was after crossing the ocean.

The room at the comfort site was so small. It was just about the size of two people lying down. Its door was a cloth covering. The wall was a board, and the floor was wood but nothing was on it. With one single army blanket, I stayed on the floor.

One day, one soldier asked me what my name was. I was still frightened so I just stayed in the corner. Then the soldier said "I will give you a name" and called me 'Dosiko'. From that time, I was called as 'Dosiko'. We usually served 'Dokotai (shock troops)'. They never cared about us at all. The soldiers were wore uniforms but I could not distinguish whether they were army, navy or air force.

I had four to five soldiers a day on average. When they came in, they finished soon and left. It was rare that they stayed and slept over. I used old clothes during my menses. Even during the period, I had to serve them. The air raids were serious, sometimes we had to evacuate several times within a day. When there were air raids, we hid in the mountain or in a cave. Then when it became quiet, we served soldiers in a tent whether it was in a field or rice paddy. Sometimes the tent fell down from the wind, but the soldiers never cared and only left when they were finished. I was treated worse than dogs or pigs. I don't remember getting any health examination outside of the camp. I did not know what a 'Sat-ku (condom)' was.

One day, the house collapsed while I was at an air defense underground subsector. Dirt had poured into the air defense subsector. I dug dirt desperately to escape the site. After a while, I made a little hole. I was so happy and said 'Now, I can see outside' but smelled some smoke. That made me bleed through my mouth and nose. Then I lost consciousness.

From that bombing, the concubine of the owner and the 'military sexual slave by Japan', Ms. Park who was tall and had a long face died. Since the houses were destroyed, we went down to the shelter under the mountain. There we served soldiers again.

Later, the houses were built again. It did not took long to make the house. Then we served soldiers continuously. I got a sexually transmitted disease (STD). The owner injected me a reddish and strong 606 shot. I didn't recover properly since I had to serve soldiers while I hadn't been cured. I served the soldiers by getting injections regularly. There was no hospital nor public health center nearby.

Aside from going to the shelter to escape the bombing, we could not go outside and were under severe surveillance. We wouldn't go outside as we had been told that we would get beaten and killed. The Dokotais were all very young. They were usually around nineteen to twenty years old.

Treating Dokotais

One day, a soldier came. He said that he will die today when he leaves the war site. I asked "What is Dokotai?" He said it meant two people on a plane that go to attack the enemy's camp sites or boats. Then he gave me his photo and his washing kit, like soap and towel. He said he had come to me two to three times before, and got an STD from me. He said he would take the disease as a gift from me. Then he taught me a song.

Taking off bravely, leaving Hsinchu (新竹)

Over the golden waves and the clouds of silver waves

No one sends me off

Only Dosiko cries for me.

By then, I only knew that it was some place in Taiwan but did not know where that was exactly. But from the song that he taught me, I assumed there to be 'Hsinchu'(新竹) in Taiwan. When we escaped, I stole and picked sugar canes due to hunger. I got caught then was beaten. They did not allow me to speak Korean. The owner beat us when we spoke Korean. One day, one quiet lady at the shelter spoke to me "I am Korean too" in Korean and told me that the war was over. We cried for a while holding each other. She held my hands tight saying "Survive, and you must go back to Korea however you can". I looked outside at people running around shouting. So I learned that the war was over. When I came back, I couldn't find the owner and other older ladies.

I went to the refugee camp that looked like a cargo near the dock. They gave me a rice ball and there were lots of rice bugs in it. Staying in a camp, I waited for a boat to come. While there, I wrapped myself with a blanket and hid at the corner wondering if someone would come and take me somewhere again. I also cried a lot there so my eyes were always swollen and looked like they were closed.

Give my youth back

I arrived in Busan when the barley was green. When we landed in Busan, they sprayed DDT on us and gave us 300 won. Four of us - Boon-soon, one chubby lady, another lady and me - made it back to Korea, and we separated in Busan. I took a train back to Daegu. In the train, I kept crying and hid in the corner in case someone found me and took me somewhere. My old home was the same as it looked old and tilted thatched house. When I entered the house, my mom fainted saying "Are you a human or a ghost?"

I never thought of getting married. Having a conscience, how could I dare think of getting married? I suffered due to the STD for long until recently. My family did not know where I was sent nor how I suffered. My dad was resentful that his only daughter could not get married. My mom and dad said it was regretful that they could not get me married before they left this life.

I worked as a waitress at the fish cake bar in Hyangchon-dong for a while. I used to run my own business near the beach in Ulsan for three years. I used to run a cart bar, too. For several years I worked as an insurance sales person and then quit a few years ago as I got older.

Both my parents are gone, and my younger brothers who don't know what happened felt sorry about me living alone. Neighbors talked a lot about me living alone. That was annoying and I also felt lonely and sad that I could not wear a wedding veil even though I was born a woman. So in January of 1989, when I became sixty years old, I married a seventy-five year old man. I chose a much older man because I did not like men. However he was always very suspicious of me and mistreated me so it didn't go well. I divorced this February and now live alone in Daegu. I live in a single room paying 900,000(won?) for 10 months without deposit. It is about 8.5 m² and has a kitchen. Nowadays, I live with the money that my brothers gathered together to support me.

I feel a lot more comfortable after reporting all this. How much longer will I live? I cannot appreciate enough 'The Council for the Women drafted for Military Sexual Slavery' helping us.

These days I often sing the song changing the lyrics of 'Katusa'. 'I cannot live with the resentment. Give my youth back. Apologize and compensate. Japan that took me against my will and destroyed me, do apologize and compensate. Mom and dad, can you hear me and the sound of cries from your daughter. Now the siblings - citizens in Korea help to resolve this sorrow'.

A few days ago, I visited my mother and father's tomb and prayed.

“Mother who cannot come even though I call and cry for you. Now my Korean siblings help me resolve the resentment. Dear mom and dad, rest in peace and stay in heaven.”