

October 25, 2017

The Root Cause of “Comfort Women Problem” in the Eurasian Continent

By KURANISHI Masako

In South Korea, the new Five-Year Plan for the state politics and policy was released by the President Moon Jae-in in this July. For the Japanese, it is noticeable that this plan includes the establishment of a new national day, “the Comfort Women Day Honoring the Victims,” within the next year, 2018. Although the President referred to constructions of a research institute and a history museum as its related projects, it seems to be questionable that this memorial day will come off, because the problem of “comfort women” was actually brought about by a fake news story, so called “comfort women hunting in Jeju Island.”

Concerning “comfort women,” there is still lively argument over its authenticity. To settle this complicated dispute, we should draw attention to the way of thinking of Eurasian nomads. “The Secret History of the Mongols,” a quasi-biography of Genghis Khan (c.1162–c.1227), is one of useful and helpful sources to know it. Though its extant texts translated to Chinese were published during the 14th century in the age of the Ming dynasty, some scholars conjecture that the Mongolian original had been written by one of contemporary kinsmen of Genghis.

In this history, we meet not only appalling sights of their conquests with cruel massacres and avaricious pillage but also inhumane treatments of women and children in their occupied areas. According to the traditional thought of the Mongols, women and children of their enemies were nothing more than war trophies; when they defeated and subjugated neighboring or foreign tribes and nations, they often took women, particularly young and good-looking, to their bases, where chiefs distributed these women to their subordinates in reward for contributions. They showed no respect for personality and dignity of women, because they regarded such disposition of humans as a special right of winners.

On the other hand, looking back over the history of Japan, “Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan)” mentions that assault on women was strictly prohibited by the military discipline enacted by Empress Jingū in around the 3rd or 4th century. In addition, during the Sengoku period (c.1467–c.1603), there was a military custom or customary law that while besieging a castle, the side of attacking should allow women and children inside the walls to escape safely from the site of battle; we can find some cases that a male lord or his sons effected their escapes by passing them off as ladies. Regarding treatment of women and children in wartime, the Japanese way of thinking is nearly opposite from that of Eurasian nomads: generally speaking, humans have, to some extent, an inclination to behave cruelly especially in war-time, which has spurred Eurasian nomads to get the spoils of war. By contrast, ethical aversion to such a tendency of humans, is the very reason that the Japanese has striven to protect the weak from war-time violence. This point deserves explicit emphasis.

Let us now return to the comfort women dispute, it is hardly conceivable that the Imperial Japanese Army took a large number of young Korean women away forcibly and systematically by orders of the state for the purpose of compelling them to serve the army as “comfort women.” Considering the fact that Möngke Khan, who was the fourth Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, conquered Goryeo, a Korean kingdom (c.918–c.1392), and ruled over it as a vassal state of the Yuan dynasty from 1270 to 1356, it seems that the nomadic idea, “women in conquered lands are mere war trophies,” still remain in the Korean Peninsula.

Since the inauguration of the pro-North Korea President, the Korean people have been getting so excited with cursing Japan out particularly for “the enforced comfort women.” But tracing back to the past before the Japan's Annexation of Korea in 1910, the root cause of this problem seems to be the repeated invasions of the Korean peninsula by Eurasian nomads, especially Mongolians as mentioned above. The most likely explanation for the Korean's false accusation against Japan is that they have a prejudiced illusion stemming from their own ordinary nomadic sense of war: that the Japanese soldiers in the World War II must have done in the same way as Eurasian nomads did. In fact, a large majority of Korean comfort women, except a small number of victims of criminal acts by some civil proprietors, worked legally based on proper employment contracts.

Here we may say that for the first step to ascertain the truth and to clear this dispute up, it is necessary that both the Korean government and people should exert themselves to face up to the facts, including the history of their way of thinking.

(This is an English translation of the article written by KURANISHI Masako, Political Scientist, which originally appeared on the e-forum “Hyakka-Somei (Hundred Ducks in Full Voice)” of CEAC on July 28, 2017.)