

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 393

“Everything’s Going to Be Fine”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“It is an incontrovertible fact that the nations of Greater East Asia are bound in every respect by ties of an inseparable relationship. I firmly believe that such being the case, it is their common mission to secure the stability of Greater East Asia and to construct a new order of common prosperity and well-being.”

Japanese prime minister Tojo Hideki.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 393. Everything’s Going to Be Fine.

I want to begin today by talking about the archipelago we know as Indonesia and what Westerners a century ago called the Dutch East Indies.

Fossil remains show that Indonesia was inhabited by archaic humans of the species *Homo erectus* more than a million years ago. In fact, when the first human fossils were discovered in the 19th century, they were originally called “Java Man,” after their place of discovery. Only in 1950 were Java Man, along with Peking Man, a set of remains discovered in China, reclassified as *Homo erectus*.

Our own species, *Homo sapiens*, arrived in Indonesia roughly 4000 years ago. The islands had never been ruled by one all-encompassing nation state, but smaller nation states on the various islands existed as early as the 7th century. These peoples were originally Hindu and Buddhist, but by the 16th century, Islam was the dominant religion in the islands.

It was also at about this time that the first Europeans arrived, Portuguese Europeans, to be specific, seeking to gain a share of the lucrative trade in spices from the islands, notably cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, and cloves. The Dutch then sought to get in on this business themselves, and in 1602 the Dutch East India Company was established. As you already know,

the Dutch and British East India Companies competed here and in India until the two worked out a *modus vivendi* under which the Dutch conceded India to the British and the British conceded the East Indies to the Dutch.

The story of Dutch colonial control over the islands is typical of the era. The Dutch began by establishing trading posts on the coasts of several of these islands and, by force of arms and economic entanglement, gradually expanded their control. In the case of Indonesia, most of this expansion took place in the 19th century, after the Dutch East India Company went bankrupt and the government of the Netherlands took direct control of its territories, ruling from the capital city of Batavia on the island of Java. The small nation-states scattered across the islands fell under Dutch control one by one, until by the early twentieth century, the Dutch controlled all of what we today call Indonesia and had army, navy, and air force units stationed there.

The peoples of these islands practiced slavery before the Dutch got there, but the Dutch took advantage of slave labor to grow introduced crops like coffee, tea, rubber, and sugar. Slavery was formally abolished in the East Indies in 1860, although the practice continued on some islands into the twentieth century.

The economy of the islands had always been agricultural, but by the late 19th century, tin and coal mining and especially oil wells became more lucrative. Much of the investment in these industries was provided by British money. In the 1890s, two oil companies were founded to operate in the East Indies: the Dutch-owned Royal Dutch Petroleum Company and the British-owned Shell Transport and Trading Company. In 1907, they merged to form Royal Dutch Shell, which still exists in our time.

Exports of oil, metals, spices, and other crops from the Dutch East Indies were tremendously lucrative, and as is also typical of colonialism in this era, the profits went to Dutch people (and British people) and not to the native peoples of the islands. The Dutch even instituted a two-tier system of citizenship, making the inhabitants of the islands second-class citizens in their own country. The island peoples mostly lived in poverty, their children seldom got to go to school, and their rights to participate in politics or to criticize the Dutch administration were sharply circumscribed.

This began to change at the turn of the twentieth century. Liberal critics of colonialism in the Netherlands began to speak out against the status quo, arguing that the Dutch had a moral responsibility to share the wealth of the islands with their inhabitants. In 1901, the Dutch government adopted what it called the “Ethical Policy” that introduced programs aimed at improving economic opportunities for the peoples of the islands. The policy included expanded education, economic development programs to encourage native businesses and industry, and programs to encourage migration from the densely populated island of Java, home to half the population of the East Indies, to less populated and less developed islands.

Educational opportunities, though broadened, were still mostly available only to the children of Indonesian elites, many of whom worked with or for their Dutch rulers. Even so, as in other colonies, education brought with it the introduction of Western ideas of democracy and individual rights, and also Western ideas of socialism and Western liberal critiques of colonialism as mere exploitation.

This produced a new generation of people opposed to Dutch rule, and although the peoples of the islands were members of many diverse ethnic groups, they had in common an opposition to the Dutch and a devotion to Islam, both of which served to unite them across ethnic divides.

In the 19th century, the word *Indonesia* was coined to describe the archipelago, from Greek words for Indian and islands, by analogy to Polynesia and Melanesia and Micronesia. The younger generation of nationalists largely abandoned separate Javanese nationalism or Sumatran nationalism or Balinese nationalism in favor of a pan-Indonesian nationalism.

One of these young nationalists was Koesno Sosrodihardjo, who was born on June 6, 1901, in East Java. His father was a Muslim Javanese teacher and his mother was a Hindu Balinese. During his childhood, he was renamed Sukarno.

Sukarno was able to take advantage of the new educational opportunities through primary and secondary schools and on to a technical college, where he studied engineering. He had a remarkable gift for languages. In addition to Javanese, which was spoken in his childhood home, he learned the Indonesian, Balinese and Sundanese languages of the islands, as well as Dutch, German, English, French, Japanese, and Arabic.

He was very much a modernist. It comes with being an engineer. While at university, he founded an all-Indonesian study club, where members read and discussed political texts. He deplored Dutch colonialism, which he dismissed as “exploitation of humans by other humans,” but he also looked down on the pre-colonial traditions of the islands as backward—that was his word. He embraced Indonesian nationalism with a modernist and socialist slant: pan-Indonesian, secular, and anti-imperialist.

In 1926, Sukarno graduated with a degree in civil engineering and along with one of his college buddies he began an architectural firm, Sukarno & Anwari. A year later, he got together with some of his old friends from the study club to form the Indonesian National Party, or PNI. Sukarno was elected its first leader. The party favored an independent, secular Indonesian state, and became popular with young, educated Indonesians.

As the PNI grew in numbers and visibility, it came to the attention of the Dutch secret police. Just after Christmas 1929, Sukarno and other leaders of the PNI were arrested and the organization banned. Sukarno was sentenced to four years in prison. His imprisonment only made him more popular among Indonesians; the Dutch agreed to release him early, at the end of 1931.

Sukarno went right back to his old life. He started another architectural firm and became leader of the newly created Indonesia Party. His speeches and writings in support of independence got him arrested again, in August 1933. This time, the Dutch governor general ordered Sukarno and his family into internal exile on the island of Flores. In 1938, they were relocated to Bengkulu, a province on the southwest coast of Sumatra. And that was where he was in 1942, when the Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies. Dutch Army soldiers attempted to take Sukarno away to Australia, but the Japanese intercepted them and released him.

The Japanese gathered together Sukarno and other nationalist leaders in Batavia, which they were now calling by its Javanese name, Jakarta. Japanese military intelligence already knew all about Sukarno, and they wanted him as a go-between, someone who could advise the Japanese military on Indonesian affairs, and interpret and explain Japanese rule to the Indonesian public. Some might call this collaboration with the enemy, and some on the Allied side did, but Sukarno agreed for his own reasons; chiefly because he saw the Japanese occupation as a first step on the road to independence.

Many Indonesians were hopeful that the arrival of the Japanese heralded the end of oppressive Dutch rule and the beginning of a better life for Indonesians. This was certainly how the Japanese liked to depict themselves: Asians freeing their brother Asians from European oppression.

The reality was something else. To begin with, the Dutch had conducted a scorched-earth policy, destroying industrial and commercial sites before they withdrew, and in particular, the oil wells that were so critical to the Japanese military. It would take some six months to get the oil flowing again.

The military were not at all happy about this, and took out their frustrations on Dutch civilians. Many Dutch civilians stayed behind, some out of a sense that Indonesia was their home, others because they believed the Japanese would need them to help administer the archipelago. Instead, the Japanese murdered European men, often by decapitation, and raped European women, before putting them into internment camps, where conditions were harsh. Not so harsh as in the POW camps, where some 80,000 POWs—Dutch, British, Australian, American, and others—were held for the duration of the war.

In one notorious incident, a ship evacuating wounded soldiers, civilians, and a group of Australian nurses from Singapore shortly before its surrender, was sunk at sea by Japanese bombers. About a hundred survivors managed to reach the shore of Bangka Island, just off Sumatra. About 60 of them were too wounded to travel, so 22 nurses and one civilian woman stayed to care for them, while the rest went to the Japanese authorities to surrender. A company of Japanese soldiers came to the beach later, but instead of taking them into custody, they machine gunned the wounded and raped the women before murdering them as well. Only two

people, one Royal Navy sailor and one of the nurses, survived both the massacre and the camps where they were confined until the end of the war.

About 200 European women, mostly Dutch, captured in Indonesia were forced to serve in the Japanese military's notorious "comfort houses." More about those a little later.

Educated Indonesian elites assisted the Japanese in governing the islands, although it was often awkward as few Indonesians spoke Japanese and few Japanese spoke Indonesian. Despite their rhetoric about liberating their fellow Asians, the Japanese impressed hundreds of thousands of native Indonesians to do forced labor for Japanese military projects, including the notorious Burma Railway, and thousands of Indonesian women and girls to serve in the "comfort houses."

The Indonesians who suffered the most were the ones who lived in the places occupied by Japanese military and Japanese businesses that came to exploit opportunities on the islands. In most cases, this meant Java and Borneo. Indonesians who lived in more remote locations were more likely to escape Japanese notice, except for the ones who took up arms against the occupation. But no matter how remote a person was, they could not avoid the famines that struck the islands late in the war, when food was in short supply due to Japanese Army requisitions.

The United Nations later estimated that four million Indonesians died in the period 1941-49, due to Japanese killings, starvation, forced labor, and the fight against the Japanese and later against Allied forces seeking to reoccupy the islands after the war. That is a story for another episode.

The Japanese outlawed political parties and imposed censorship. Schools taught Japanese and made students sing the Japanese national anthem every morning before classes. The Japanese harshly punished any hint of anti-Japanese opinion. It didn't take long for Indonesians to realize they had traded one set of oppressors for another, and the new guys were worse.

The arrival of the Japanese in Indonesia also triggered violence between native Indonesians and the islands' small Chinese community, most of whom were merchants or factory owners. The Japanese forced an end to this violence, which is a bit surprising, in view of how they treated the Chinese populations of their other occupied territories. In the case of Indonesia, it was likely because they recognized the importance of the Chinese to the Indonesian economy.

This is in sharp contrast to other countries under Japanese occupation. In Malaya and Singapore, the Japanese closely monitored the large Chinese communities. Some 50,000 Chinese, mostly men, were taken away and executed by the Japanese military on suspicion of hostility toward Japan. The Chinese community was forced to pay the Japanese military \$50 million, meant as compensation for their prior support of Chiang Kai-shek and the Republic of China.

Ethnic Indians and Malays were somewhat better treated, although tens of thousands of them were also taken for forced labor, and women and girls were also subject to rape or to be forced into a "comfort house."

In Hong Kong, the Japanese deported over half of the city's dense population into China. The Japanese occupation force sometimes killed Hong Kongers on the street, often for no apparent reason. Public executions were held at King's Park in Kowloon for opponents of Japanese rule, and for everyone else, food was in short supply and rapes of Chinese women commonplace. It is estimated that some 10,000 Hong Kong civilians were killed by the Japanese, and a much larger number were raped, tortured, or died of starvation.

In the Philippines, after the US High Commissioner, Francis Sayre, and the military chief, Douglas MacArthur, left for Bataan, the ranking American left behind was Sayre's executive assistant, a diplomat named Claude Buss. He dealt with a Japanese officer who spoke fluent British English, because he'd been educated in the UK. He told Buss "Everything's going to be fine." Buss proposed a plan under which Americans would be interned in various locations around Manila, to avoid overcrowding. The Japanese weren't interested. They had their own plan. They ordered all Americans confined to the campus of the University of Santo Tomás, which they turned into an internment camp.

Almost immediately three Americans attempted to escape from the camp; Japanese soldiers captured them and beat them to death with clubs wrapped in barbed wire. There were no further escape attempts after that.

When the Americans were collected together in the camp, they soon discovered that the Japanese had made no arrangements to provide them with food or medicine or other necessities. Ordinary Filipinos made up for the lack, bringing food and bedding and other supplies to the Americans. The Japanese guards were often hostile toward the Filipinos who arrived with these supplies, but it seems they made no attempt to stop them.

Ironically, many of these white Americans living in Manila had held racist attitudes toward the Filipinos and limited association with them. Now that they were living off rations supplied by the Filipinos and had plenty of time on their hands to think. Some of them used the time to rethink their attitudes.

The Americans organized themselves. They created their own informal police force to deal with bad behavior, lest the Japanese decide they needed to police the Americans themselves. They elected a liaison committee to communicate with the Japanese Army, and learned what the Japanese wanted most from the Americans was that they stay put and not cause trouble.

Thousands of Filipinos helped the American prisoners, and thousands more went into the mountains and formed guerilla units to resist the Japanese occupation. Most of the wealthy landed families that traditionally made up the Filipino political elite accommodated themselves to the Japanese, as they had to the Americans before them, and the Spanish before them.

Jorge Vargas, President Quezon's executive secretary, along with Associate Justice of the Supreme Court José Laurel, had been secretly asked by Quezon to stay behind and represent the

Philippine people. Vargas agreed to do a radio broadcast on behalf of the Japanese occupation, in which he promised Filipinos that Japanese rule would be “benign and liberal” and called on them to return to their jobs and do nothing to interfere with the occupation.

Vargas and other prominent Filipinos, such as Laurel, Benigno Aquino, and Manuel Roxas, assisted the Japanese in governing the Philippines, but as Filipinos experienced the cruelty of the Japanese occupation, Japanese promises seemed increasingly hollow. The Japanese had framed their seizure of the Philippines as a liberation, but Japanese administrators made all the decisions.

The Japanese emphasized that they and Filipinos were fellow Asians, which sounds good on paper, but in practice the disciplined and diligent Japanese and the laid-back Filipinos found they had little in common. The Filipinos soon began to miss their American doctors and teachers, not to mention American consumer goods and popular culture. Everyday items such as salt and soap became expensive and hard to find, and food prices skyrocketed. The Japanese printed large quantities of Philippine pesos, which soon became worthless and were derided by the Filipinos as “Mickey Mouse money.” There’s that American cultural influence.

As Filipinos were scrambling for food, Japanese Army officers settled into premium hotel suites, ate at the best restaurants, and drove expensive cars seized from rich Filipinos.

Similarly, the Japanese definition of “co-prosperity” proved to be subordinating Filipino economic interests to Japanese ones. The Philippines’ gold and foreign currency reserves were seized and shipped to Tokyo. The Japanese had no use for sugar cane, the Philippines’ main export crop, because Taiwan adequately supplied their needs. What they did need was cotton, so they razed hundreds of thousands of acres of sugar cane to make way for cotton fields, but the Filipinos lacked the tools, the know-how, and the climate necessary to grow cotton, and the project mostly generated unemployment and poverty in what had been one of the islands’ most prosperous industries.

But the most important reason Filipinos soured on Japanese occupation was the same as it was in Singapore or Hong Kong or Java: the cruelty and brutality. Filipinos were required to bow to any Japanese soldier they encountered, down to the lowliest private. Those who refused, or forgot, were subject to beatings. Listening to American radio broadcasts was a capital offense. As more and more Filipinos turned to the black market to survive, the Japanese tortured and killed black market traders when they caught them, and put their bodies on public display as a warning. When Filipino guerillas killed a Japanese soldier, the Japanese killed ten Filipinos chosen at random in retribution.

[music: Ravel, *Miroirs*.]

I’ve talked before in this podcast about the use of military brothels, which could be found in the armies of some European nations such as Germany and France. Check out episode 241 for more on that topic. The principle behind military brothels is that soldiers are going to hire prostitutes

regardless of what their superiors say or do, and venereal disease can become a serious problem in a military organization. There is also a security concern when soldiers solicit private prostitutes, since any one of them could be a spy. Military brothels therefore provide the intimacy soldiers crave in a more secure environment. In a military brothel, the women are monitored and examined regularly for VD in order to limit its spread.

The Japanese military operated brothels during the Russo-Japanese War. Widespread rapes by Japanese soldiers in Shanghai in 1932 and Nanjing in 1937 persuaded Japan's top military commanders of the need to bring them back.

This decision was based on the assumption that rape is caused by an irresistible sexual urge. If that were true, then providing soldiers with a more acceptable alternative sexual outlet would make sense, but that is seldom the reason people commit rape. Rape is better understood as an act of violence. Like other forms of violence, it is usually motivated by rage or by the desire to assert power and dominance. If you don't believe me, ask yourself why the Japanese soldiers who committed those tens of thousands of rapes in Nanjing often also brutalized, tortured, lacerated, mutilated, and/or murdered their victims in addition to raping them. Savagery like that cannot be explained simply as repressed sexual desire.

So why were Japanese soldiers generally so vicious to their enemies, to their prisoners, or to civilians in occupied countries? The explanation is more likely to be found in the harsh and abusive training regimen Japanese soldiers had to endure.

Admittedly, military training requires a certain "toughening up" of new recruits, who are often only teenagers. Military training was often the first time these recruits lived anywhere outside their parents' homes. Recruits need to adapt to the often harsh life of a soldier, and they need to learn discipline, not only for the good of their army, but for their own safety as well.

But some armies take this idea to extremes. In the Soviet Red Army, for example, beatings of new recruits were considered part of the training program. The Imperial Japanese Army was one of history's cruelest in this regard. Soldiers could be beaten for the most trivial of offenses, such as an open button on their shirt, or a sloppy salute. Soldiers were beaten with fists, with weapons, or with whatever was handy. One notable offense was failing to snap to attention whenever the Emperor was mentioned. Sadistic officers amused themselves by mentioning the Emperor without warning several times a day, in the hope of catching someone off guard.

The beatings were based on rank. NCOs beat their soldiers. Officers beat NCOs. Generals smacked their colonels. Even the prime minister, General Tojo Hideki, was known to rough up his staff officers.

When a new recruit joined a unit, he could expect to be beaten by the veterans, at least until someone newer showed up. Then it was their turn. And here we have the root of the problem. These impressionable young men were taught that it was perfectly normal for a person in a

position of power over you to beat you; the corollary to that rule was that when you were in a position of power over someone else, ah ha, now it's your turn.

Add to that the fact that Japanese soldiers were indoctrinated with propaganda similar to what the Nazis were telling their soldiers: that Japanese people were physically, mentally, and morally superior to any other people on Earth. Westerners certainly, but other Asian people as well.

When you put all this together, it becomes much easier to understand why Japanese soldiers treated enemy soldiers, POWs, even civilians in occupied countries, with such appalling cruelty.

But, as I say, the Japanese military thought the solution would be to bring back military brothels. In fact, what they were doing was providing their angry, violent soldiers with a ready supply of victims.

The Japanese military referred to these military brothels with the euphemistic term "Comfort houses," and the women in them as "comfort women," though these also included teenage girls. The first comfort women were Japanese and they were volunteers. Times were tough in Japan in the Thirties, as they were everywhere, and hard times can force people into prostitution. But as the war in China drew in more and more soldiers, and then war with the US and the UK, the supply of volunteers was inadequate to meet the demand. Also, at the Japanese foreign ministry, they were getting embarrassed by the large numbers of Japanese women applying for exit visas so they could work as prostitutes overseas. Eventually, they stopped issuing them.

Once Japanese women were no longer available, the military began recruiting women of other ethnicities within the Japanese Empire: from Korea, Taiwan, or Manchukuo, and after the Army began seizing and occupying large parts of China, Chinese women. At first, women were simply recruited. The military might advertise or it might hire a recruiter to find women for them. Some of these recruiters resorted to deception or to kidnapping.

The deceptions involved promising pay rates that were far above what the women would actually be paid, and by falsely characterizing the jobs, perhaps as nurses or cooks.

As the Japanese military expanded its reach across the Western Pacific, millions of women came under its control in nations populated by peoples the Japanese regarded as inferior. It was no longer necessary to resort to trickery; the Japanese could simply seize these women and force them into comfort houses. In some instances, the Japanese would merely approach a town or village and demand a certain quota of women for the comfort houses, leaving it to the local leaders to choose whom to send.

Overall, Chinese and Korean women made up more than half of all comfort women, but the Japanese also took Straits Chinese, Malay, Burmese, Javanese, Thai, Filipina, Burmese, Balinese, and New Guinean women and girls. A few hundred white European women, mostly Dutch or Australian, were also taken. Some civilian prisoners "volunteered" to work as comfort

women. I put “volunteered” in quotation marks because these women were living in internment camps under harsh conditions and close to starvation when they were offered a position that would allow them to eat regularly and sleep indoors. You can’t really call that voluntary.

The sources I’ve seen sometimes reference small numbers of men and trans women taken as well, though I haven’t been able to establish many details, but then it’s hard to get people to talk about their experiences in comfort houses, so who knows?

These comfort women were in fact sex slaves. Different comfort houses operated in different ways, but often a woman was expected to have sex with Japanese soldiers at fifteen-minute intervals for four to eight hours every day, or longer on some occasions, such as right after combat. NCOs got to be with the women for an hour; officers perhaps for an evening. New women were “broken in,” so to speak, by being beaten and raped repeatedly until they submitted.

Senior Japanese military officers had one or more women assigned to them permanently. These women lived with the officer full time and traveled with him. They might also be required to cook and clean for him. The women who held these positions were again “volunteers” from the comfort houses, but you can’t really call that volunteering. White women were particularly in demand with these senior officers.

The life of a comfort woman was unspeakably brutal. They were forced to provide sexual services at a rate the human body simply can’t bear. Beatings were commonplace. Regulations required soldiers to use condoms with comfort women, but this rule was often ignored. No one checked, and the woman herself was in no position to object.

Comfort women were often referred to with dehumanizing terminology, such as “public restrooms.” Food, water, and living conditions were inadequate. When the women weren’t being used for sex, they were often made to do cooking or cleaning. Some were forced to give blood transfusions to soldiers. The women were examined regularly by doctors, but these examinations were limited to checking for and treating venereal disease and for abortions when the woman got pregnant. Comfort women were sometimes raped by the doctor during the examination.

Any form of noncompliance would get a comfort woman a beating. Comfort women often attempted to escape or to kill themselves. In some instances, women were warned that if they succeeded in escaping or killing themselves, the Japanese military would kill their families and neighbors in retribution.

An estimated 300,000-400,000 people were forced to serve as comfort women by the Japanese military during the war, again with Chinese and Koreans making up the majority of that total.

It scarcely needs to be said that women who were put through this system suffered long-term physical and emotional injury. The end of the war was hardly the end of the survivors’ suffering. Many of them became sterile, for starters. In many of the cultures of East Asia of the time,

women were expected to sacrifice their lives before their virginity, making it all but impossible for these women to return to their families or their communities, or to speak publicly about their suffering. It was only decades after the end of the war that the stories of the comfort women began to come out.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening and for sticking with me through another dark and difficult episode. As was the case with last week's episode, this is also history that must never be forgotten. I'd like to thank Joshua for his kind donation, and thank you to Gabrielle for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Joshua and Gabrielle help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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I have an important announcement to make about the podcast. Longtime listeners will recall that I have occasionally made reference to the fact that Mrs. History of the Twentieth Century and I have two adult sons with developmental disabilities who live with us and are dependent on us for their care. One of our sons has a heart condition that is going to require some serious surgery in just a few weeks, and I regret to say that it will be impossible for me to care for him during his recovery and still maintain the current schedule for this podcast.

I've pondered how to deal with this with a minimum of disruption, and I've decided that rather than go dark for a period of several weeks, it would be better to go to a biweekly schedule until things are back to normal for me and my family. Next week would be a bye week for the podcast anyway, so I'm going to start now, since the sooner I begin the schedule change, the sooner I can switch back. This means there will be a new episode two weeks from today, then another two weeks after that, and so on for as long as necessary, hopefully no more than two months or so. And I feel that we've just done two episodes of very difficult history, and it's time for something to lighten the mood a little.

So I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as we go back to Hollywood and talk about another movie studio, this time Warner Brothers, the studio that vaulted into the majors when it introduced the first talking picture. The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of, in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. It was not until the Nineties, decades after the end of the war, that the experiences of the comfort women began to be publicized, and this history remains a fraught and controversial topic. Suffice it to say that some Japanese prime ministers and parliaments have issued apologies, while on other occasions, other prime ministers and political leaders have insisted this never happened. The right wing in Japanese politics continues to deny that women were forced into comfort houses. They claim women in Japanese military brothels were volunteers, well treated, and that they received fair payment for their services.

Attempts have been made to offer compensation to survivors, but that is also complex. Some survivors deride the compensation as inadequate, while others refuse it entirely and demand instead more contrition from the government of Japan. The Japanese Ministry of Education has a history of deleting references to the comfort houses from Japanese textbooks. Japan's Foreign Ministry has protested the inclusion of the topic in textbooks in the United States, as well as protesting memorials to comfort women established in the United States, South Korea, and Germany. In South Korea, a memorial statue was put up in front of the Japanese embassy. The Japanese city of Osaka ended its sister-city relationship with San Francisco after that city put up its memorial. Memorials to comfort women have also been established in China and in Taiwan, as well as the Philippines, Canada, and Australia, among other countries.

Needless to say, none of this history has endeared Japan to the East Asian countries it formerly occupied, particularly China and Korea, where anger over the comfort houses and conduct of the Japanese military generally during their occupations, remains a sore point in those countries' relations with Tokyo. Protests have been held every Wednesday in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul beginning in 1992 and continuing to this day.

[music: Closing War Theme]