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THE COMFORT WOMEN OF SINGAPORE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION: A DARK HERITAGE TRAIL

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During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore from 1942 to 1945, the Japanese military sexually enslaved hundreds of mainly Korean – but also Chinese, Indonesian and Malay – women in what were called “comfort stations” dotted across Singapore. Japanese women were also brought to Singapore as “hostesses” or prostitutes for high-ranking officers. The last-known living survivor of this mass sexual enslavement in Singapore is Kim Bok Dong, aged 93, who lives in Seoul. She most likely worked at a comfort station on Sentosa. Other sites of comfort stations include buildings still standing at Cairnhill Road, Jalan Jurong Kechil, Tanjong Katong Road and Teo Hong Road in Chinatown.

Memories of the experiences of comfort women in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation illustrate the contradictions in remembering women’s experiences during war as transnational history. In this lecture, Prof Kevin Blackburn discusses the comfort women of Singapore in both history and memory, and offers insight into what has come to be called “dark heritage” sites of human suffering.

TIME (MIN)	TRANSCRIPT
0:01 [Speaker: Moderator, Priscilla Chua]	<p>Right, good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I’m Priscilla, a curator from the National Museum. So, thank you once again for joining us in this talk tonight. This is actually part of the museum’s HistoriaSG series, which offers insights on Singapore’s culture, history and heritage. And the talk tonight is the first for 2019.</p> <p>So, one week ago today, 77 years back, Singapore fell to the Japanese, and with it began one of the darkest chapters in the history of modern Singapore. The local population suffered during the three and a half years of Japanese occupation – living in fear, hunger and in poor conditions. During this period, hundreds of women in Singapore, mainly Korean, but also Chinese, Indonesian and Malay, were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military.</p>
0:55 [Speaker: Priscilla]	<p>These women, together with tens, if not hundreds of thousands of other women, became known as comfort women. And they served in comfort stations, in the territories occupied by the imperial Japanese army in Asia during World War Two.</p> <p>In Singapore, comfort stations were found across the island including buildings</p>

	<p>still standing in Cairnhill Road, Jalan Jurong Kechil, Tanjong Katong Road, and Teo Hong Road in Chinatown.</p> <p>Now, this evening, we are very honoured to have with us, Professor Kevin Blackburn to give us a lecture on “The comfort women of Singapore during the Japanese occupation – a dark heritage trail”.</p>
01:34 [Speaker: Priscilla]	<p>Prof Blackburn will be speaking about the topic of comfort women in Singapore, in both history and memory, and to look into what has become known as “dark heritage sites” of human suffering. Now, Kevin, of course, is a dear friend of the museum who has sat on a number of our advisory panels and the curators have all benefitted from his generosity as he is always so forthcoming in sharing his knowledge.</p>
2:00 [Speaker: Priscilla]	<p>Kevin Blackburn is an Associate Professor in history, at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University Singapore. He has taught in Singapore since 1993 when he left the history department of the University of Queensland, to take up his present teaching position. He teaches and researches the history and memory of the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia. On the topic of war and commemoration, he has co-authored with Carl Hack, “Did Singapore Have to Fall”, well as “War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore”. He’s also co-edited the book “Forgotten Captives in Japanese Occupied Asia”.</p>
02:38 [Speaker: Priscilla]	<p>Before we invite Prof Blackburn on stage for his talk, just a few house-keeping matters. There will be a Q&A session after the lecture, so do keep your questions to the end. Also, kindly turn your smart devices to silent mode, and please be mindful of the sensitive nature of this topic. We look forward to a good and fruitful discussion about the topic this evening. And just in case you are worried about missing some details or information about the talk tonight, don’t worry, we’ll actually be uploading a video of tonight’s lecture on our website that should be up sometime in March. So, you can keep a lookout on the museum’s website.</p> <p>So, without further ado, Prof Blackburn, please. Let’s welcome him.</p>
03:23 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]	<p>Thank you very much, Priscilla. Thank you for coming.</p> <p>I’d like to start off this talk with why I’m giving this talk, it has something to do with this book. In 2017, about eight Korean historians emailed me and got in touch with me about their research trip to Singapore, to collect documents on the comfort women. I gave them as much assistance as I could, and then I detailed the seven sites of the comfort stations in Singapore. And I said, well, you will have to get someone to show you around. And after several months, they came back and said, well we haven’t found anyone, can you do it for us? So, I said, okay, I will do it. This is the first time I did it, probably the first comfort women tour of Singapore. Okay, so I took them to all the sites possible, actually. Not all seven, but as you can see it’s as close as I could get. They did pay me, surprisingly, they</p>

	<p>had money for a guide, actually, so there are Koreans around who will come to Singapore, there are also Japanese who will come to Singapore as well, to see this aspect of dark heritage as I say.</p>
<p>04:32 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Okay, so what is dark heritage? It's a common term that's cropping up. There's elements of it, three different elements if you want. You can have like the London dungeons, you can have kind of dark heritage in entertainment. Then, of course, there's dark heritage like the holocaust sites. The last one is probably where we would put the comfort stations of Singapore. They are somewhat known, actually. They are unmarked, and as we will see, and in many cases, unwanted. Okay, one could argue if this is heritage, but as I've said, I've conducted a heritage trail for visiting Koreans and I know that Japanese tourists that are aware of the comfort sites do them as well.</p>
<p>05:32 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>The research work, okay, there's lots of research work on the comfort women. The comfort women of Singapore, not so much actually. The doyen of this, the man who is the most responsible for this, is the man sitting in the middle at one of the conferences that I did in 2005 on the Japanese occupation, I invited him. His name is Professor Hayashi. He's written extensively on the comfort women and the massacre of the Chinese as well. Unfortunately, most of his detailed work, as you see, is in the Japanese language. But there are English language sources that have used his work as well.</p>
<p>06:10 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Okay, a lot of what I will tell you tonight is drawn from his work in the 1990s, and also his book in 2007. Okay, so if you were a Japanese language speaker, there is this rich source of material.</p> <p>So how did we get to the situation where we are now, where Korean historians are coming down, wanting a comfort tour of Singapore? Before 1991, the comfort women were scarcely known internationally and in Singapore also. There was, basically, as you can see, not much awareness of this aspect of Singapore's past. So in 1991, we had the Korean women coming to Japan, to sue the Japanese government. Okay, that's the first time, internationally, we hear of the comfort women, since basically, the end of World War Two.</p>
<p>07:04 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, in 1992, you have once again, another historian, who basically wants to tell the Japanese government that there are lots of evidence in the military archives on comfort women. Professor Yoshimi, who worked with Professor Hayashi, so he goes into the archives and within hours, brings out all these documents that basically contradict what the Japanese government is saying in 1992.</p> <p>So, basically the Japanese government can't lie, so they issued the Kono statement where they acknowledge the existence of comfort women. And, also that they (the women) were coerced as well, and also they give something of an apology.</p> <p>So, what happened, you have 50 years of silence. This is Professor Yoshimi's</p>

	<p>book translated into English. Quite a very good book, actually, if you really want to know about the lives of comfort women, which I won't cover too much here. Across East Asia, this is an excellent book, it's been used as a textbook in many Japanese colleges, of course this is the English language version. So, it is an excellent book if you are fascinated by this topic, actually. It's rich in detail, and very good in terms of observations and he observes that, these women were brutally enslaved by a patriarchal system whereby basically, men went off to war, and women served them through prostitution, basically, sexual enslavement.</p>
<p>08:25 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>And, after the war, of course these women went back into a patriarchal society. And we can see this in early press reports about comfort women in Singapore, which I haven't included in this lecture.</p> <p>But a lot of it is this image of them as the "fallen women". Basically, they have been taken from their homes, and they have been put into, you know, kind of places of prostitution, and from this, they've become the fallen women, irredeemable, actually. So patriarchy ensures that these women are largely silenced. Certainly, in the case of Singapore for a long time, but other countries as well, actually.</p> <p>So, what happened in Singapore? What happened in Singapore in 1991 to '92? We had this blockbuster of a documentary, the first documentary on Singapore TV, about the Japanese occupation – "Between Empires". If you remember, it was full of lots of brutal things. In a sense, it was almost like Singapore TV thought of all the possible ways they could portray the Japanese military in the worst possible light.</p>
<p>09:31 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Babies being bayoneted, women being raped. All these things that did happen, but of course, they use them to sensationalise it. It became quite an amazing documentary series – two episodes. Okay, in this we don't hear about comfort women because it was made just a bit earlier, in 1991, '92, before the issue broke. We hear about what's common when we talk about women's experience in Singapore which is the fear of rape during the Japanese occupation. This is quite a common feature in all history interviews. So, we see, testimony from two women on this.</p> <p>So, after the comfort women becomes an issue, we see the first depiction of a Singapore woman, as a comfort woman. It's on the slide, obviously, it's our beloved Fiona Xie, actually. She's the first one to portray a comfort woman, in this docu-drama. It's more a drama than a documentary. So, it's 2001, "A War Diary". Most of you would have forgotten about it, of course. It ran for 20 episodes.</p> <p>We were astonished actually, when she was taken away and put in a comfort station. We learnt that comfort women wear uniforms or wore uniforms. This is something many people didn't know, but it's true actually. They got the colour wrong. The women tended to wear white. Of course, not all did. Usually you can tell it's a comfort station because the women they were wearing white nurses'</p>

	<p>type uniform. Why this happened, I don't know. As we see, it is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a comfort station, even in other places outside of Southeast Asia.</p>
<p>11:21 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, in popular culture, we have a few representations of comfort women. These are the plays that have been about comfort women. The one by Kuo Pao Kun, actually, is about comfort women but it's obvious that it was a Korean comfort woman. The other two are plays by Wildrice and also by the Malay theatre company, Teater Kami. They are obviously about, a local woman, most likely a Singapore woman, because they are about Malay women. The director for Teater Kami, he was inspired by a Berita Harian article about comfort women.</p> <p>So now it's a feature of popular culture. But what was it in 1945, actually. It was there strong in the memory of people just after the war. If you look at the newspapers and look at comfort girls, it actually is a category. Or search for comfort houses, you'll discover that there's quite a bit on this. And they are seen, comfort women are seen almost like, not something that should be treated with sympathy, actually. Many accounts are not that sympathetic, but there are sympathetic accounts.</p> <p>So, basically, it's kind of painting them as victims of Japanese brutality. So, here you can see a Chinese cartoon compilation which is lurid and full of lots of sexual images and violent images anyway. And then we see something more artistic by Liu Kang, which is also in Chinese originally. And he portrays a comfort house.</p>
<p>12:54 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Apparently, in Malaysia, there was one comfort house that occupied a chapel or a church, so that's based on some kind of truth actually. So, yeah this is perhaps the most well-known image from "Chop Suey". So, documents at that time reflect that there is this concern that it did happen, particularly in Malaysia, they used a lot of local women. Particularly, Chinese women to basically, fill their comfort stations. So, we have this testimony and piece of document from the Kuomintang branch in KL. I used it for my book which is why the Koreans contacted me.</p> <p>So basically, they described how a large number were taken from some of the wealthiest families in Kuala Lumpur. Kind of like Fiona Xie actually, when she was kidnapped from her Peranakan family. This is the quote that I used for my book. And based on the work of Professor Hayashi, he did work on Malaysia, Malay Peninsula, these are all the known comfort stations in Malaya, actually. So, it seems to be there are actually even more if you read some accounts, like Bahau, the camp there's supposed to be some comfort women there. These are basically, all over. Only Terengganu escaped. Professor Hayashi in his article in Japanese says, it's likely that there are many more, actually. Likely there are many more comfort stations in Peninsular Malaysia.</p>
<p>14:24 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, if there are that many in Peninsular Malaysia. And also, Professor Hayashi said that there are 16 comfort stations in Kuala Lumpur alone. Sixteen alone.</p> <p>So, what about Singapore? These are the ones that he finds in his research of</p>

	<p>comfort women in Singapore. These are identifiable using Japanese documents and also oral history testimonies, some of which we will have a look at tonight. So, you've got some of the more common ones. There are about five that were fairly well known and are in his 1994 article, actually. There's two that aren't. So, Cairnhill Road is very well known as a comfort station, very well known. Tanjong Katong Road, also well known as a comfort station. The Bukit Pasoh Road No. 27, the clan association house, that's well known too. This one, he didn't include in his 1994 article, Jalan Jurong Kechil around Beauty World, around Bukit Timah village. Okay, but he later discovered through a document that he found from the archive, the Japanese military documents, that they used that. There was a little map of the area. From that map, these old shop houses from the 1930s could possibly be identified as the comfort house.</p>
<p>15:42 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>And, also at Sentosa as well, you have buildings that were once behind Madame Tussauds or Images of Singapore which were a comfort house as well. We have corroboration of this through oral history testimony as well. And Pulau Bukom for the Navy, there's an oral history account of that too. And lastly, Seletar naval base, where the airport is today, around there, okay. There's Japanese military documents that indicate that place.</p> <p>So, basically there are seven known places and Professor Hayashi documents these in his 2007 book, actually. So, basically, in 1994 he documents five, and then after that, he adds two more.</p> <p>So what were they like actually? This is the classic illustration of what a comfort house was like. So, you have the women in white, in cubicles, actually. This is the one in Shanghai, and this is an illustration, a painting, an illustration of the process of how they operated. So, a classic determinant of what a comfort house is usually, you have the presence of Korean women; usually you have the presence of women dressed in white; and usually you have a long line of Japanese privates and NCOs, not so many officers actually, waiting.</p>
<p>17:12 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, it's kind of mechanised sexual enslavement, actually. Because, we will look at something else that is something like what's called a restaurant. The Japanese set these up and had hostesses and had prostitutes, mainly from Japan, Japanese women. And these are called Ryotei, actually. That's a similar system, but not as mechanised as this one, actually, in terms of, you know, very organised.</p> <p>So, how did they adapt it to the buildings of Singapore and the sites. So, this is in Cairnhill, the most well-known one, actually. You can see that these are the shop houses in purple. They are preserved by the URA. They are not preserved because they are comfort houses, but they are preserved because these terrace houses are of aesthetic value actually. So, right at the top. It's this building here actually. This building is today, a part of the arts centre or whatever. It was once upon a time, after 1950, the teachers' training college, which was the predecessor of my institution. Before then, the older of you would know that was actually ACS, a school. It was a school during the Japanese occupation, too. The</p>

	<p>Japanese kept the school but they had a large comfort station right next to it. Which makes for some interesting memories of some of the people who were at the school.</p>
<p>19:01 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>First of all, we start off with the person who may have the first memories, after the international issue. Not surprisingly, it was Lee Kuan Yew, actually, so this is what he says when he was talking to the Japanese at the Symposium in Kyoto, actually, in early January. So, it was very close to when the issue broke as international news.</p> <p>He remembers the long lines, remember that's one of the characteristics of comfort stations, long lines. He remembers also that it was at Cairnhill Road, the one he was most familiar with. And interestingly, he actually says, "... at that time I didn't know that they were Koreans". This is something too, that interests people who want to look at the memory of it. And also, he said something which is a bit shocking, actually. He reckons that they saved the chastity of Singapore women. Well, as we'll see, they didn't actually. But there is that argument that the Japanese military had is that, as these comfort stations were built, it made the Japanese soldiers more inclined to actually go to them rather than to rape, as they had done in China.</p>
<p>20:10 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Okay, so, comfort stations kind of emerged out of this brutal system that the Japanese military set up, actually. This kind of innate violence that they cultivate amongst their men, that basically spills over into sexual violence. So, we see that in Nanking. Nanking was, probably there were comfort houses before Nanking, but Nanking was the catalyst for the building of more, actually. And this is a classic military document.</p> <p>So, amongst the local culture, surprisingly the silence, somewhat silence. There is this book that's quite nostalgic by Goh Sin Tub, actually. He talks about this area. His comments are quite interesting, and you'll notice they're not really that sympathetic in terms of looking at victims, enslavement, or whatever. He talks about mainly these waitresses actually, that worked, supposedly in a comfort station or they might have worked in a restaurant. The Japanese might have set up these restaurants with hostesses or whatever.</p>
<p>21:10 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>His comments kind of confirm Lee Kuan Yew's, actually, when he says... he didn't say it there, but he says it later on in an interview that he believed also that Singapore women's chastity had been saved as well. So, there's two men of the same generation who thanked the comfort stations of Singapore for saving the chastity of Singapore women.</p> <p>Okay, so we'll move on to this. Okay, this is to do with what's a comfort station and what's not. So, you have the former principal of Singapore Chinese Girls' School, Tan Sock Kern, actually. So, she lived in Cairnhill Road. She lived in No. 57 and 59, they owned two houses. Her family was quite well-off, cause Cairnhill Road is like, I don't know, it's kind of like Cairnhill Road today. It's very wealthy</p>

	<p>actually, very wealthy place.</p> <p>She remembers that these were on the opposite side of the shop houses that were conserved. So, her two houses have been demolished actually, and now there's a condo there. She says also, her generation, not her in particular. They say that Singapore Chinese Girls' School at 37 Emerald Hill, they're trying to preserve it, was a comfort station. If you look at Shinozaki, the Education Officer and Welfare Officer, in his memoirs he specifically says no, it was one of these horrible restaurants that the Japanese military was setting up. This is something where it is easy to mistake one of these Ryotei restaurants for a comfort station.</p>
<p>22:48 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, there's more testimony that comes and comes about these places. This is before 1991. So, it's interesting that people would refer to them as comfort houses and the women who occupy them would be comfort girls.</p> <p>So, it's there amongst that generation who knew about these places because the oral history centre did this big project to gather all the memories of many people who lived through the Japanese occupation in the '80s. So, this is a good source in terms of common knowledge. So, it seems to be amongst many people who lived through the war. It wasn't common knowledge, but you know, some of them knew about it. Particularly those who lived near them.</p>
<p>23:26 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, his impressions are quite interesting. He describes the long queues of Japanese soldiers or whatever, and women basically waiting in the comfort houses. The location's correct, actually.</p> <p>So, looking at this. This is the school, Anglo Chinese School, it's part of the art centre today. The very top, as you walk up past the terrace houses, you have to walk up a flight of stairs. This is the school, interesting architecture basically. What's down below is the old canteen, down at the bottom, near that "No Trespassing" sign. At the bottom is the old canteen. And also, behind that, is the row of shop houses that begins. So, if you were at that school in the 1940s, during the Japanese occupation, you've got a very good view of what's going on.</p> <p>So, you see this in some of the students' testimony about this place. These are young boys. Basically, the canteen was facing the backyard, or back balcony of the comfort stations.</p>
<p>24:37 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>The women would have one day of the week off when they have a medical examination. So, these women would go out onto the court yard or balcony, which was right next to their canteen for the ACS school, and these boys would be amazed by what was going on. So it's like, they are not really aware of the enslavement. But they were more aware of this. The principal, I'm not sure if he was the principal at that time, maybe it was just a Japanese learning place. He basically tried to shoo everyone away from the canteen, up to the other side of the school which overlooks the Scotts Road area.</p> <p>So, often the boys just went up further into the top area of the school and they</p>

	<p>had an even better view. So, this is kind of boyhood memories of this area. The other boys who were perhaps more adventurous, the Japanese were kind of focused on cleanliness or whatever, and prevention of venereal diseases as well, so they had condoms issued and these were scattered after use so we had the principal's reaction to boys blowing them up like balloons. And he explained classically that the dirt of the woman is on the outside and the dirt of the man is on the inside.</p>
<p>26:00 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, his memory of it is certainly not one of victimhood and enslavement, but of course it was there. The oral history collection has no oral history interviews from comfort women, not surprisingly. We'll get to that soon.</p> <p>So, what happens also is that they are not sure. Like Lee Kuan Yew, they are not sure, because they can't tell Koreans from Japanese that may be shocking for Japanese and Koreans, but it happens. And even the historians who came down and they looked at this testimony and they were surprised: "How come they can't tell Koreans from Japanese?"</p> <p>But yeah, at that time, the Koreans could speak very good Japanese. Even when they spoke to them, they spoke in Japanese.</p>
<p>26:47 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, more testimony will come later on. Basically, this question was raised in 1993, after all the controversy. Philippine women were also comfort women, Indonesian women. This was an inevitable question, were Singaporean women comfort women?</p> <p>It was a difficult issue actually. There were none popping up. No Singapore women were saying: "Well, I want compensation from the Japanese government."</p> <p>So, it was debated among some historians. Ong Chit Chong was one, who said that there was no documented evidence but actually all you had to do was kind of look at the modern version of this book from 1947, that describes how Singapore women are coming back from Java, 15 of them were coming back from Java, on the 6 of March. And the author of this book, N.I. Low, he basically meets them. You can see that these women just don't have much faith in patriarchy because they said: "Will our fathers still have us?"</p>
<p>27:53 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>You can see that long silence, and the continuing silence amongst many women, is more than justified.</p> <p>So, yes, you see the journalist he is very good actually, at uncovering things. Phan Ming Yen, he is involved in uncovering possible comfort women sites and also exploring this question. He does bring into this article that people won't openly say, but some people say their relatives were comfort women.</p> <p>The next site is quite a large one, perhaps the largest. This one is hard to actually say which building was a station and which was not. Accounts were given in</p>

	<p>terms of somewhere between Wilkinson Road and Wareham Road, which is a long way. If you look at a lot of these sites, there are a lot of URA preserved buildings, pre-war shop houses along that side of the road. When I took the Koreans down that road I just stopped anywhere and said: "Well, it could be any one of these terrace houses or shop houses...". We don't really know, even Professor Hayashi as well.</p>
<p>29:02 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>One source mentions the corner of Mountbatten Road and Haig Road which is obviously demolished now. Between Wareham Road and Wilkinson Road, there are lots of accounts of that general location. We'll look at some of that testimony, it's quite interesting actually.</p> <p>This is not from the national archives, but one year before the comfort women issue broke, there was a book written, it was a compilation of different experiences of Japanese occupation. So, we have here, this one, by someone quite familiar to us. One of the old guard of the PAP, Othman Wok. He talks about Tanjong Katong Road and he talks about Indonesian women, in the sense that the Japanese were moving Indonesian women not just to Singapore. There were three batches if you look at some of the newspaper accounts of Indonesian women coming through Singapore, basically about 219 who were in those three batches. And about 50 stayed in Singapore, then 20 returned, so that left about 30 who probably stayed and married local men, and Othman Wok says that they did at the end of the war, and there is an account in the press at that time, English language press, of all this happening. The women don't want to go back. Once again, they said the same thing: "Will our families have us if we go back?"</p> <p>They say that they like dancing and they like Singapore as well. They stayed. The idea of being a fallen woman in a patriarchal society is something that doesn't appeal.</p>
<p>30:45 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Another interview about this area – Robert Chong. This is '83, remember before the big controversy in 1991. This is from the national archives too, you can easily search for these online. This was what I told the Koreans to do, even if you go back to Seoul and Busan, I said you can still keep searching for this stuff. It's witnesses, it's not people who were comfort women, which is the big issue. Basically, he describes how nondescript these places were. They really weren't anything like what we see in red light districts today in places like Amsterdam or other places actually. They were very quiet indeed.</p>
<p>31:26 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>What happens is the women he describes too, interestingly, Othman Wok describes them as appearing as nurses and then he does as well. They wore these white uniforms.</p> <p>The description of the shop houses turned into comfort stations is interesting too. You had these long corridors, that led to these cubicles where the women were. Of course, he couldn't go inside, he could just pass by. So, he describes this. This is basically verbatim what he said. So, the Japanese will sit very quietly, Robert Chong says just like waiting to see the doctor. Very disciplined, very</p>

	patient.
32:09 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]	So the corridor, the crucial feature of this long line is the corridor. The shop houses had to be adapted to this purpose. Elsewhere too, in China they did this as well. Other countries they did it too. Usually, when the owners of these buildings came back, they'd find these holes in their buildings where the Japanese had built these long corridors so the men could line up and queue, orderly. The idea, as I said, is kind of mechanised or orderly system according to the people who designed it – of course it's sexual enslavement, there's no doubt about that.
32:46 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]	<p>So, moving on to, looking at the trail actually, you'll see that this is perhaps the most well known. This is the one I described. It's at the junction of Bukit Pasoh Road, it's no. 27 Bukit Pasoh Road, the junction between Bukit Pasoh and Teo Hong Road. Just behind the Dorsett Hotel. Most people would be familiar with this site.</p> <p>Testimony suggests that Korean women mainly were in this place. So, this is more well known, I won't bring up any testimony for this one. But this one was the one discovered in 1995, quite interesting this one, has an interesting story behind it. So, you can see it's near Beauty World, just up from Beauty World. This is an old map. It's a row of shop houses. The one-storey ones are the ones that Professor Hayashi positively identifies as a comfort station. And then the others, the double-storey, he's not so sure about that. But as we'll see, the people around there, who own the shop houses, a family, the Cheong family, say that all the whole area was a comfort station. You have the restaurant, the one-storey and then you have the relaxation house, or comfort station.</p>
34:01 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]	So, this one is interesting because of a Singaporean whose history is attached to it. Dr Cheong Pak Yean, in 2000, submitted a dossier for preservation of his old family's shop house. His family had built them, and he really loves this area, Bukit Timah area, Bukit Timah village. So, he documented the history. Of course, he knew at that time they were comfort houses, comfort stations, so he documented this too. That probably made this the first comfort house or station that was preserved because it was. It was preserved for its history, its entire history, but a prominent part of the case he put up was that it was a comfort station. That's one of the reasons why it should be conserved.
34:59 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]	So, at the moment, we have China, in its memory war with Japan is increasingly trying to conserve its own comfort stations and there are many in China. There's museums in old comfort stations. So, in this case we have Dr Cheong, and he works hand in hand with these two other people in the 1990s who were quite crucial to uncovering this history. The journalist from The Straits Times, and also Professor Hayashi. So, they find this document, Hayashi finds it and gets in touch with the journalist, and the journalist gets in touch with Dr Cheong who owns the shop house here, but of course has a history tied to the whole block.

	<p>So, Dr Cheong expresses his views. He reckons they are heritage actually. He's very enthusiastic about this. And obviously he had to be, he had to put it up as a submission to the URA which accepted it in 2002.</p>
<p>35:51 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, what he gets also, from Professor Hayashi is this document. This document has a map on it, that basically defines where the comfort house is. It also has an operation manual for the comfort house. You'll see that the hours are there, which Butai or military unit gets to use it on which day, the price, the Japanese soldiers, mainly privates and NCOs in this case, had to get a ticket. And they couldn't get in for their 30 minutes with the comfort women without that ticket. Obviously, very mechanised, very organised.</p> <p>So, Wednesday was their only day off actually. This is similar to Cairnhill actually. So, basically, they had that one day where it's a medical day, in terms of medical examinations.</p>
<p>36:43 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, behind the Images of Singapore or Madame Tussauds as we call it today, is also another comfort station that's been identified and written up as well.</p> <p>And as we go further, out to sea, you see that Pulau Bukom was the comfort station. It's now, of course, a massive oil refinery. So, it was used by the Japanese navy and there were Malay villagers on it, and they saw Indonesian women being used in the comfort stations.</p> <p>The last one, the Japanese military documents identified this. It's hard to know exactly where it is. Seletar naval base, it was a naval base, the Japanese used it as it was. It's hard to know exactly where it is, in this general area of course. It's been a naval base, an air base for a long time and now it's an airport. Professor Hayashi gets Japanese documents that confirm this.</p>
<p>37:43 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Okay, so moving on to finally, what we started with was the Ryotei system, the restaurant system. So, they were restaurants actually, that the Japanese used for prostitution. Most of them were staffed by Japanese women, most of the Japanese women were prostitutes or they described them as Geisha. Of course not like the Geisha we see when we go to Kyoto or these other places. At that time, there were Geisha who were close to prostitutes. They tend to not be what we imagine the Geishas, the Geisha are certainly not prostitutes today. They would describe some of the women working there as Geisha. Sometimes the Japanese military would describe them as typists. And actually, Shinozaki closed down one of these Ryotei, and he said that we kept all the real typists and the ones who couldn't type we sent them back to Japan.</p> <p>The Singapore Cricket Club was one of these as well that was closed down because it was so close to the mayor's office that the local staff would start laughing when they could hear the drunken cries above the men and the women just coming across from the cricket club. The mayor didn't like this. Shinozaki didn't like it, so, they brought the commander Terauchi down from Saigon or</p>

	<p>wherever, and he could hear it and he closed it down very quickly.</p> <p>Others, of course too, Shinozaki didn't like them so he tended to close them down. This is one he closed down. It became public knowledge, Nan Hua Girls' School on Mount Sophia. What happened was that, it was reported in the Allied propaganda news and when that happened, immediately, it was closed down because the idea that the Japanese military would turn a school, a girls' school, into a place of prostitution was bad propaganda, so they shut it down eventually.</p>
<p>39:32 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, Shinozaki, in his memoirs, this is the Japanese language memoir actually, he says this on page 82. It doesn't appear in his English language memoir, he says, regrettably, he never liked these places actually. "When the British get a colony they build roads, when the French get a colony they build a church, the Spanish bring in a church but they take out the gold and silver. But when the Japanese get a colony, they bring in these restaurants and women." So obviously, there's something else.</p>
<p>40:00 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, in terms of finishing up, close to finishing. The last known woman to say that she worked in Singapore was Kim Bok-dong. She had passed away, just after I wrote the abstract for this talk. She was born in 1926 and I wrote the abstract in December and she passed away. She'd been ill for quite some time, but she was virtually a kind of a national hero in Korea. The President had visited her in hospital. When she passed away, there was this mammoth five-day period of mourning in Seoul.</p> <p>Interestingly, her path with Singapore crossed somewhat differently in 2013. In the sense that one of her wishes – she worked in Singapore but also Malaysia and Indonesia – was actually to have a comfort woman statue in Singapore. Of course, this would send shivers down the spine of any Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. And Singapore, of course, whenever one of these pops up, you have a divisive issue between the Japanese community and the Korean community. In San Francisco there was one, in California there was one and there was one in Sydney too. It does nothing for international relations.</p>
<p>41:18 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Actually, at this time, it was proposed, and then they were all ready to come down. I don't know what possessed them to think that the Singapore ministries would approve such an idea. But they were all ready to come down. One of my colleagues who was a PhD student in Japanese Studies department, Yusuke Watanabe, he was all ready to do the first comfort women tour of Singapore. Because they wanted to know all the places, and he picked them all out using Professor Hayashi's work. And he said, he went to the place where he was supposed to meet them, and there was no one there. Mostly, they were put off by the whole thing actually. It is an interesting footnote to Kim Bok-dong.</p>

<p>42:01 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Also, that same Japanese scholar who was working in the Japanese Studies department, he co-wrote this book with Professor Takashima. It's basically a kind of Leftist tour of Singapore for Japanese tourists. Because it has the Jalan Kechil site, it has a good picture of that. And it is used. I met one person – once again a NUS PhD student – he was from Japan. Shee actually, she used that book to find the comfort station at Jalan Jurong Kechil as well. And also, the one at Bukit Pasoh is mentioned.</p> <p>So these historical research are appearing in various ways. I can't predict the comfort women tour of Singapore as a feature of tours, or heritage tour, or dark heritage. But there is an interest certainly amongst Koreans and Japanese.</p> <p>So lastly, I'll just go to the switches – it's the end. Thank you very much for your attendance.</p>
<p>43:13 [Audience member 1]</p>	<p>Hi, my name is Ng Yi-Sheng, I'm a writer and an NTU PhD student. I've got two questions.</p> <p>First, I'm curious about the other roles played by Japanese women in Singapore during the Japanese occupation besides serving in these rest stations and restaurants.</p> <p>Second, I'm doing research into Singapore's LGBT history. I recently read a short story by Goh Sin Tub written in the 1980s, in which he talks... it's a fiction piece but he describes a teacher whom he respects very much, having sexual relations with a male student. And I'm wondering given that Japan has traditionally had less of a taboo on homosexuality than European nations, I was wondering if you have found any stories of non-heterosexual liaisons in World War Two history.</p>
<p>44:21 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Japanese women first. Okay, Japanese women did hold a variety of jobs. There were typists, there were offices, obviously. They were part of the civilian administrations. They weren't part of the military administrations. Singapore had a military administration and a much weaker civilian administration. That was where Shinozaki was Welfare Officer, and also Education Officer. So he was always on the somewhat losing end. A lot of the Japanese women were employed in the civilian administration, and some were also in businesses like Mitsubishi and a few others which employ Japanese women. Japanese women did have more roles than just hostesses or Geishas.</p> <p>The LGBT issue is quite interesting. There's an interesting book by I think Robert Klein. And he looks at the literature representation of Japanese occupation and Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, it's published by the University of Philippines. It's at the NUS library, I think. And he finds a gay man, who was a comfort woman, actually. He was a transsexual, actually. He didn't have the operation, but he was with a group of people. It's a very fascinating interview. Because he put into this book – there's no reason why this book should have it. It's basically about how Goh Sin Tub represents Japanese occupation, how Philippines... and he has this special interview. Because he says: "I must preserve this for posterity...". In the sense that, at that time, there was this man</p>

	<p>who lived in the Japanese occupation and basically, he and a group of friends, they were basically transvestites, female performers or whatever. And when the Japanese occupation came, they would carry on their kind of trade as well. And then, they were caught by Japanese who thought they were women. They were beaten up a lot. And they were raped as well. They continued on, as gay comfort women, so it's quite a fascinating story. And it is documented by Klein in that book on literature representations.</p>
<p>46:40 [Speaker: Audience member 1]</p>	<p>This is in the Philippines?</p>
<p>46:42 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>In the Philippines, in Manila, actually. One time the group goes to the provinces, they mix with the men who are obviously quite simple and backward, in their minds, and they didn't realise that these are not women, but actually men. And then they just go back to Manila again, and basically continue the trade that they work in. While they while enslaved by the Japanese, they said the Japanese would regularly rape them actually. They knew they were men, and they really were kind of upset. It's quite an interesting interview that goes on. I haven't seen anything like that, but that's quite unique, so that's quite interesting.</p> <p>Yeah, it's probably the only case we will ever know of similar to what you've asked. Yeah, Klein, actually, I can't remember the exact title of the book. You can Google the book, it's one of the Google books. It's quite an interesting interview... incredible interview.</p>
<p>47:44 [Speaker: Audience member 2]</p>	<p>I came a bit late so I didn't get to hear about your book and the title of it. And could you just describe it a bit. That's A.</p> <p>And B. There seems to be a kind of veil over the participation of Singaporean women in these things. And nobody seems to want to whatever, but I'm kind of interested to know like – was there?</p> <p>And what are the numbers? Not only of the Singapore women, but the whole comfort women population and... just delving into that a bit, please.</p>
<p>48:23 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Okay, the book, "War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore". It covers the comfort women a little, actually. But enough to make those Korean historians working on the project get in contact with me. The other books I put up, covered more. My book covers a lot more than the comfort women. It's called "War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore". So some of the quotes that I put up will be in that book.</p> <p>But to get to your more interesting question, about Singaporean women who were comfort women. Yes, the piece of evidence from N.I. Low suggested that there are 16 or 15 comfort women who had come back from Java, so that's 16. Also, the Indonesian women who married Malay men and settled down, so that's</p>

probably 20, if we go by the figures. Actually the Indonesian Red Cross came to Singapore in the middle of 1946 looking to recover the Indonesian women actually. This was when all the details came out, because the Red Cross documented all these details. So, seems to be that there were 50 women who were brought to Tanjong Katong Road who were Indonesian women. And of that 50, basically, 20 were repatriated to the Indonesian Red Cross. There must be 30 who decided to stay. There were women who decided to stay and they married men, according to Othman Wok, in Amber Road kampong, around there, actually.

So, we don't find, like in Malaysia, we find the experiences is larger in numbers in terms of Chinese women who were forcibly enslaved or tricked. Just like Kim Bok-dong was tricked. She was going to work in a factory, and then she discovered that it wasn't a factory, it was actually a comfort house. And she was 14 years old. So, in Malaysia, there was basically some level of force used. And they mainly focused on Chinese women as you see with the quotation I've used.

In Singapore, obviously, the numbers in the comfort stations tend to suggest that there are not many Singapore women, because that would come out in the oral history testimony. What comes out is that, initially they were Japanese, and then Indonesians, but in terms of, some say Chinese as well. It suggests that numbers of Singapore women in Singapore comfort stations are not high, if they are present. And, whereas in Malaysia, the numbers of local women are reasonably high in the sense that there are various directives that are given to various armies. One of them is to use local women as much as possible, because we don't want to use Japanese women for comfort stations.

Yeah, she [Kim Bok Dong] was sent everywhere actually – China and then Indonesia, Malaysia, and then in the last few days, if you go to the interview on AsianBoss, she discusses her life in October last year. She says that when the surrender came, she was working in Singapore. She'd just arrived in Singapore, probably in early '45, and then when surrender came, she says that the Japanese tried to pretend that the comfort women were really nurses by setting up these hospitals, whatever, when they were surrendered. So, she became a nurse, in a sense. Actually there are other accounts in the press that say that some of these Korean women were staying too long at Cairnhill Road.

Even in those days, if you look at some of the press accounts, there were complaints in October 1945: "What are these Korean women doing in Cairnhill Road?" Surely, we can get people to occupy those places or whatever. Not much sympathy actually. There's always been some kind of rumours and kind of stories that there were comfort women in Singapore who perhaps are still alive. I would imagine by now, many of them would have taken that secret to their graves.

And I think it's to do with patriarchy in a sense. These women were enslaved by patriarchy. The idea, the justification that many of the military had was basically that the soldiers were doing the fighting, and the women must serve the men. Some of the comfort stations, in other places, not in Singapore, had that inscribed in Japanese characters. Basically the women are serving the men who were

	<p>fighting the war.</p> <p>So, patriarchy is not that sympathetic to women who are in this position and you can read in terms of press accounts that are appearing in '45, '46, they're complaining about prostitution, they're complaining about all these women, who were suddenly appearing, who weren't there before. Because even if you were poor, you turn to prostitution, basically it was to keep you alive and so on. And also some families sold their daughters to marriage brokers who actually sold them to the Japanese. You do get these things popping up after, in '45, '46, which suggest that perhaps there are more Singapore women who actually are comfort women then what we would imagine today. But, we don't know. That's a good question, thanks very much.</p>
<p>54:04 [Speaker: Priscilla]</p>	<p>Thank you, and I think, this gentleman here.</p>
<p>54:10 [Speaker: Audience member 3]</p>	<p>Hello, my name is Subaya. I think that part, it covered my question already. But just asking: Seems like there were no, or very few Singapore women in Singapore, you know, in the comfort houses, but they were sent to other places. There were Indonesians coming here. And Kim, the lady Kim, seems to have moved around a lot. Just wondering whether, was there a policy that, not to use the local women in their hometowns but to send them somewhere else. And at a higher level, how was this organised. I mean, at a local level, you can see how the battalions were organising. But was it something at the highest level of the army that, you know, just like a logistics department you have a department handling all of these.</p>
<p>54:57 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Okay, yes it's interesting actually. The comfort women are like what we call "transnational history" in a sense. Perhaps this is why it's never resonated in Singapore history. You see a lot of Korean women coming, you see a lot of Indonesian women coming, even the Chinese women coming – seem to be coming from China, actually. So that's the issue that pops out, actually. Because it's kind of transnational, this movement of women around... of course the dominant group is Korean women. And you find Korean women in many of these places actually. Indonesian women, in the 1990s the comfort women issue sparked off more protests in Indonesia and the Philippines, than other Southeast Asian countries. Of course, all countries had comfort women. There were Thai women who were basically turned into comfort women too. But Indonesia and the Philippines seemed to have large numbers. In terms of sending them overseas, there was no real account of Philippine women being sent elsewhere. Indonesian women were being sent, certainly to Singapore, maybe to Malaysia as well. It depended actually.</p> <p>In Malaysia's case, if I was talking to you about Malaysia right now, it would be such a different scenario, because they used local women a lot, particularly Chinese women, because they had the antagonism towards the Chinese. That's one of the reasons given in the literature. So, moving women around like they</p>

	<p>move labour around, interestingly, when they moved Indonesian labourers to the Burma-Thailand railway, they would basically move them with the women.</p> <p>The women didn't know. The women thought they were going to become nurses or whatever, and the men had some idea that they were going to become labourers. So on the same ship as the labourers going to the Burma-Thailand railway were these women. Because the Japanese moved labour around all throughout their empire. So, it's no real surprise that they move these women around, actually.</p>
<p>56:57 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>So, in Indonesia, a lot of comfort stations were staffed by Indonesian women. Also, they put pressure on the civilian internees, the Dutch women and some British women to also become comfort women for the Japanese too. And these are well documented because they were very literate women who could write their stories down and there were war crime trials in Indonesia about this actually.</p> <p>So, it is something that's interesting that you raise, that there's this transnational nature of the comfort women.</p>
<p>57:35 [Speaker: Priscilla]</p>	<p>So, I think we are running out of time. So, we would have time for maybe one last one or two questions.</p> <p>We'll start with the lady here.</p>
<p>57:48 [Speaker: Audience member 4]</p>	<p>Thanks, Professor.</p> <p>Two quick questions. My name is Josephine, I'm a writer. What is the average age range of the women? I know there's a 14 year old, that's the first one.</p> <p>And, second. How many men did these women have to service each day?</p>
<p>58:06 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>I'll be quick about this.</p> <p>The age that they wanted was supposedly 18 to something like 35. When they saw Kim Bok-dong, and they knew she was 14, some of the Japanese officials didn't like that at all, actually. They said basically you can't have her, she's only 14. You'll see a variety of reactions actually.</p> <p>The next question was?</p> <p>Yes, when they do the interviews they always emphasized the high numbers. On a Sunday, they serve 40 or whatever. The women tend to remember the times when they had the large numbers. But even when they started to do four or five a day, the reports about the pain, because many of them were young girls like 14 or 16. They were supposed to only take 16 or 18 to about 35. So, the women would describe these types of horrible situations and usually they would emphasise the times when they really had to serve a lot of men. If each man is</p>

	<p>given 30 minutes, obviously 40, 50 is not likely. But obviously they served a lot of men actually, there's no doubt about that. Usually they would give quite high figures, which are probably accurate, because these men would have a Sunday or whatever with them, which is quite busy. Other times, four to five, when they would start.</p>
<p>59:40 [Speaker: Priscilla]</p>	<p>Right, I think we have one last question from the gentleman over there.</p>
<p>59:48 [Speaker: Audience member 5]</p>	<p>I'm Fabian, a counsel. I just have two questions, very quickly.</p> <p>How did the word "comfort women" come about? It sounds like a horrible euphemism. Is it from the Japanese or how did it come to pass?</p> <p>More importantly, why are they mostly Koreans? Is it because they can speak Japanese? Taiwan was also colonised for more than 40 years, so why? Is it revenge on the Korean resistance?</p>
<p>1:00:18 [Speaker: Professor Blackburn]</p>	<p>Okay, comfort women, you'll find that these houses are sometimes called relaxation houses as well. It is a euphemism, of course. The historians, they don't want to use "comfort women" actually. The organisations that are set up in Korea they don't use "comfort women", they use "sexually-enslaved women". But because it's so common in the currency and so many people have heard of it, the historians will use "comfort women". It is a euphemism, they did use it actually, they did use it, there's no doubt about that. These houses are sometimes called relaxation houses even though they are basically houses of sexual enslavement.</p> <p>Your next question was about?</p> <p>Obviously Korea was a place where they'd colonised it for a very long time. They did use local women, Chinese women a lot actually, but Korean women they used them extensively. Why Korean women? It could well be because they colonised Korea for such a long time, and they had all these networks to basically, get Korean women into the military. They would coerce them, they tricked them, perhaps it was easier, whatever. And they would serve also, perhaps, in China, and sometimes in Japan, actually, as well. I think it's because of the colonial relationship between the two and perhaps as you said, it might be because they could speak Japanese easier, but actually the nature of the work didn't require language as a major category. Yeah, so, they used a lot of Chinese women and over the next 10 years, as China starts to ramp up its memory war with the Japanese government, I think you will see a lot of Chinese women coming out and places that are preserved.</p> <p>Yes, it's a Japanese expression for this.</p> <p>The Korean women today call themselves women who were sexually enslaved by the military, actually. The association is called that, they don't actually use it.</p>

	<p>But because it's such common currency, as historians we tend to use it rather than just those three words. Yeah, it's from the Japanese military, actually.</p>
<p>01:02:38 [Speaker: Priscilla]</p>	<p>Okay, thank you very much Prof Blackburn. So that sums up our first talk in the HistoriaSG series for this year, thank you very much.</p> <p>And before you leave, can I please trouble you to fill up our feedback form, so you can either do it digitally, or I think you have been given the hard copy. And for the hard copies you can just pass them to my colleagues while you are on your way out.</p> <p>And secondly, don't worry if you've missed any part of the lecture because as I've mentioned earlier, the lecture will be uploaded as a video, on the museum's website. So do look out for that, I think it should be happening sometime in March.</p> <p>So, thank you very much once again and have a good evening.</p>

About the speaker

Kevin Blackburn is an Associate Professor in History at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He has taught in Singapore since 1993, when he left the History Department of the University of Queensland to take up his present teaching position. He teaches and researches the history and memory of the Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia. On the study of war and commemoration, he has co-authored with Karl Hack *Did Singapore Have to Fall?* (Routledge, 2004) and *War Memory and the Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore* (NUS Press, 2012), as well as co-edited with him *Forgotten Captives in Japanese Occupied Asia* (Routledge, 2008).