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Marketing History as Social Responsibility

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In recent decades, it has become somewhat fashionable in Japan to recount one's own personal history of the war and postwar years through a variety of public and private media.¹ Several of the chapters in this volume examine how cultural and political elites have deployed narratives of tradition and modernity as a means of constructing modes of local and national identity. This chapter examines the role that historical narrative plays in the public relations agenda of corporate Japan by investigating the ramifications of the attention given to shaping public perception of the company's place in history. Most member companies of Japan's twentieth-century *keiretsu* (corporate conglomerates that included Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and Sumitomo) regularly published, before and after the war, official histories as a means of enhancing corporate prestige. As a result, company history narratives, like many tropes of national history, often obscure more than they illuminate about the corporate subject. This chapter unpacks the way in which corporate history narratives have in recent years become interwoven with philanthropic initiatives, so-called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, in part developed to rehabilitate corporate reputation and enhance public perception of the private enterprise.

Although developed for different purposes, and a little later than in the United States and Europe, CSR programs in Japan were quickly integrated into pre-existing public relations practices with the common purpose of shaping public perception of corporations' social and fiduciary responsibilities for a variety of hot-button issues such as industrial pollution and racial and gender discrimination. An early adopter of recommendations from the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren), the Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) has, since the early 2000s, promoted CSR programming focused on company policies aimed to reduce the maritime transport company's

environmental impact while also underwriting education programs in communities where NYK core businesses hold significant interests. Importantly, NYK CSR initiatives also include significant employee-focused human relations programming such as scholarships and vocational training for employees across the globe.²

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, it has become fashionable for some Japanese companies to repackage their “history telling” enterprises as social responsibility schemes advertising the organizations’ commitment to the social norms of the communities within which they operate. This chapter argues that there has been a significant social cost, and potential fiduciary risk, to the ways in which these organizations have shaped historical memories of so-called golden eras of nineteenth and twentieth century history. Most of the world’s corporations deploy historical narrative—whether to sell products, enhance brand value or establish corporate prestige—as part of their overall marketing strategy. Corporations also deploy historical narrative partly to ameliorate lingering memories of their links to less pleasant aspects of the recent past. This line of inquiry broadens our interrogation of the way history is shaped by examining the extent to which social and fiduciary obligations come into conflict when it is in the material interest of an organization to obscure past events even while under the legal obligation to provide truthful information.³

While national jurisdictions define specific legal obligations, all corporations operating in the highly industrialized societies of Asia, Europe, and the Americas share to some degree the fiduciary responsibility to provide truthful information to their shareholders, employees, purveyors and customers. The resultant interconnected milieu of social and fiduciary obligations provides a fascinating opportunity for historical inquiry precisely because many of these otherwise distinct types of corporations share in their use of institutional history narratives to partly ameliorate lingering memories of less pleasant aspects of the recent past. While it is understandable those corporate executives would commission historical narratives that enhanced corporate prestige or add brand value, this chapter argues that the resultant commodification of history as public relations and marketing narrative is at odds with corporate social and fiduciary responsibilities defined by custom and law.

The Nippon Yūsen Kaisha

NYK executives have been intensely concerned about public perception of the company’s place in history since the early twentieth century.⁴ NYK regularly published, before and after the war, official histories. Multiple agendas underpin NYK’s official narratives, a fact which presents historians with the means to further interrogate the idea that corporate history, which first emerged at NYK as a genre of marketing and promotional

literature, can be presented as a manifestation of social responsibility and philanthropic activity. NYK's contemporary historical exhibitions and publications present a narrative of the past that promotes the company's role in the national maritime history of Japan in part by obscuring its central role in Japan's imperialist and militarist expansions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the company's official narratives, it is possible to learn the ways in which NYK's rise to global prominence parallels the trajectory of Japan's emergence as a global economic power. Importantly, the prewar and wartime incarnations of NYK did not conceal the company's intimate relationship with the emerging imperial state. Instead, NYK official histories and marketing propaganda clearly and proudly documented the company's exploits as an integral member of the imperial era military-industrial complex.

In the late 1980s, NYK managers responded to market competition and increasing labor costs by divesting the company of direct control of its sailing fleet and subcontracted ship operations to maritime management groups mostly based in Southeast Asia. The move transformed NYK into an *ersatz* holding company run by a relatively small workforce, based in Tokyo, who managed contractual relations with affiliated subsidiaries and subcontractors across the globe. The arrangement seemed satisfactory until the mid-1990s when the boom in trade between China and the consumer-focused economies of Europe and the Americas encouraged company officers to reclaim direct control of the NYK fleet and port facilities worldwide. The global megacarrier that emerged was more profitable and ethnically diverse. By 2008, NYK ranked among the top three marine transport companies in the world with more than ¥2.5 trillion (£19.2 billion) in total revenue and ¥160 billion (£1.23 billion) in net profit.⁵ The globalization of NYK also resulted in a majority of the company's nearly 55,000 employees being nationals of countries whose populations still retained strong public memories of World War II.⁶ This change in international status and employee demographics fostered a variety of challenges for NYK's Tokyo-based senior management, not the least of which was how to construct a global corporate identity that did not inflame memories of unpleasant aspects of the company's 120-year history.

NYK's earliest official histories, told in flowery marketing prose, tell us how fierce domestic competition compelled the fledgling company to shift the bulk of operations to overseas transport by linking the textile exporters of Yokohama and Shanghai with their overseas customers in Europe and the United States.⁷ After several mergers with its remaining rivals, which also positioned the company to receive government favor, NYK was awarded a lucrative monopoly on troop and cargo transport during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95). As a core member of Japan's emerging military-industrial complex, NYK again benefited from government shipping transport contracts during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), in addition to gaining access to new ports and shipping routes made possible by Japan's

expansion into China, which enabled the company to be a key player in the transport of cargo between Japan and its newly established colonies in Taiwan and Korea. By the start of World War I, NYK was Japan's primary intraempire and overseas deep water carrier and ranked among the seven largest shipping companies in the world.⁸

While bulk commodities cargo was NYK's primary business, human cargo was also an important source of revenue well into the twentieth century.⁹ The majority of ships that comprised NYK's prewar fleet were mixed cargo and passenger vessels that, in addition to freight, also carried upper-class Japanese and Europeans in several dozen first- and second-class passenger berths. A surprising amount of NYK's early history can be gleaned from the marketing materials produced during the prewar and wartime era. In 1901, NYK published its first illustrated guide for upper-class travelers seeking passage throughout the Far East. As a paid supplement to the Meiji era periodical *Fūzoku gabō* (*Manners and Customs Illustrated*), the *Jōkyaku annai yūsen zue* (*Yūsen Passengers' Illustrated Guidebook*, or *Yūsen zue*) was more likely produced with a domestic agenda in keeping with the *Fūzoku gabō*'s overall mission to educate the Meiji era upper-class in the ways of Western civilization. Offering short essays and captioned illustrations depicting the luxuries of shipboard life available to the elite transoceanic traveler, the guidebook joined a host of contemporary publications at the center of the Meiji discourse on "civilization and enlightenment."¹⁰

For the illustrated guide, NYK selected the 3,500 ton Scottish built *Kasuga Maru* to represent the ideal passenger ship of the era. Constructed by Napier and Sons in Glasgow and delivered to NYK in 1898, the *Kasuga Maru* was a moderately sized dual cargo-passenger ship that typified the vessels of the Yokohama-Shanghai-Seattle Line at the start of the twentieth century.¹¹ Importantly, *Fūzoku gabō* illustrators portrayed the *Kasuga Maru* as a cross-section of the emerging modern empire by dividing the ship into liminal spaces that also illustrate the many layered interconnections between capital and empire during the early twentieth century. Editor Noguchi Shōichi and illustrator Yamamoto Shōkoku portrayed the ship's first- and second-class passengers in the ship's social hall (main saloon), barber shop, smoking room, dining rooms, and stately cabins, as well as partaking in the modern amenities and culinary delights that the ship's crew provided for them. Noguchi described extravagant Western dining menus, while Yamamoto illustrated immaculately maintained first- and second-class accommodations. First-class passengers aboard the *Kasuga Maru* were expected to adhere to a formal standard of dress and conduct their activities with proper deportment.¹²

Like their European and American competitors, NYK ships of the era demarcated class lines as much by race and ethnicity as by wealth.¹³ While Japanese and Chinese nationals able to pay the significantly more expensive first-class fare ate and socialized alongside their European and American contemporaries, more than half of the *Kasuga Maru*'s passengers, and an unrecorded number of below-decks crew,¹⁴ were Chinese and Korean

nationals segregated from the Japanese lower-class passengers as well as the predominantly white European and American upper-class passengers. Japanese and Chinese third-class passengers were assigned separate communal sleeping and living spaces, and NYK even fashioned an “inter-class” steerage berth for lower-class Europeans and Americans whom the company thought would want to be segregated from what the NYK passenger guide referred to as the “Asiatic races.”¹⁵

NYK’s “Asiatic” third-class passengers were billeted according to national origin and were not granted access to organized deck side activities or upper-class below-deck communal spaces. Segregated by race and ethnicity, third-class passengers lived and slept in communal rooms of up to a hundred. Water was rationed and meals, prepared according to the company’s determination of the passenger’s ethnic cuisine, were cooked and served in ethnically designated communal quarters. The only specific comfort beyond food and a place to sleep offered to Chinese émigrés was the occasional “opium den” (*abenkutsu*) where smokers could relieve their addiction in an environment that company propaganda claimed demonstrated the comfort of even the third-class NYK passenger experience.¹⁶

NYK continued to publish its annual illustrated travel guides until the mid-1920s when the company re-launched the serial as an English-language publication, *Glimpses of the East*, the purpose of which was to sell the exotic travel experience available to English-speaking travelers.¹⁷ Published annually until 1944, a recurring feature of each year’s edition was a recounting of the company’s historic role in Japan’s emergence as a modern imperial power, and each issue of *Glimpses* opened with a frank account of the company’s collaboration with the imperial state. Successive decades of *Glimpses* tell us how NYK began dedicated passenger ship operations in the mid-1920s and further explain how in 1928 the company commissioned its first luxury passenger liners, which company managers marketed to what they perceived as an expanding number of wealthy world-travelers. These company mini-histories fondly recollect how NYK’s interwar era passenger fleet marked the very best in a Golden Age of luxury passenger service.¹⁸

NYK marketing materials proudly present a narrative of shipping centered on the luxury passenger ships the company brought into service from the late 1920s. The first of NYK’s luxury passenger ships were assigned to NYK’s highest-profile trans-Pacific routes linking Hong Kong, Shanghai, Kobe, Yokohama, Honolulu, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. NYK’s European-styled luxury liners were a financial and public relations success, and in 1939, the company placed orders for two additional ships designed to carry some 900 passengers at speeds exceeding 25 knots, which promised to provide the fastest Pacific crossing in the industry. Had the twin 27,000 ton passenger liners been built as designed, they would have joined the ranks of the finest luxury passenger ships of the era. In late 1941, however, the Imperial Navy requisitioned both while still under construction at Mitsubishi’s Nagasaki Shipyards. The navy re-fitted and launched them as aircraft carriers in 1942, along with three other smaller passenger ships

that NYK had commissioned for the company's European passenger service. All NYK ships were put under direct government control in April 1942, and NYK histories tell us how only 36 cargo ships and one passenger liner, the *Hikawa Maru*, survived the war.

At the height of wartime patriotic fervor, *Glimpses* editors printed a message from company president Terai Hisanobu in which he wrote that NYK was bravely playing its part in

the formation of the new World Order. Upon the conclusion of the present conflicts, the Company is prepared not only to resume its well-known world-wide services, but to devote its energy to the opening of services within the Co-Prosperity Sphere with special attention to inter-insular trade. It is hoped that the services hitherto monopolized by the British, American, and Dutch vessels between these districts, will thus be immensely improved, enhancing the enjoyment of freedom, happiness and prosperity of the vast number of native inhabitants at large, who were hitherto held down under the unjust oppressions, economic and otherwise, of their usurping overlords.¹⁹

The annual passenger guide included an unabashed narrative of co-expanding corporate and national empires up until the Pacific War. In fact, both the 1943 and 1944 issues of the annual guide similarly assert NYK's long-standing collaboration with the empire by laying out a historical narrative recounting NYK's service to the state during the annexations of Taiwan and Korea as well as the role NYK ships played in the subsidized transportation of Japanese subjects to Hawai'i and the Americas.²⁰

The persuasiveness of these and NYK's other wartime propaganda publications is doubtful at best, but nonetheless demonstrative of the company's position at the nexus of wartime maritime transport. By 1944, the majority of the Japanese merchant fleet, long since under government control, lay at the bottom of the navigable waterways of East and Southeast Asia. While collaboration with the imperial state was compulsory, it is nevertheless significant that NYK's management, executives of what was essentially a shell corporation, produced patriotic public narrative that applauded the company's long-standing, intimate relationship with the modern empire.

Rescuing history from the past

After compulsory forfeiture of control of its remaining ships at the start of the Allied Occupation, NYK was allowed to resume normal operations in 1950, which enabled the company to begin rebuilding its cargo operations with the assistance of considerable government subsidies. In addition to resuming its cargo business, the company also refitted the *Hikawa Maru*,

which had been used as a hospital ship during the war and to transport food and troops during the first half of the Allied Occupation, and returned it to service as a trans-Pacific passenger liner. The *Hikawa Maru* ferried dignitaries, students, and even Fulbright scholars between Japan and the United States until severe competition from the airline industry killed the passenger surface ship market in the early 1960s.

The end of NYK's trans-Pacific passenger service, however, also marked the beginning of the company's emergence as the dominant carrier of bulk materials and commercial cargo to and from Japan. Despite a profitless decade between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, several waves of government-mandated industry consolidation positioned NYK to establish itself as a dominant player in the container cargo sector that grew alongside Japan's booming export trade. NYK was a major transporter of Japan's exported industrial production, and the rapid economic growth that characterized the postwar era was in part only possible because NYK was able to deliver the goods to marketplaces across the globe.

Despite a rich historical record of proud service to the empire, or perhaps because of it, NYK has, since 1945, taken great pains to downplay the extent to which earlier narratives celebrated the company's prewar and wartime accomplishments. The company was consumed with financial concerns well into the 1970s, but in the 1980s, NYK managers sought to re-establish the company's importance by commissioning an official history of NYK's first 100 years.²¹ The economic challenges of the post-bubble years of the early and mid-1990s consumed the attention of company managers, but one small consequence of the company's shift in business plan and subsequent rapid growth in the early 2000s was an upgraded importance, and slightly different spin, put on the presentation of the company's historic role.

In 2002, NYK managers began a refurbishment of the company's maritime museum and repackaged its long-standing history-writing enterprise as part of the company's official social responsibility scheme. The majority of NYK's historical narrative has since been produced by personnel working from the NYK Maritime Museum located along the historic Yokohama waterfront. As cathedrals to the modern nation-state, history museums occupy the urban landscape as monumental acts of hubris disguised as philanthropy, and NYK's museum was similarly established in the early 1990s as a means to bolster corporate prestige by embodying the firm's historical importance. Reopened under the umbrella of NYK's social responsibility scheme in 2003, NYK executives charged the maritime museum staff with the tasks of preserving historical materials, communicating "marine philosophy" to the general public, and instilling "NYK Group Values—integrity, innovation and intensity—in the minds of employees around the world."²² Managed by the company's corporate communications group, the museum is promoted by company officials as a forum for educating the general public, as well as employees of the NYK Group, about Japan's modern maritime history.²³

To serve the museum's three-fold mission, the curatorial staff have organized temporary exhibits ranging from displays of marine art produced by local school children to educational exhibits explaining the danger consumer pollutants pose to the marine environment.²⁴ The museum even features monthly musical performances and occasional public lectures by marine scientists, NYK ships' officers, and company executives. Since re-opening in 2003, the museum has been visited by more than 100,000 members of the general public.²⁵ As a forum for public education, the museum does no worse, and no better, than the hundreds of maritime museums that bound the navigable waterways of Europe, Australia, and the Americas, and as such, the NYK Museum serves as the primary venue for staging the company's official historical narrative.²⁶ The museum, managed by the company's corporate communications group, is thus used as a forum for promoting the company's role in Japan's contemporary maritime industry as well as the nation's modern maritime history.²⁷

From its historic building in Yokohama, the NYK Museum plays a central role in the formulation and embodiment of the company's institutional memory. As a phenomenon of the late twentieth century, company museums have helped to shape popular notions of history, nation, and culture in most of the world's highly industrialized societies.²⁸ Privately owned history museums often retell the history of a particular company within the meta-narrative provided by better known tropes of regional or national histories. NYK's museum, located on the ground floor of the company's fully restored 1920s' era Yokohama Office, offers visitors a spatial-temporal link to what the company refers to as its "Golden Era." The museum's nine permanent exhibits sequentially narrate the company's history through bilingual wall text (English and Japanese), period photographs, schematics, timelines, maps, and material relics—mostly nautical antiques recovered from NYK ships and offices from each of the historical eras portrayed.

Museum curators have filled the obvious narrative gaps left by the paucity of surviving relics with video segments from a commissioned documentary. The film is parsed into a dozen segments displayed on video screens embedded within the graphics and text of the permanent exhibit. "The NYK Story" (Nippon Yūsen Monogatari) recounts a heroic tragedy of the years leading up to, during, and just past World War II. Yet, the NYK documentary attends to the history of the company as a travel agent would précis their product. The resultant narrative fills important gaps in the museum's material narrative by providing visual evidence of shipboard life and exotic ports of call in an entertaining and somewhat informative format.

Much like a national history museum, the NYK museum's exhibit areas present the history of modern Japan as the product of world events spurred on by the advance of Western nations whose expansion into East Asia drove Japan to defend itself by pursuing the economic means to achieve

world power status. Two exhibit areas, situated at the physical center of the museum's exhibit space, portray the historical narrative at the core of NYK's corporate identity. While NYK had been the lynchpin of Mitsubishi's cargo transport network since 1885, the NYK museum presents photos and artifacts of the company's 1930s' passenger service as material evidence of its finest era. The full-scale passenger ships of the 1920s and 1930s were the corporate prestige products of the interwar era, and the museum displays a variety of photographs and artifacts memorializing the sleek and stylish Art Deco interiors by designer Marc Simon from which visitors are able to discern some of the most appealing aspects of the first-class experience aboard NYK's interwar passenger liners.

The company's wartime exhibit sits directly beside its "Golden Era" display. Comparatively speaking, the Janus-faced exhibit is understated. It presents a wall-sized map depicting the last known locations of the 185 ships NYK lost during the war. Adjacent to the exhibit, museum curators have installed computer terminals offering patrons the opportunity to look up the names of deceased NYK sailors to determine which ship they died aboard and read brief accounts of their service to the company. While the war experience as recounted here is somber and rather modestly presented, the war exhibit nevertheless shares center stage with the exhibit celebrating what museum curators elected to portray as NYK's finest era.

Understatedness belies its purpose. The exhibit's accompanying wall text explains that NYK's participation in the war was involuntary, by asserting that the company and its officers had no choice but to join the war effort since all wartime shipping not already requisitioned by the Army or Navy was nationalized and put under the control of the government's *Senpaku Un'ei Kai* (Ship Management Association). There is some truth in the claim, but it is important to note that NYK's chief executive Ōtani Noboru was also appointed to head the Ship Management Association when it was formed in April 1942. While the head of the largest shipping corporation in Japan was the logical appointment, that Ōtani had been advanced to the position is indicative of NYK's multilayered complicity in the interests of the wartime state, a status not easily dispelled by claims that the company was simply compelled by imperial order.²⁹

NYK's postwar war narrative de-emphasizes the company's role in the imperial expansionism that characterized the company's passage through the Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa eras. The exhibit does not mention the circumstances that led to the war, nor does it discuss the extent to which the company had been part of the military-industrial complex that prepared for and supplied the war. Through this exhibit, NYK pays tribute to the memory of the 5,000 merchant sailors and nearly 185 ships lost during the war. Yet, there is no mention of the cargo—military materiel for certain, but also human cargo—lost with these ships. An undetermined number of those lost at sea (passenger manifests were destroyed during the war) were colonial subjects and enemy prisoners in transit aboard ships that were

in all but name still the responsibility of NYK personnel. In taking pains to explain how the NYK fleet had been requisitioned and put under direct control of the Army, Navy, or Ship Management Association, and thus not NYK's responsibility, the exhibit also illustrates the extent to which NYK's postwar managers and history writers still understood the sunken wartime ships to be NYK's "lost fleet."

On the surface, it seems that the loss or forfeiture of the majority of the NYK merchant fleet, followed by a brief interregnum of operation under Allied control, allowed company officials to assert a break from their wartime past and rebuild their company free of the specific histories of the company's earlier complicities. Indeed, it is perhaps the near total loss of the wartime fleet—only 37 of more than 200 ships remained afloat in 1945—which enabled the company to assert a physical break from the past. The few merchant cargo ships that survived the war were retired by the mid-1950s, and it seems likely that the purpose of the exhibit commemorating NYK's sunken heroes is to further diminish public memory of wartime complicity without losing the brand value of the company's past.

Selling nostalgia as history

While cargo transport remained NYK's dominant business throughout the postwar era, NYK moved in the 1990s to exploit public memories of the interwar era passenger liners by re-entering the luxury passenger service. Its first foray into the postairline passenger service business, however, came in the form of the Los Angeles-based cruise ship line Crystal Cruises. NYK marketers used the moment of *Crystal Harmony's* first call on New York as an opportunity to mark NYK's re-emergence as a company of global importance. One company advertising leaflet asserts: "almost a half-century after NYK's wartime losses, the gleaming, all-white *Crystal Harmony* arrived in New York . . . [and] amidst the festivities and formalities of the occasion there was also a historic notation to her visit: she was the very first Japanese luxury liner to visit New York in forty years."³⁰

Catering to the lucrative American market, Crystal Cruises began as a one-ship operation. Despite a stagnant economy in Japan, economic growth in the United States bolstered NYK's California-based cruise business. NYK cruise ships regularly won industry-wide customer satisfaction awards, and industry analysts lauded NYK's return to the passenger market. The success of Crystal Cruises' first ship, *Crystal Harmony*, encouraged the company to launch two additional luxury cruise ships for the American market: the *Crystal Symphony* in 1995 and the *Crystal Serenity* in 2003.³¹ Hoping to experience similar success in home waters, NYK re-launched its Japan-based passenger business in 1991 with the 600-passenger ship *Asuka*. After a slow start in the post-bubble recessionary economy of the mid-1990s, NYK's *Asuka* business grew into a successful enterprise by offering

to its middle-class Japanese clientele long and short-distance luxury cruises with an annual global circumnavigation cruise for its elite passenger base. In 2005, in order to relieve the aging *Asuka*, NYK refitted and relaunched the Los Angeles-based *Crystal Harmony* as the 800-passenger *Asuka II* to serve the Japanese market with intercoastal and regional cruises punctuated by a biannual circumnavigation.³²

Considering that the bulk of NYK's profitability comes from the cargo transport business, NYK's cruise ship lines receive a considerable amount of attention within corporate communications and marketing propaganda. While profitable, NYK's cruise business accounted for less than one percent of net operating profit in 2009, and cruise operations only became profitable in 2005. Recent refitting and refurbishment of its cruise ships operating out of Yokohama and Los Angeles indicates that the company intends to remain in the cruise business.³³ However, NYK's investment in its cruise line is only partly explained by the company's optimistic outlook on its potential to gain additional market share in an uncertain financial climate. The cruise business holds a disproportionate position of importance within the company's public profile because it functions as a prestige product line aimed at enhancing the corporation's brand image.³⁴

While the company does make money at it, NYK's contemporary cruise business is an attempt to leverage the company's historical prominence in the luxury passenger carriage business. NYK marketing materials and corporate communications often use the public image of the company's cruise line to enhance public recognition of its historical connection to the interwar passenger ship business. Like many other corporate institutions, NYK deploys historical narrative as a means of influencing public perception of the company's long-term commitment to qualities desired by the targeted clientele.³⁵

NYK offers its Japanese cruise ship clientele a taste of the "good life" in the form of well-ordered shipboard activities with prescribed activities and a minimum standard of deportment that includes a sense of culture and class, in the form of fine dining and exotic ports of call that draw upon the customer's nostalgic link to public memories of NYK's interwar era passenger ships. NYK's American product line offers the same well-ordered sense of class and culture, but also offers its majority non-Japanese clientele several opportunities to become familiar with the history and prestige at the core of their host's corporate identity. Reading materials, shipboard activities, and even memorabilia offer the cruising customer an historicized experience designed to enhance their perception of the cruising experience within an historical framework. The shipboard enterprise in Japan and the United States also includes a gift shop that sells a range of reproductions of advertising materials and artifacts from what NYK has branded as the "Golden Age" of passenger shipping.

The NYK museum is tightly integrated with the company's prestige cruise business. The museum archives provide historical materials for all aspects of

the company's marketing strategy, but also produce narratives for company publications that feature the company's historic passenger business. Indeed, the relationship between passenger operations and the museum is also quite contemporary. The museum's first two directors each finished their seafaring careers in command of one of NYK's three cruise ships—a plum assignment among the company's 800 captains. Even further evidence is found on the third floor of the museum building, which houses NYK's cruise sales center. The museum and cruise center, under the command of a former cruise ship captain, foster an integrated platform for NYK's maritime history enterprise.

Writing history for internal audiences

While marketing products is a primary purpose of the company's history writing enterprise, NYK has also deployed historical narrative as an integral part of its employee relations programs, and in this, the NYK museum serves as a primary venue for internal as well as external audiences. While by the mid-2000s, Japanese remained the language of NYK's Tokyo-based management, English was the language of daily operations for all 45,000 employees working outside Japan.³⁶ Importantly, the employee demographics of NYK in the early twenty-first century were in some ways similar to those of the late nineteenth century. NYK's Meiji era ship crews were by necessity multiethnic: NYK purchased its ships from Europe and recruited its ships' officers and senior engineering crew from Europe and the United States. The foreign senior crew served as mentors to a small number of handpicked Japanese whom the company aspired to put in their stead, but a great many below decks crew, especially fire crew who fed coal to the great boilers in the bowels of the ship, were Korean and Chinese colonials whose unrecorded, underpaid labor meant much to the company's profitability. By the mid-1920s, the majority of NYK ships were captained and officered by Japanese nationals, but NYK continued to employ a multiethnic crew below deck.

NYK managers aspired to a monoethnic above deck workforce, which many Japanese of the era perceived as evidence of having achieved technical parity with Western shippers. The preference for all-Japanese crews, above and below deck, became much easier to manage when NYK transitioned from coal- to oil-fired ships, which required far fewer below-deck crew with higher levels of technical specialization, and Japan's merchant maritime fleet of the 1930s and 1940s was crewed by only Japanese nationals. The employment structure persisted throughout the first three decades of the postwar era, but the company's inability to attract new recruits from Japan's high school graduates, who by the 1980s, were more interested in white-collar than blue-collar maritime careers, resulted in a rapid ageing of NYK's ship crews.

NYK managers responded to their “ageing problem” by re-registering NYK ships under flags of convenience and subcontracting sailing operations to primarily Southeast Asian maritime logistics partners. It has not been possible to determine the exact reason why company managers took the decision to reflag their fleet, but while it was indeed common industry practice during the 1980s, it seems likely that company managers also did not perceive an advantage in directly managing the multiethnic organization that would result from the declining numbers of young Japanese men entering into the maritime trades. The decision of the early 1980s was made all the more significant when in the late 1990s the company reversed its early policy and began to again re-flag a Filipino crewed fleet under Japanese officers.

Internal communications within a large corporation can provide a fascinating perspective on operational dynamics, especially the ways in which a company’s management teams seek to communicate with their employees. In the late 1990s, NYK’s Japanese language employee magazine *YUSEN*, and English language *SEASCOPE*, began to feature stories narrating the company’s central role in the migration of peoples across the globe. Although reader-impact data is not available, these two magazines do provide a unique window on the institutional uses of historical narrative deployed as part of NYK’s employee management scheme.

In July 2000, the English-language *SEASCOPE*, distributed to all of NYK’s ships, dock facilities, and offices worldwide, featured a story highlighting the important role NYK played in the transportation of Japanese overseas migrants. “The history of emigration from Japan to South America started with the voyage of the *Sakura Maru* when she left the port of Yokohama on 27 February 1899.” The writer tells us that all of the *Sakura Maru*’s “790 emigrants were male and went there to work at a sugar cane farm through contracts they had with the trading company, Morioka-shōkai.” While the story fails to explain how most such contracts were signed without benefit of literacy or full disclosure, and were tantamount to contracts of indenture, the story does go on to explain how “as a result of differences in diet, the harsh climate and the rugged natural features of this new country, a large number of the new arrivals succumbed to illness and sadly died.”³⁷

Despite this grizzly turn, the NYK emigration narrative did serve a purpose. The article further explains that “although emigration to Peru through contracts with a trading company was abolished in 1923, many people continued to cross the Pacific Ocean to Peru with the aim of advancing into commercial fields.” By way of personalizing the narrative, the story further narrates how “in the mid-summer of 1934 newly-married Mr. Naoichi Fujimori accompanied by his wife Mutsue, emigrated to Peru on NYK’s *Bokuyo Maru* sailing from Yokohama to Callao. This couple’s son Mr. Alberto Fujimori is the first Peruvian President of Japanese descent.”³⁸

While it seems bizarre that an internal magazine would fix on such a distant connection between NYK and the then head-of-state, Fujimori—who in 2012 sat in a Peruvian jail cell—Fujimori was at the time of publication

in 2000 still lauded across Japan for having boldly directed the retaking of the Japanese Ambassadorial Residence in Lima from Túpac Amaru (MRTA) guerrillas in 1997.³⁹ A few months after publication of the *SEASCOPE* story, though there is no likely connection between the story and subsequent events, Fujimori was able to leverage his fame and claim patrilineal right of citizenship when he fled to Japan to escape prosecution for his role in orchestrating the extra-judicial killings and kidnappings conducted by the anti-Communist death squad Grupo Colina.⁴⁰

The public relations benefit of NYK's historical connection to Fujimori is somewhat doubtful, given the crimes for which he was ultimately convicted. Nevertheless, the rhetorical effort appears to have been part of an overall attempt by NYK's internal communications team to shape institutional memory of the company's involvement in the human cargo business. Indeed, *SEASCOPE* and *YŪSEN* ran several stories from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s highlighting the famous people, sports teams, and social groups—from a Nobel physicist to Japan's first Fulbright scholars—who had taken passage on NYK ships.⁴¹ Many of the stories focus on the honor bestowed upon the company by the patronage of the NYK Line's many VIP passengers, but a telling few attempt to impart a different air to the role played by the company in the human migrations of the twentieth century.

By an odd circumstance of history, it was the NYK Line that carried Rabbi Zorach Warhaftig and a few dozen other Polish Jews when they fled from Lithuania in 1941. Warhaftig is credited with having engineered the escape of as many as 5,000 Jews to the Americas and Dutch Caribbean. When visas from the Dutch consulate were cut off, Warhaftig turned to Japanese consul Sugihara Chiune, who issued some 6,000 visas to Jewish refugees before his consulate was also closed.⁴² Explains the *SEASCOPE* story on the affair: "after working extremely hard to help the Jewish refugees, Mr. Warhaftig and his family boarded *Hikawa Maru* (an NYK vessel) in Yokohama on 5 June, 1941, destined for Vancouver, Canada." In his book, Warhaftig writes:

The sea was calm and the voyage was peaceful. It was as if we were having a summer holiday onboard and we spent the time sunbathing on deck. The shadow of the war and the storm faded away, and the troubles and the tense nature caused by them disappeared. However, I didn't have a peaceful mind because of the strong responsibility I had to help the Jewish refugees with the troubles they faced.⁴³

Hundreds of Jews paid passage out of Europe on NYK ships, and while the story does carry some value as a human interest piece, the narrative ends with a selection from Warhaftig's own travel journal that resembles contemporary touristic narratives of the NYK experience, albeit in the heavy shadow of the destruction of European Jewry.

While there seems little doubt that the communication group does not employ skilled history writers, it might yet stand to question why the NYK

communications group chose to draw such tenuous historical connections for its English-speaking audience. The historical narrative appeared as the company was experiencing significant demographic change and, ineffective as it appears, the internal historical narrative that emerged during the 1990s seems indicative of an uneasy awareness of the company's increased global exposure to public criticism for its role as a purveyor of maritime services to the imperial state.⁴⁴

NYK's postwar war narrative de-emphasizes the company's role in imperial expansionism and coerced transportations that characterized NYK's passage through the Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa eras. The exhibit does not mention the circumstances that led to the war, nor does it discuss the extent to which the company had been part of the military-industrial complex that prepared for and supplied the war. Through this exhibit, NYK pays tribute to the memory of the 5,000 merchant sailors and hundreds of ships lost during the war. It seems that the near total loss of the NYK merchant fleet in 1945 provided NYK's postwar managers with the opportunity to claim a physical break from their wartime past and thus rebuild their company free of the specific histories of the company's earlier complicities embodied by its lost fleet. Indeed, the few ships that survived the war were retired by the early mid-1950s—all except for the interwar passenger liner *Hikawa Maru*.

Institutional mnemonics

Most maritime heritage organizations are shaped by a contemporary fascination with the history of technology, and no maritime museum seems complete without the physicality of a ship for its visitors to wander. Since 1945, the corporeal body of the *Hikawa Maru*, the last survivor of NYK's historical fleet, has provided a useful spatial-temporal link to the interwar era. Permanently berthed near Yokohama's Yamashita Park since the early 1960s, the *Hikawa Maru* exhibit is the last surviving relic of the company's "Golden Era." and serves as a crucial aspect of the company's effort to evoke nostalgia for a set of products and services rendered to the upper classes of the early twentieth century as a means of marketing a vaguely similar set of products and services to the urban middle classes of contemporary Japan. In 2007, NYK completed an extensive refurbishment of the ship, which had lain in neglect at its permanent mooring in Yokohama since 1960, and reopened it as an extension of the NYK Museum. Yet the ship, which also saw service during the war as a medical support vessel in Southeast Asia, also embodied unpleasant memories of the company's wartime complicity. Perhaps symbolic of their uneasy relationship with its history, company officials have several times remade the ship and its story in ways that seem to further diminish public memory of the less laudable moments of its past.

When launched in 1929, the *Hikawa Maru* was designed as a cargo-carrying passenger vessel. It completed more than 70 trans-Pacific voyages on the Seattle line between 1930 and 1941, at which point the company responded to increased political tensions between the United States and Japan by reassigning the ship to service on the European line. After several voyages carrying Japanese and other evacuees from Europe, the ship was requisitioned by the government in 1942, refitted as a hospital ship, and put into service tending wounded soldiers in Southeast Asia. Seized by the Allied Occupation in 1945, the ship was used to carry personnel between the United States and Japan until 1947 when it was reassigned to alternately carry coal and food until released to NYK control in 1950.⁴⁵

NYK continued to use the *Hikawa Maru* as a cargo vessel until 1953, when it was refurbished as a passenger carrier and reassigned as the company's first postwar trans-Pacific passenger liner. The ship traveled between Yokohama and Seattle until August 1960, when it was retired and permanently moored on the Yokohama waterfront where it served as a floating youth hostel and wedding venue. In the early 1970s, the youth hostel was closed and the ship was converted into a joint operation with the City of Yokohama that featured a maritime museum, restaurant, banquet facility, and summertime beer garden. The restaurant, banquet hall, and beer garden closed in 2002, and the ship's future remained uncertain until 2007 when NYK agreed to completely refurbish and reopen the ship as a historical exhibit of the NYK Museum in April 2008.⁴⁶

Since 2008, the company has exhibited the refurbished *Hikawa Maru* as a memorial to designer Marc Simon's sleek Art Deco interiors, the faded ghost of which can be experienced by walking through the refurbished exhibits of first-class cabins and social spaces, the smoking salon, and the dining room. The designated walking tour, illustrated with graphics and bilingual wall text, guides visitors from the upper-deck first-class accommodations to the third-class berths and service areas of the ship's lower decks. The exhibit is designed and maintained by museum staff, and many of the wall-sized displays deployed to explain the exhibit feature visual materials and text drawn directly from the pages of *SEASCOPE* and *YŪSEN*, most of which can also be found on display at the museum nearby in Minato Mirai.

A recent reacquisition, the contemporary ship exhibit was meant to supplement the museum, but has drawn far more visitors than the primary facility, which is situated about two kilometers from the ship's mooring at Yamashita Park. The *Hikawa Maru* has long been a popular waterfront attraction, drawing more than 26,000,000 visitors in its first 45 years moored on the Yokohama waterfront, and attracting more than 100,000 visitors in the first year after its refurbishment and reopening in April 2008.⁴⁷ Although the ship attracts a small number of merchant mariners while they are in port, the primary audiences are school children and families out for a day on the waterfront, and the numbers of visitors are evidence that the

ship is a popular venue from which NYK seeks to promote the company's role in Japan's modern maritime heritage. Yet, the ship is only one of many corporate venues and publications that obfuscate NYK's role in the history of imperial Japan.

Conclusion

Corporations in part flourish by evading critical discussion of their social function, and CSR schemes deploy an array of devices as a means of achieving this end.⁴⁸ Surprisingly, many companies, large and small, host their own museums, and the case of NYK is an excellent example of how corporate museums manufacture historical memory as a means of enhancing brand recognition, selling products, and obscuring less pleasant aspects of institutional histories. As an arm of the company's social responsibility program, the NYK historical enterprise is part of a philanthropic scheme that promotes a carefully crafted narrative of the company's role in the history of modern Japan. Indeed, NYK's history-telling enterprise is so well integrated within the other parts of the company's internal and external communications apparatus that it is remarkably easy to forget that the museum and ship exhibit are managed by the public relations organ of a for-profit corporation.

The integrated history enterprise nevertheless exemplifies an institutional uneasiness with the historical narratives it attempts to create. NYK's museum exhibits and employee magazines offer little more than a facsimile of the national history narrative presented by museums such as the Yūshūkan at Yasukuni Shrine and the National Shōwa Memorial Museum, both in Tokyo. On consequence is that NYK's external narrative is under-informative and offers little more than the opportunity for the visitor to spend a pleasant day on the Yokohama waterfront. NYK's internal narrative selectively, and uncritically, draws from historical materials originally crafted to emphasize the company's enthusiastic participation in imperial and militarist narratives, which further underscores what I think to be an embedded institutional fear of employee relations problems between NYK's Japan-based managers and its majority non-Japanese workforce. Human relations programming comprises part of many public relations schemes, but the reason for this particular shape to NYK's public relations agenda may be the fact that the significant shift in employee demographics since 2000 may have left NYK managers feeling anxious about what their Asian employees might do after learning about the company's twentieth-century history.

NYK merchant ships did not shoot, bomb, or gas anyone and the official narrative is that the company was compelled by imperial order to collaborate with the war effort, and lost nearly all of its merchant fleet as a result. Significantly, in the company's version of history, the human story is also lost at sea. Hundreds of thousands of civilians and soldiers in Asia and the

Pacific lost their lives because of the war materiel and soldiers transported aboard NYK ships, for which NYK received ample compensation—up until the end, when the corporation was all but lost at sea.

It is important to note, however, that the wartime government and its marine transport contractors were closely entwined elements of the same military force, and total loss, whether sunk at sea or lost through forced divestiture of capital inventory at the conclusion of the war, does not appear to have fully resolved the historical concerns of NYK officials. While it is convenient for postwar company executives to deploy historical narratives that underpin the assertion that the wartime company was merely following orders, it seems that the NYK Group, which today transports goods across the globe and employs more than 33,000 Asians, might indeed benefit from a vision of historical responsibility that seeks to reconcile rather than obfuscate its multiple collusions with the imperial and wartime state.

The stories presented by NYK bring to bear the question as to what constitutes legitimate historical narrative. Recent scholarship on historical memory in Japan and Germany demonstrates that all public memory is at some level constructed within contested discourses.⁴⁹ NYK's history-telling enterprise opens the question as to whether it is "socially responsible" for a corporation to present itself as absolved of its past without seeking reconciliation for the very worst deeds undertaken by its employees, corporate officers, and majority shareholders. Many postwar German citizens chastised their postwar corporate leaders for not admitting the extent to which their institutional collaborations with the Nazi regime did grave harm to tens of millions of individuals. Few in Japan have questioned the same.

Corporations have in law the fiduciary responsibility to provide truthful information. Nevertheless, the obfuscation of an unpleasant past may be one way that corporate executives protect shareholder value since publicizing past indiscretions could invite civil action. Indeed, several civil cases brought against the American subsidiaries of major German and Japanese corporations have precipitated settlements despite legal roadblocks claiming the issue of war liability was resolved by the treaties that ended World War II.⁵⁰

Yet, there are historic sites, such as the slave auction at Colonial Williamsburg in the United States and the "Killing Fields" at Choeung Ek in Cambodia, that function as profitable tourist enterprises by specifically recalling past horrors on a scale that seems well beyond any indiscretion or collaboration perpetrated by NYK. The crucial point of difference, however, is that the historical narratives deployed by NYK are also likely intended to ameliorate an institutional fear of conflict between Japanese management and a predominantly Asian workforce—a situation that perversely resembles social and political tensions within the imagined Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere of the wartime era. The institutional structures constructed by NYK to promote corporate social responsibility since the start of the

twenty-first century seem to emphasize the lingering ambiguities of postwar Japan's relationship with its prewar and wartime past. Ironically, it also seems likely that NYK's history telling enterprise exposes the company to fiduciary risk by using the company's social responsibility scheme as a forum for presenting marketing narrative as history.