

Straits Chinese Steamship Owners in the China-Straits Passenger Trade, 1890s-1950

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Part I Introduction

Commerce and passenger movement across the South China Sea from coastal Fukien (Fujian), Kwangtung (Guangdong) provinces and also the island of Hainan to Southeast Asia traces back at least 1,500 years. Some of the passengers were merchants, some artisans, some labourers, mostly men but also wives and children; some settled and intermarried with local women, others eventually returned to China. By the eighteenth century, Amoy (Xiamen) junks were reportedly as large as a thousand tons and carried hundreds of passengers as well as cargo. These vessels, large or small, sailed according to the monsoons, southwards with the southwest wind, home with the northeast wind, thus with several months in between to lay over and exchange cargoes. With the opening of Treaty Ports, the lifting of the imperial prohibition of emigration in 1858, and the emergence of faster and more reliable Western steamships owned by small companies and chartered to Chinese firms, the rate of emigration increased rapidly, preponderantly of Chinese men seeking to work for profit such as in the tin mines and rubber plantations of Malaya, the rice fields of Thailand, or the gold fields of the Americas and Australia. The word 'coolie', of Indian subcontinental origin, was often used by Westerners to describe these migrants in a rather derogatory way. The Chinese word kǔlì (苦力) is thought to be an instance of phono-semantic matching that literally translates to 'bitter strength' but is more commonly understood as 'hard labour'. The travel often involved borrowing funds at the outset for repayment to triad-linked

brokers, often on usurious terms. But the financial reward was enticing, and migrants might, after a number of years, return as wealthy men to their home villages in China. Others who died overseas returned home in coffins, whose carriage was a significant return cargo.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 accelerated the momentum. Second-hand steamships became readily available in Singapore and Hong Kong for purchase or for charter by Chinese merchants or syndicates (kongsi), thereby being able to voyage more quickly and predictably without much regard to the prevailing winds. Although steamers were more expensive than Chinese junks or Western-rigged sailing vessels, they could make more round voyages in a year. While foreign steamship owners dominated the export/import trades with Europe and America, Chinese firms around the South China Sea found a niche in local trades because they controlled cargoes and could contract with the passage brokers.

For the first three decades of the 20th century the number of Chinese seeking passage to and from the main steamer ports of Amoy (Xiamen), Swatow (Shantou), Hong Kong and Hoihow (Hainan) showed a steady rising trend. The inducement was the prospect of making money in the mines, plantations or towns of Southeast Asia, not more than a week to ten day's distance by sea, while the 'push' was poverty and instability in the hinterlands of Fujian and Guangdong. Nevertheless, economic and political conditions were subject to enormous fluctuations, while the policy of colonial and also the Thai governments sometimes promoted and sometimes restricted migration. Some idea of the trend can be gained by immigration figures for Singapore, which was a distribution point for both Malaya and then Dutch Indonesia. Around 1900, inward Chinese migration was around 200,000 per annum, rising to a prewar peak of 270,000 in 1911. By 1915 the flow had all but ceased, recovering to 126,00 in 1920 and 215,000 in 1925. Then came two exceptional years of 350,000 (1926) and 360,00 (1927) when the rubber boom in Southeast Asia and civil strife in China generated outflows that were never surpassed. These last figures corresponded to a shipload of 1,000 immigrants every day through the year, without including large flows also to Java, Penang, Belawan Deli and Rangoon. There was always a significant rate of return migration, thus 78,000 in 1925, 120,000 in 1926 and 155,000 in 1927. In boom times the net flow was outwards, in bad times the reverse.

Fluctuations in passenger traffic could readily be accommodated because all but a tiny proportion of these passengers travelled not in cabins but in tweendecks that could otherwise be used to carry pilgrims or as cargo space or for cattle or simply not be used at all. Regular ships on the berth from Amoy or Swatow could be supplemented by charters, usually seasonal time charters for just a few months that could be extended or terminated according to conditions. Other measures were to increase or decrease the frequency of voyages and, most simply, to carry more or less passengers. Whereas in bad times or the off-season ships might carry just a few hundred deck passengers, in good times they would be crammed into the maximum allowed by the Hong Kong Government's passenger licence and sometimes more. Consular and Maritime Customs supervision at Amoy, Swatow and Hoihow could be evaded but there is a steady record in Singapore of ship masters and chinchews being fined (usually quite small sums) for over-carrying.

Although the outward passenger trade from South China was controlled by Chinese passage brokers in Amoy and Swatow with networks that extended back to rural villages in the hinterland, the legal situation in China until 1897 did not allow those merchants to invest in steamers under

the Chinese flag. But such expensive investments were secure under the British flag with registry in Hong Kong, Singapore, Penang or Rangoon, and the availability of Royal Navy backup in emergencies. It was this legal anomaly that caused wealthy Chinese merchants in those ports and usually themselves Hokkien to buy second-hand steamers and make them available to passage brokers. Chinese goods, including large quantities of floor tiles as ballast, would be shipped southbound, rice or sugar northbound, mainly to Hong Kong. One of the first Straits owners to do was Penang shipowner Khoo Tiong Poh (Bun Hin & Co.), who by early 1874 was running steamers to and from Amoy to provide labour to the Chinese tin mines of the adjacent Malay Peninsula, a business that was already flourishing before the British began to impose their authority. Nevertheless, by 1880 the two main carriers from Amoy and also Swatow were the British homeward freight carriers Ocean S.S. Co. (Alfred Holt & Co.) of Liverpool and Glen Line (McGregor, Gow & Co.) of London, which carried neither mails nor cabin passengers and could therefore divert to Amoy and Swatow to embark Straits-bound Chinese passengers in their tween decks.

This post focuses specifically on the role of the leading Straits Chinese owners, all tycoons with conglomerate business interests. The Singapore-based Wee Bin Kongs, tracing back to the 1860s, built up an extensive network of lines across the Malay Archipelago before around 1891 entering the China trade. The principal, Lim Ho Puah and his son Lim Peng Siang formed the Ho Hong S.S. Co. Ltd in 1913. This venture was contemporary with Lim Chin Song's Seang Line of steamers from Rangoon. Koe Guan's involvement in the China trade was shortlived, only from 1903 to 1906, but the principals Khaw Sim Bee and Khaw Joo Tok of Penang, maintained a large network of steamship services north of Singapore, from 1907 as Eastern S.S. Co. Ltd. The involvement of Java's 'sugar king' Oei Tiong Ham from 1901 to 1913 was also brief but he likewise retained a local shipping interest trading between Singapore and the Dutch East Indies through Heap Eng Moh S.S. Co. in Singapore.

And yet, by the mid-1930s shipping in the Malay Archipelago and much of the China trade had come almost completely under European control. Alfred Holt & Company's Ocean S.S. Co. of Liverpool, the main cargo carrier between China and Britain, had dabbled in the China trade in the late 1890s before in 1899 selling out most of its feeder operations to the German Norddeutscher Lloyd. After the German fleet was seized at the outbreak of World War I, Holts and the associated China Navigation Co. Ltd of John Swire & Sons, moved back into the China-Straits trade, eventually taking over Eastern S.S., Straits S.S. and Ho Hong S.S. while the Dutch-flag Kon. Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM) took over Heap Eng Moh. This outcome was then product of better access to capital combined with political leverage from colonial rule. It was also the product of unexpected shocks. The postwar depression of the early 1920s followed by the Great Depression of the 1930s destroyed the financial viability of the Straits Chinese conglomerates and choked off the funds needed to sustain their shipping businesses. The uncertainties of family succession and, in the case of Lim Chin Tsong, a propensity to gamble, did not help.

Nevertheless, that is not the whole story. From the 1920s onwards, the passage brokers in Swatow and Amoy were very entrepreneurial in chartering steamers to compete with British and Dutch firms in the China trade and handled at least half the business. Thus in 1926, a busy year because of the rubber boom and also the anti-British boycott at Canton, according to records of the Dutch Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM), the KPM itself provided 25 fortnightly sailings alongside

China Navigation (42), British India S.N. Co. (Apcar Line) en route from Calcutta to Japan (34) and Jardines ex Calcutta (28), in all 129 for these four foreign firms, alongside Ho Hong (21) and Lim Chin Tsong's *Seang Bee* (7), but another 534 sailings were out of a total of 702 were by vessels chartered by Chinese passage brokers.

After 1945, as Indonesia and Malaya decolonised and China was taken over by the People's Republic, the passage brokers proved more resilient than the foreign companies and carried on a diminished trade with chartered tonnage, mainly under the Norwegian flag (see study of Norwegian companies on 'Singapore' page of www.oldchinaships.com). Then in the 1960s the wheel turned full circle and Singapore Chinese companies re-entered the passenger trade as Kie Hock Shipping, Guan Guan Shipping and Pacific International Lines, as previously, all owned by Hokkien Chinese. This last phase, before airlines took over the whole business, will be the topic of a separate post.

Part II

Ho Hong Steamship Company Ltd (1913)

Ho Hong Steamship Company (1932) Ltd

(Lim Peng Siang)



The Ho Hong 和豐 Steamship Company Ltd had notable antecedents. In the late-19th century, the Chinese syndicate of Wee Bin & Co. was the main Singapore-based steamship operator with services extending through the Indonesian archipelago and, with its larger ships, as far as South China. Lim Ho Puah 林和坂 (b. Amoy Dec. 1841, d. Feb. 1914) began working for Wee Bin as an apprentice but quickly rose to become bookkeeper and to marry Wee Bin's only daughter (Goh & Koh, 2023). He also proved to be a capable shipping manager. After the early death of his brother-in-law Wee Boon Teck on 22 September 1888 at the age of just 36, Lim became his executor and took over management of the shipping fleet. Wee Boon Teck's son Wee Siang Tat (b. 1875) became a partner in January 1900 but died just fourteen months later on 14 March 1901. He was said to have had no head for business and to have been more interested in the arts.

In 1891 Wee Bin & Co. entered the China trade with the recently acquired 1512-grt *Nam Yong* (1875). Then in October 1894, on behalf of Wee Bin, Lim purchased the new 1867-grt steamer British steamer *Mandarin* (1891), which was delivered in Singapore, registered there in his name and immediately placed in service to Amoy. On 8 November 1894 she was reported as arriving that day at Penang with 486 Chinese passengers. At the end of the year, she was renamed *Hong Leong* which, following twelve months after Lim's renaming one year earlier of the 167-grt, wooden-hulled Malayan coaster *Nor Hasjim* (1892) as *Hong Wan*, seems to have been the origin of the 'Hong' nomenclature. Two years later, with brother-in-law Lee Choon Guan[see Song, 1967: 111-12], Lim bought the 2180-grt Glen Line steamer *Glenfalloch* (1873) and likewise registered her at Singapore in his own name for the China trade. *Glenfalloch*, which was never officially renamed,

was a larger, ocean-going cargo steamer that was converted to carry a large complement of deck passengers. At that time, she was the largest ship in the Straits-China trade.

In mid-1896 the British consul at Amoy reported that the annual outward passenger traffic from Amoy was around 100,000 'coolies', of whom about half were seasonal free labourers who paid their own way and mostly returned some months later, while the other half were poor labourers whose fare was advanced by clan agents to be worked off (Straits Budget, 23/6/96). The outward traffic picked up after Chinese New Year with the peak season with the northeast monsoon through to May, after which it fell away because of rougher conditions and the typhoon season in the South China Sea during the southwest monsoon. During the six months from May to November, Hong Kong regulations did not allow passengers to be carried under above-deck awnings (Straits Budget, 7/7/96). In the peak month of May 1896, almost 20,000 immigrants arrived in the Straits from China, of which 8,800 came direct from Amoy, 2,400 from Swatow, 6,580 from Hong Kong (most probably from Swatow) and almost 1,500 from Hoihow (Hainan) (Straits Budget, 23/6/96). By August arrivals were just under 10,000 conveyed in 22 steamers (16 British-flag, 5 German and 1 Italian) (ST, 2/9/96). By November arrivals were down to 7,000 carried by 16 vessels (14 British, 1 German, 1 Italian) (SB, 7/12/97). On the other hand, towards the end of the Chinese year, the rate of repatriation to South China would increase.

With big passenger flows in both directions, it is hardly surprising that steamship owners saw opportunity. By November 1897 it was reported that only 3 of the 14 British-flag vessels belong to Straits Chinese owners (SB, 7/12/97). In May 1896 a former officer in the Chinese Maritime Customs observed that whereas around 1890 most voyages were by made by local British-flag steamers registered in Penang, Singapore or Hong Kong, since then the shift of tea cargoes from Chinese ports to Ceylon and India had led the homeward lines such as Blue Funnel (Ocean S.S. Co.) and Glen Line to carry unberthed passengers in the tweendeck between China and the Straits or India, where they could top up with cargo (SB, 26/5/96). Unberthed passage rates fell from \$25 to \$6-7 and sometimes as little as \$3. Competition intensified from October 1897 when Blue Funnel dedicated several of its older ships to a fortnightly Amoy-Straits-Amoy line, *Jason* (2181/80), *Bellephoron* (2154/80) and *Telemachus* (2188/80) becoming the regular vessels (SB, 26/11/97)[our study can be accessed via <https://www.oldchinaships.com/copy-of-singapore>].

When in mid-1899 German-flag Norddeutscher Lloyd of Bremen sought to entrench a monopoly of local shipping in Southeast Asia by taking over Holt's feeder lines, Chinese merchants and shipowners were emboldened. As a consort for *Hong Leong* and *Glenfalloch*, in August 1899 Lim Ho Puah with Wee Koon Lim bought the 2075-grt former Alfred Holt & Co. cargoliner *Stentor* (1875), more recently trading out of Singapore and having just completed two pilgrim voyages to Jeddah as *Charterhouse*. A Rangoon syndicate associated with Lin Chin Tsong introduced the 2,000-grt *Seang Leong* (1881) to the Rangoon-Straits-Amoy trade. In the latter half of 1900, Lim Ho Puah bought two fine ocean-going steamers from George Smith & Sons' City Line, the 3229-grt *City of London* (1876) and her 3,230-grt sister *City of Edinburgh* (1876) for the same line. They were refitted to carry a large number of deck passengers as *Hong Bee*, *Hong Wan I* (as mentioned, Wee Bin already owned a small local trader *Hong Wan*). In March 1901 it was reported in Singapore that Wee Bin was buying a third sister, *City of Venice* (3372/75), but a few days later the ship stranded in the Hooghly while outward bound from Calcutta and needed significant repairs. Instead, in May 1901

Lim took delivery in Calcutta of the newer, larger (3910 grt), two-funnelled *City of Calcutta* (1881), to be renamed *Hong Moh*. The trio were by far the largest ships on the Singapore or Penang registers. Together with *Glenfalloch*, Lim now deployed an impressive fleet of four big ships in weekly service between Rangoon, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Swatow and Amoy.

Nevertheless, there was soon competition and an aggressive rate war. Having suffered the loss of *Seang Leong* with all hands in a typhoon in July 1902, Lim Chin Tsong replaced her with the 3750-grt, 14-knot Glen Liner steamer *Glenogle* (1882), a larger and faster version of *Glenfalloch* and a good match for Ho Hong's two older ex 'City' liners. Also in 1903, Penang-based Koe Guan & Co., associated with tax farmer and tin miner Khaw Sim Bee, brought from New Zealand the 2000-grt passenger steamer *Waihora* (1882) for the Straits-China passenger trade. At the end of the decade, Lim Chin Tsong achieved primacy by adding the four-masted, twin-screw former Bibby sisterships *Shropshire* and *Chesire*, both of more than 5,000 gross tons and built in 1891 for its Liverpool-Burma passenger-cargo line. During a time of increasing European dominance of steam shipping, the busy Rangoon-Straits-China line was one where Chinese shipowners still held sway, most notably Lim Ho Puah and Lim Chin Tsong.

Lim Ho Puah's son Lim Peng Siang 林秉祥 (1872-1944), educated at St Joseph's in Singapore, at first worked for his father in Wee Bin. Two years after becoming a naturalised British subject in 1902, a \$50,000 loan from his father allowed him and his brother Lim Peng Mau to go into business on their own account as the trading firm Ho Hong Co. Goh & Koh (2023: 97) suggest that the characters 和豐 combined 'Ho'/和 character from Lim Ho Puah and the 'Hong'/豐 character from Wee Bin's firm 'Hong Guan'. Both characters are auspicious, 'Ho' (Cantonese 'Wo', Japanese 'Wa') denoting 'harmony' and 'Hong' ('FENG' as in 'Feng Shui') denoting 'wealth'. Together they implied that Ho Hong was the successor to the old Hong Guan/Wee Bin firm. The Lim brothers saw good prospects in manufacturing and proceeded in 1906 to set up the Ho Hong Oil Mills Ltd, manufacturing and exporting coconut oil, and Ho Hong Rice Mills Ltd. Peng Siang prospered and in August 1912 became one of the founding directors of the Chinese Commercial Bank.



(Left) Lim Ho Puah (www.nlb.gov.sg/main/image-detail?cmsuuid=e5d36078-ade6-43b7-810d-88d2ae280f18).
(Right). Lim Peng Siang (Song Ong Siang, 2020; Wikipedia).

Meanwhile, in January 1911 the now 70-year-old Lim Ho Puah had liquidated the Wee Bin Kongsi. Given that Lim was the sole surviving partner and the prime investor in the ships, it is somewhat surprising that this move had been delayed until a decade has passed since the death of Wee Siang Tat and then granting of probate on the estate in June 1901. The explanation seems to be that Siang Tat's widow Ho Shiok Chui (Ho Sok Choo) Neo was heir to the estate and it was her remarriage on 7 March 1909 that triggered its distribution. Even then, the wheels turned slowly. The large property portfolio of 97 lots was auctioned on 22 and 29 March 1910, realising a total of almost \$400,000 (ST, 30/3/10). Advertisement in the Straits Times then requested claimants to lodge with Ho Shiok Chui by 20 May 1910. Only when all this was tied up did the firm itself complete liquidation. Most of the remaining ships were already registered to Lim Ho Puah, but *Ban Poh Guan* and *Nam Yong* passed to Chew Joon Hiang, agent for Oei Tiong Ham and joint owner with him of Heap Eng Moh S.S. Co. Ltd, suggesting that Oei had held an interest, either by direct ownership or mortgage. One or two less valuable ships were sold to third parties.

Management of Lim Ho Puah's fleet was carried on by his son (and Wee Bin's grandson) Lim Peng Siang, who sought to put the business on a more solid basis to withstand increasing foreign competition from British, German and Dutch rivals. Whereas the Wee Bin ships had been managed on behalf of affiliated single-ship syndicates under the old British system of 64th shares, on 27 May 1913 the Ho Hong Steamship Co. (HSSC) was registered as a private shipowner/manager with a nominal capital of \$5 million, of which \$1.95 million was initially paid up. Of the 19,500 issued shares at \$100 each, Lim Peng Siang held 8,205, his brother Lim Peng Mau 5,183, (Mdm) Lim Liang Neo 3,260 and Lim Hock Keng 815, the rest being widely distributed among another 70 family members and associates. The six founding directors were Lim Peng Siang, Lim Peng Mau, Lim Seow Kiow, Lim Siow Eng, Lim Hock Sing and Ko Leong Hoe (Hong Kong).

Ten days after Ho Hong's registration, the ships *Glenfalloch*, *Hong Bee* and *Hong Wan I* were transferred into its ownership. *Hong Moh* retained registry with Lim Pek Siong, was laid up at Singapore in August 1913 and offered for sale in November 1913, then after no acceptable bids were received also transferred to Ho Hong on 10 January 1914 and shortly afterwards put back in service.

Patriarch Lim Ho Puah died on 16 February 1914 leaving Lim Peng Siang and Lim Peng Mau as his executors. They duly returning his body to China for burial and returned to Singapore on 16 June 1914 by *Hong Wan I*. The Ho Hong fleet was boosted in mid-1915 by purchase from P&O of the impressive, 3-masted, 5,284-grt passenger liner *Oriental* (1889), almost certainly intended to restore Ho Hong's supremacy against the two big Seang Line ships, both since requisitioned as wartime transports. This was probably over-reach. After just a few months in service as *Hong Kheng*, the liner was sold to an Anglo-French interest at double the price.

Through World War I, the two brothers concentrated their energies and funds on diversifying their business group. The German-owned Singapore Oil Mills that had been seized in February 1916 as alien property was sold to Ho Hong by tender in October 1917 and in November 1920 merged into

the private company Ho Hong Oil Mills Ltd ('Elephant' brand) (SFP, 18/10/17). The factories were consolidated on the upper reach of the Singapore River off Havelock Road, their waterfront designated as Ho Puah and Peng Siang Quays. In March 1917 the Ho Hong Bank was established and quickly built a network that extended to Penang, Batavia (Jakarta), Hong Kong, Amoy (1925) and Shanghai (1927). Other industrial ventures were in 1918 the Ho Hong Portland Cement Works, which opened in 1920 on nearby Karimun Island. There followed the Ho Hong Soap Factory Ltd ('Double Arrow' and 'Palm Tree' brand).

While investment funds were being taken up for other enterprises, Lim looked for a cheaper and more practical ship to add to the Ho Hong fleet, whose newest ship had been acquired as long ago as 1902. In 1917 a solution was found in the local coal hulk *Kalgoorlie*, a solid iron hull built for Glen Line as *Glenfruin* (1880). After being refitted with a salvaged triple-expansion steam engine, she was commissioned in January 1919 as the 3081-grt *Hong Hwa* with a capacity for 130 cabin and around a thousand deck passengers.

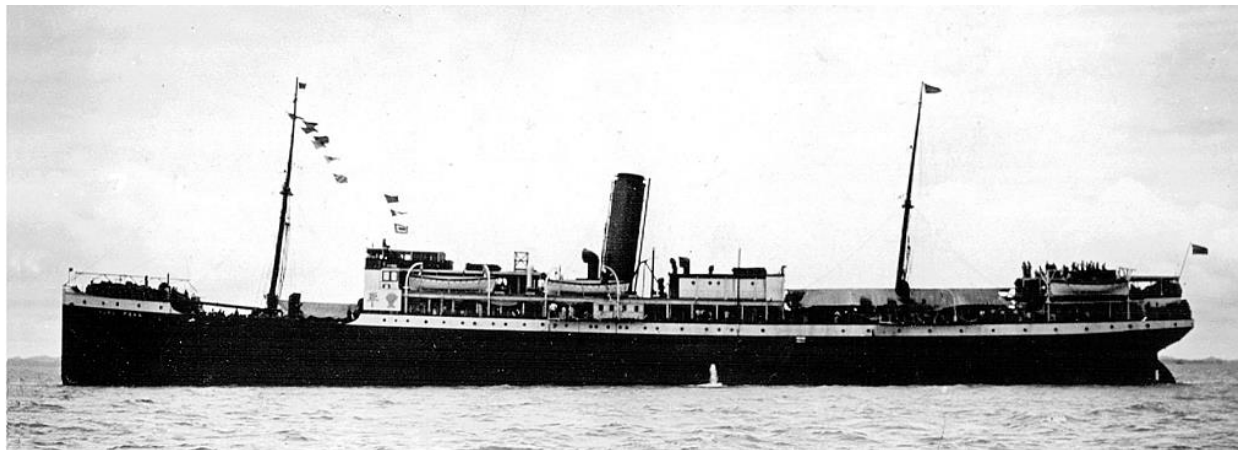
With a fleet of five large passenger carriers as well as a fleet of small local traders, by 1920 Ho Hong was pre-eminent among local Chinese shipping lines, all the more so because by then Lim Chin Tsong's fleet had been reduced to just *Seang Bee*. Then Ho Hong also faltered. In January 1921 *Hong Wan I* stranded near Swatow, was refloated and beached. Salvage looked to be feasible but and weather intervened and the ship broke in two. Fortunately, there was no loss of life.

Just a few weeks later came a much worse disaster, also in the approaches to Swatow. On 3 March 1921 *Hong Moh* was wrecked in tragic circumstances. On the previous day she had sailed from Hong Kong for Swatow with a crew of 48 and 1135 through passengers from Singapore and arrived off the bar at 9.30 the following morning when, in the absence of a pilot, the Master decided that at 22'6" draught the ship was too deep to enter and set course for Amoy. The 230 passengers expecting to disembark then threatened to kill the comprador and clerk, which persuaded the master to return to anchor off Swatow. This time the pilot refused entry, so the ship weighed anchor and again set course for Amoy in worsening weather, then at 7.20pm hit rocks near the Lammock Islands. At 3am next day the stern section broke aft of midships. China Navigation's *Shansi* arrived on the scene at 9am followed by HMS *Foxglove*, the cruiser HMS *Carlisle*, the small local steamer *Nam Hoi* and some fishing junks but still only 358 people could be rescued from the rough seas. The loss of life was never precisely known but was reckoned as around 800 souls, a very high number for a ship only one-tenth the size of the 46,300-grt *Titanic* (1,496 lives) (SFP, 1/8/21, Pinang Gazette, 9/4/21). Over the years there were more than a few casualties to ships in this passenger trade, including in July 1919 the disappearance in a typhoon of the 2,000-grt *Hauroto* (1882) en route from Saigon to Hong Kong but the *Hong Moh* disaster was the worst in the steamship era.

Two such disasters in quick succession must have struck public confidence in Ho Hong, which was being challenged on other fronts. Since 1920 the postwar recession had reduced traffic while rivals were commissioning new tonnage. John Swire & Sons' China Navigation Co. that had entered the trade after the seizure of the NDL fleet had commissioned six 2500-grt 'S' class (1915-20), then another slightly larger 2600-grt 'K' class (1921-22) and was now offering fortnightly sailings from

Amoy and Swatow through to Penang, each ship able to carry up to a thousand deck passengers. Jardine's Indo-China S.N. Co. was also building new ships for its China-Straits-Calcutta line. The powerful British India S.N. Co. was slower to build new postwar tonnage but in the mid-1920s redressed this in a grand manner by taking delivery of three classes of ships for the Apar Line from Calcutta to Japan via the Straits and China: the single-funnelled *Santhia*, *Shirala* and *Sirdhana* (7750 grt, 13 knots; 60 cabin, 2900 deck pass.), the 2-funnelled *Talma* and *Tilawa* (10,000 grt, 13 knots; 134 cabin, 3150 deck pass.) and the 3-funnelled *Tairea*, *Takliwa* and *Talamba* (8000 grt, 16 knots; 136 cabin and over 3,000 deck passengers). Also in the mid-1920s, China Navigation commissioned the 'A' class, 3500-grt, steam-turbine trio (*Anhui*, *Anking*, *Anshun*), each carrying 48 cabin and up to 2,000 deck passengers (SB, 27/2/25), while in 1926 the Dutch-flag KPM commissioned the 4600-grt motorships *Cremer* and *Van Heutsz*, each carrying 76 cabin and 2100 deck passengers, for their South China-Straits-Sumatra line. In stark contrast, by the time the last of all these liners was delivered in 1926, Ho Hong's *Glenfalloch* (1873) and *Hong Bee* (1876) were 53 and 50 years old and *Hong Hwa* (1880), though only recently reconditioned, 46 years old, all iron-hulled and obviously dated veterans.

Ho Hong's first step was to buy a newer second-hand ship. The 4,000-grt *Bloemfontein* (1899) had been built for British owners for the passenger/cargo trade to West Africa, then after being gutted by fire was refitted in 1920 for Dutch owners. After just two years in service, she was laid up for 20 months before sale to Ho Hong. Though hardly a new ship and not especially fast (12 knots), the renamed *Hong Peng* (after Lim Peng Siang) was a genuine passenger liner with cabins for 128 first- and second-class passengers and, after refit, tweendeck space for 1,500 deck passengers.



Crowded HONG PENG on arrival at Singapore, mid-1920s, probably off the quarantine station. Shade awnings at Nos 2, 3 and 4 hatches and on poop. Extra crew cabins built aft on Boat Deck but third midship boats not yet fitted. Chinese name below bridge (KPM/Alg. Rijksarchief).

However, a second liner was needed to restore Ho Hong's reputation, urgently so after *Hong Bee* had gone to breakers in 1926 and *Glenfalloch* in 1927. The solution was found in the 6167-grt, 13-knot ex German liner *Ling Nam* (1903), which since mid-1927 had been chartered by Hong Kong owner S.T. Williamson for the South-China Straits passenger trade. With a licence for 140 cabin passengers and 2640 deck passengers, the stately *Hong Kheng* ex *Ling Nam* again restored Ho Hong to the forefront of the trade.

As a consort, in February 1929 Ho Hong sought to time-charter the 3,850-grt Australian coastal liner *Dimboola* (1912) for 6-8 months for the Rangoon-China trade, but the owners declined. In June 1930 it came to the attention of the KPM that Ho Hong was negotiating to buy the Rotterdamsche Lloyd's mail liners *Tabanan* (5271/08) and *Tambora* (5602/10), both about to be replaced by the 17,000-grt sisters *Baloeran* (1930) and *Dempo* (1931). Instead, *Tabanan* was sold later that month for £19,750 to Turkey to become *Ege* while *Tambora* was delivered to Belgian breakers in February 1931. Ho Hong was fortunate not to have proceeded because the two ships would immediately have been surplus. Following the Wall Street crash of late 1929, the world quickly fell into a severe depression, with Malaya's rubber and tin in particular being especially hard hit. Out of concern for rising unemployment, on 1 August 1930 the Straits Government, imposed stringent restriction on Chinese immigration. Quotas on each shipping line cut the number by around 90%, though the rate of return migration actually increased, in part through enforced repatriation.

According to Lim Peng Siang's later testimony (SFP, 14/12/32), by October 1928 the Ho Hong group was already struggling financially and companies were operating on overdrafts. The shrinking shipping business was maintained on a reduced frequency but could not withstand the crisis of the affiliated Ho Hong Bank, which in September 1931 suffered a S\$2 million loss on sterling reserves when, almost simultaneously, the Japanese invaded Manchuria and the United Kingdom abandoned the gold standard. In mid-1932 agreement was reached to amalgamate the bank with the Chinese Commercial Bank and the Oversea Chinese Bank to form the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) with effect from 1 January 1933. Lim's challenge was then to rescue what he could of the rest of the interlocked Ho Hong group. As Goh & Koh (2023) explain, his course of action was to close down the loss-making and technically impaired Ho Hong Portland Cement Works, to find a buyer for the shipping company and use the funds to pay off the debts and write down the capital of the oil mills, which were restructured as Ho Hong Oil Mills (1931) Ltd with its capital reduced from \$1,476,000 million to \$1,125,000 million but with the Lim family still holding the controlling interest.

Lim desperately need a buyer for Ho Hong S.S. Co. On 15 July 1932 eighteen mortgages had been taken out on the fleet in favour of the Ho Hong Bank with a balance of \$600,000 owing. In the following month negotiations were undertaken with the Dutch-owned Koninklike Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM) through its Singaporean affiliate Heap Eng Moh S.S. Co. to buy out the fleet for £1.75 million. The KPM directors declined on the basis that the price this was well above what the fleet was worth given that there was no longer much value attaching to the goodwill. That led the colonial government of the Straits Settlements to put pressure on Straits S.S. Co. to come to the rescue. A complicated process ensued. Ho Hong S.S. Co. (1932) Ltd was registered with a capital of \$1.2 million, then Straits S.S. bought \$0.7 million in shares for cash while paying the balance of \$0.5 million for the fleet and goodwill. A further loan of \$0.2 million was provided against outstanding liabilities. The new Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) also loaned \$0.1 million. William Wedgewood Jenkins (Straits S.S./Mansfields) then became official manager of the new Ho Hong company while two OCBC board members came onto the HHSSC board. Like Straits S.S. Co. itself, HHSSC was therefore more Anglo-Chinese firm than Sino-British but the former Chinese shareholders retained some interest while operational management remained in Chinese hands

under Straits S.S. Co. supervision. Disposal of the large part of the shipping company allowed the Ho Hong group to retain control through OCBC of the oil mills Ho Hong Oil Mills (1931) Ltd.

As conditions began to pick up in the mid-1930s, the restructured Ho Hong S.S. needed a third ship. The old *Hong Hwa* had been transferred to the new company but remained laid up until sold to breakers at the end of 1933. It may be noted here that Lim Gar Chang's *Seang Bee* had been laid up in mid-1930 and been to breakers the following year, marking the end of that Rangoon Chinese enterprise. Ho Hong's Rangoon-Straits-China service was being carried on at a three-weekly frequency with *Hong Kheng* (6167/1903) and *Hong Peng* (4055/1899). By 1935 traffic warranted restoration of a fortnightly service. When *Dimboola* came onto the market, Jenkins and Lim saw their opportunity. Like *Hong Peng* and *Hong Kheng*, she had good cabin and cargo capacity and ample tween-deck space, hitherto used for cattle, that could readily be converted to accommodate a large number of deck passengers. However, neither Ho Hong nor the Chinese minority shareholders had the necessary funds so, with the backing of the parent Ocean S.S. Co., C.E. Wurtzberg, Chairman of Straits S.S., agreed to fund the £16,000 purchase price.

On arrival at Hong Kong on 13 November, *Hong Siang* went to Taikoo Dock, the shipbuilding and repair affiliate of China Navigation, for a thorough refit that, apart from machinery, was almost a rebuild. According to coverage in the Singapore press on 25 February 1936, the cabin accommodation had been extensively reconfigured to give 20 three-berth in First (60), 14 four-berth and 2 two-berth in Second (60) and 12 six-berth in Third (72), thus a total of 188 cabin berths across all three classes. More remarkably, the tween-decks fore and aft were fitted out according to 1931 Simla Rules for up to 1,200 deck passengers, thus a total complement of around 1,400 passengers. That meant some loss of cargo space but it hardly mattered because the heavy staple cargo of bagged rice stowed in the lower holds.

Postwar

The Pacific War with Japan stripped most companies of the large part of their China-Straits fleet. Ho Hong were probably the most fortunate in being able to recover all three units after the end of the war, though only *Hong Kheng* and *Hong Siang* were worth reconditioning. Lim Peng Siang had died on 21 March 1944 at age 71 or 72 but his brother Lim Peng Mau carried on the business in conjunction with W.W. Jenkins, who returned to his prewar position. There was much pent-up demand for family reunion and a flood of refugees. When *Hong Kheng* (1903) resumed her former run in September 1946, she embarked as many passengers as she could carry, passing through Singapore en route to Rangoon with 1,900 Burman Chinese refugees under UNRRA auspices, then returning to China with 1,500 deck passengers (ST, 3/10, 2/11/46). *Hong Siang* was put through an almost six-month refit in time to take her first postwar sailing from Singapore to Hong Kong and Amoy on 6 December 1946. Thereafter the two ships provided a monthly frequency, soon increased to fortnightly, between Rangoon, the Straits, Hong Kong, Swatow and Amoy, returning via Swatow and Saigon, with passengers and freight, mainly rice from Rangoon and Saigon to Singapore. Then disaster struck. On 9 July *Hong Kheng* sailed from Singapore for Hong Kong with reportedly 2,000 passengers but after leaving Hong Kong was about eighty miles up the coast en route to Swatow when at 4am she struck rocks. Royal Navy and American destroyers were

promptly on the scene and worked through the day to rescue all 1,800 passengers still on board along with the crew but the ship was a total loss.

From mid-1947 Ho Hong was therefore left with only *Hong Siang* for its prestige passenger trade, though the freighters *Kepong* (1916) and/or *Kamuning* (1944) were chartered from Straits S.S. to handle rice imports from Rangoon and Saigon but neither had any passenger capacity. *Hong Siang* kept up a six-weekly schedule but passenger traffic fell away as the political situation in China deteriorated. In July 1949 Shanghai was evacuated by Nationalist forces and by the time *Hong Siang* arrived back in Singapore on 25 September with just 150 passengers. Amoy had been occupied and Swatow was expected to be. The ship proceeded to Penang and after arrival back in Singapore on 30 September was laid up. In October 1950 she was put back into service as a troopship and served as such, latterly as *Empire Longford*, until laid up in Hong Kong in April 1952, subsequently being towed away for demolition.

Ho Hong retained the tiny coaster *Hong Thong* (184/27) and in 1948 took over the small 'Empire May'-type coasters *Hong Ann*, *Hong Soon* and *Hong Tat* for local trade with Sumatra until the last of these was sold in the mid-1950s. Until 1955 it also traded with Rangoon using a vessel chartered from Straits S.S. Co. Thereafter Ho Hong appears no longer to have owned or operated vessels but it remained a member of the Hong Kong-Straits liner conference with some value attaching to those rights, albeit diminishing in the face of outsider competition. In 1961 Straits Steamship sold its residual Ho Hong interests for \$3 million to the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation, which in 1952 had bought out the China Navigation Co. interest (Tregonning, 1967: 240-41).

Lim Peng Mau, much younger than his brother, had carried on other Ho Hong interests, including from early 1952 a newly registered Ho Hong Line Ltd, which was independent of Straits S.S. Hong Line seems only ever to have owned the 205-ton motor lighter *Hong Eng* (1945) and this was sold in March 1956. Ho Hong Trading Co. Ltd had been voluntarily wound up at the beginning of 1956 (Sing. Standard, 18/1/56). Lim Peng Mau died in Singapore on 6 July 1960 at age 75 or 76.

Ho Hong Oil Mills remained a viable business that was very much in the public eye through the advertising and sale of common household products. In the 1964 Straits Times Directory it listed as 'Manufacturers of Coconut Oil, Refined and Deodorised Coconut Oil, Copra Cakes, Margarine and Vegetable Fat', while the adjacent Ho Hong Soap Factory listed as 'Manufacturers of Washing, Toilet Soaps, Powder and Soft Soap, Liquid Detergent and Shampoo'. Both firms were under the same management of Lim Seow Eng as Chairman and Managing Director with fellow directors N.A. Hall, Lim Kim Chiu and Ong Chew Bee.

The Ho Hong head office, opened around 1930 on Chulia Street, was demolished in the early 1970s to make way for the 50-story OCBC building, which almost fifty years later is still a Singapore landmark. The factories and warehouses between Havelock Road and the Singapore River were also cleared and the precinct redeveloped for luxury hotels. The Grand Copthorne now stands more or less on the site of the former Ho Hong factories.

Straits Chinese/Singaporean shipping companies would re-enter the passenger trade with South China from 1961 onwards but Kie Hock, Guan Guan and Pacific International Lines would be new, postwar companies.

Sources

There is no written history of the Ho Hong S.S. Co. Ltd. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years of the Chinese in Singapore* (U. of Malaya Press, 1923/1967/2020) has a few paragraphs Lim Ho Puah and Lim Peng Siang. Jeremy Goh & Koh Keng We, 'Industrialisation and Chinese big business in colonial Singapore, Malaya, and China: The transnational enterprises of Lim Peng Siang (1904-41)', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 54(1) (2023) have had access to an unpublished family history and provide the best account of the Ho Hong industrial interest. A. Wright & H.A. Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Malaya* (1908) makes early mention of Ho Hong. Background on the Ho Hong Bank may be found in histories of the successor Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC). W.A. Laxon, *The Straits Steamship Fleets* (2004), pp. 142-58 includes a summary fleet list of Ho Hong S.S. Co. and Tregonning, *Home Port Singapore* (1967) refers to the Straits S.S. Co. involvement from 1932. KPM file (old system) Doos 406/file 1756/'Ho Hong'] give further background on that takeover. This account draws heavily upon the Singapore Press at <eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers> and, in regard to the ships, to the now archived copies of the Singapore register. Other sources are the British Newspaper Archive, Lloyd's Register and the Schell registers.

Fleet List

Lim Ho Puah

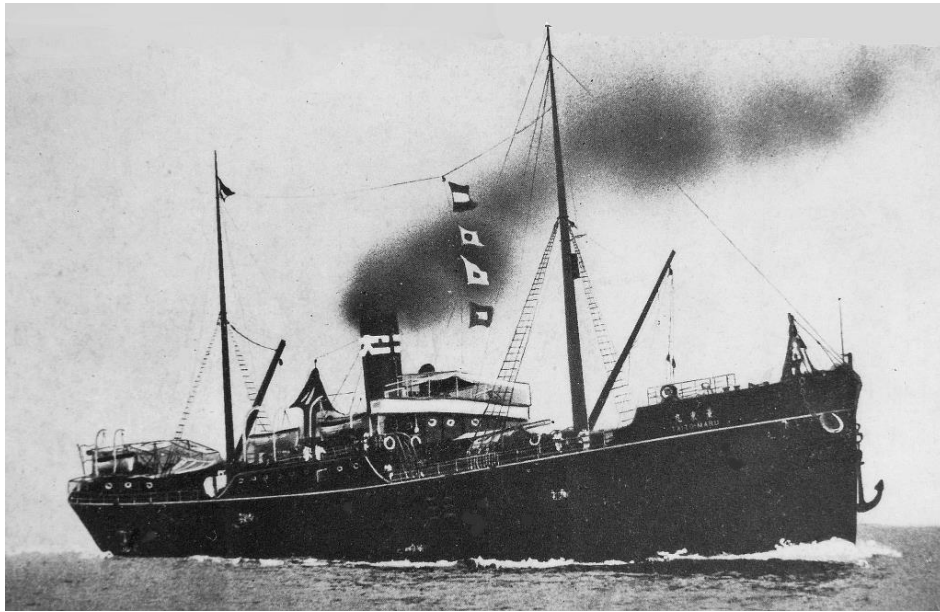
NAM YONG (1891-1911) 1512/75-5 (iron, 255.5 x 32.2', T3cy/187nhp)

Built by R. Dixon & Co., Middlesbrough (#114) as C2cy/150nhp and reg. as #6/1875 at Middlesbrough for John B. Walker, Middlesbrough as J.B. WALKER. Late 1878 sold to Royal Exchange Shg Co. Ltd, London (46/64) and 13 others (18/64) r. NORMAN MONARCH. 1/87 principal owners bankrupt, sold to John Wood (John Wood & Co.), W. Hartlepool and mid-1888 refitted at Hartlepool by E. Withy & Co. with T3cy/187nhp engine by T. Richardson & Co., Newcastle, 3/9 ran trials (11½k) as NAM YONG, now owned by John Wood on behalf of 'Singaporean firm' (Shields Daily News, 5/9/88), 19/9 sd Middlesbrough for Manila, Iloilo (8-12/12), then HK, Amoy and via Penang to Liverpool (10/4/89). 30/4/89 sd Cardiff for Saigon (15/6), thence via Amoy to Singapore (22/7) and Penang, where reg. as #1/1889 to Chuah Yu Tung. Mid-1891 sold to Lim Ho Puah (Wee Bin & Co.), Singapore for Rangoon-Straits-Amoy line. 10/91 Lee Choon Guan 6/64^{ths}. 3/11 sold to Chew Joon Hiang, Singapore, 1/4 m/g to Oei Tiong Ham. 18/12/12 t/f to HEMSSC. 12/2/15 (pm) sd Singapore for Batavia but 0100-0200 hrs while entering Pulo Sambu for Dutch quarantine papers struck reef off Brinti beacon, 10 nm from Singapore, then caught fire, next day submerged by stern at 45-degree angle (Malaya Tribune, 13/2/15), 9/3 wreck (only) auctioned by Powell & Co. at Singapore, cargo to be removed by 14/3.

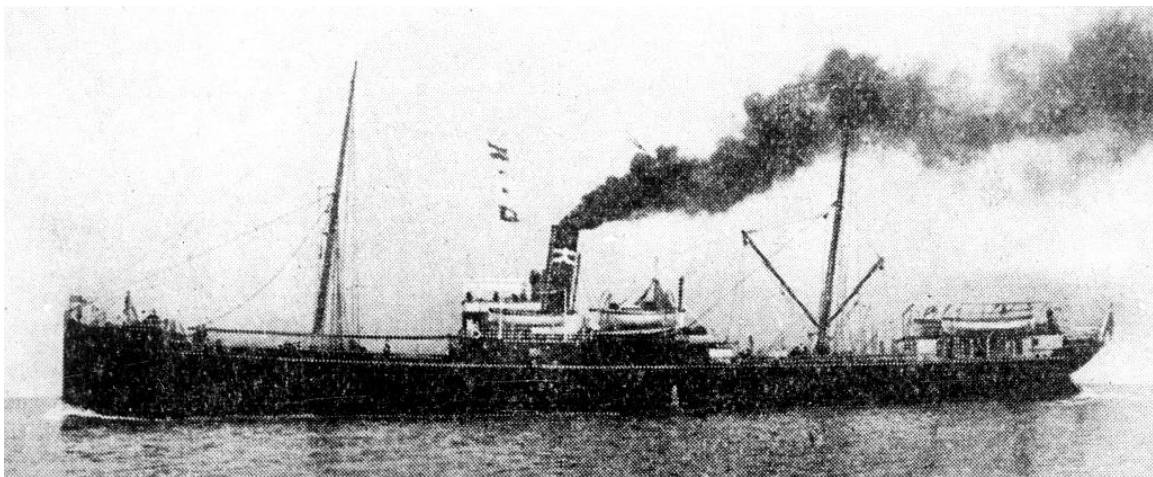
HONG LEONG (1894-00) 1867/1891-11 (265.8 x 39.0', T3cy/210nhp/10k by Black, Hawthorn & Co., Glasgow)

Built by Blyth S.B. Co. Ltd, Blyth (#79) for John White, London as MANDARIN. 12/91 after trials t/f to Whiteleaf S.S. Co. Ltd (John White mgr), London. 4/7/93 arr. Singapore from New York (Paterson, Simons & Co. agents). 12/93 chartered through Paterson, Simons & Co. to Alsagoff & Co., Singapore for local trade, then 9/3/94 ex Singapore for Jeddah (480 pilgrims); 7/7 arr. Singapore from Jeddah

via Aden (for repairs) and Penang, charter terminated (subsequently legal case) and vessel laid up. 1/10/94 sold at Singapore through Wilhelm Lund, London to Lim Ho Puah, reg. at Singapore #40/1894) and placed on Singapore-Amoy line. 12/94 r. HONG LEONG. 9/3/00 arr. Penang on last southbound voyage with 1075 Chinese immigrants; 14/3 sd Singapore for Hong Kong and Amoy under sale for \$225,000 and pending delivery 4/00 to Osaka Shosen Kaisha, Osaka r. TAITO MARU for Kobe-Okinawa-Keelung service, subsequently Yokohama-Kaohsiung. 10/21 sold to Nisshin Kisen K.K., Tokyo. 4/25 sold to Sodegaura Kisen K.K., Tokyo. 1926 Sold to Sagara Shinichi, Kobe. 1928 sold to Boshin Shoten K.K., Fuchu. 7/30 broken up at Osaka [SFP, 5/2/95].



MANDARIN as TAITO MARU in Osaka Shosen service (postcard coll. Nakamura/S. Kizu).



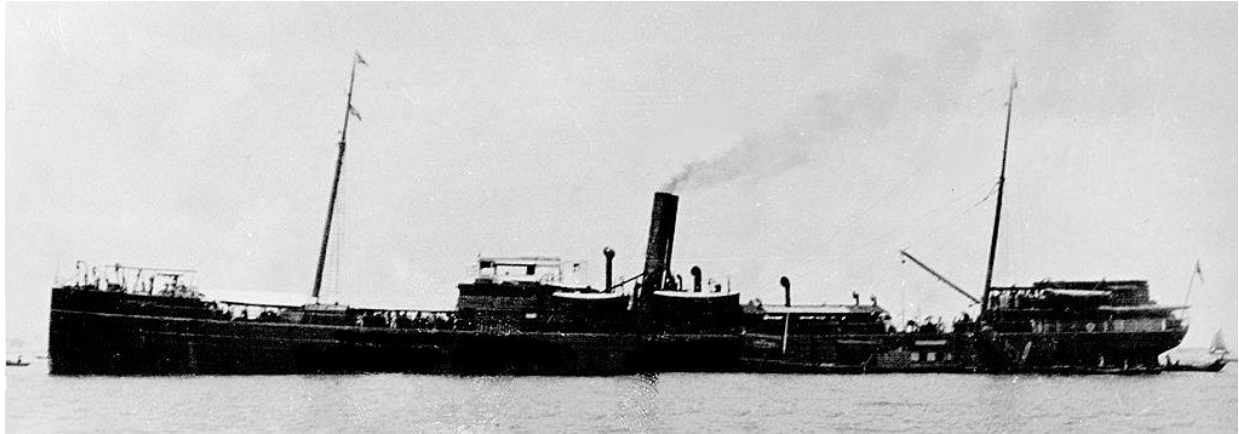
TAITO MARU in profile (OSK History).

Ho Hong S.S. Co. (Ltd)

GLENFALLOCH (1913-27) 2180/1873-6 (iron, 330.0 x 34.3', T3cy/223nhp)

Built by London & Glasgow Eng. & Iron S.B. Co. Ltd, Glasgow (#189) as compound-engined str for Alan C. Gow & Co., Glasgow for Glen Line to the Far East, 6/73 reg. at Glasgow to James McGregor

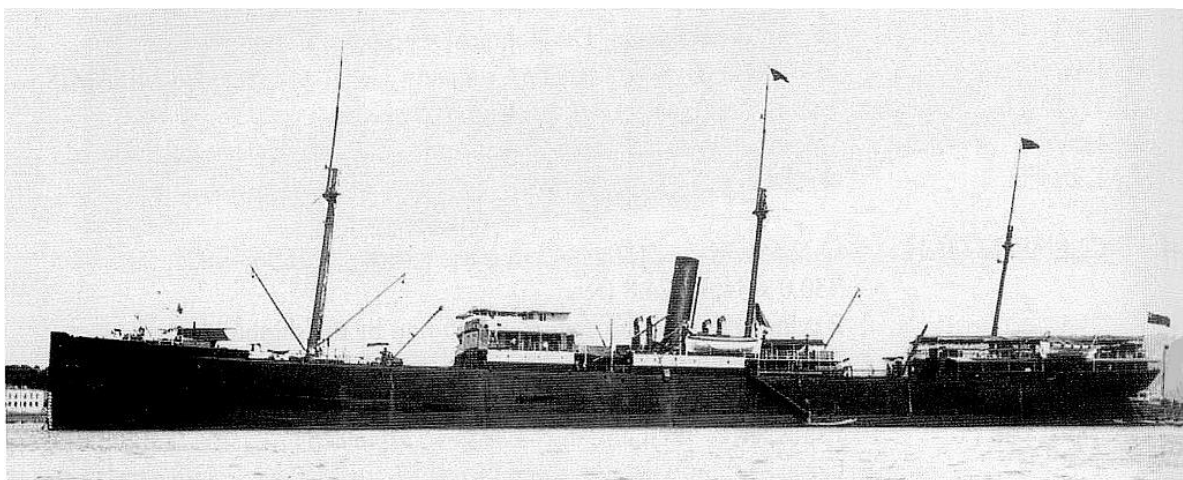
& Leonard Gow. 1880 t/f to McGregor, Gow & Co., London (reg. Glasgow). 3/89 engines tripled by Hall Russell & Co., Aberdeen. 19/9/96 arr. Singapore from Kuchinotsu (coal), docked and sold for £6,500 to Lim Ho Puah (58/64) and Lee Choon Guan (6/64) for Straits-China trade, 10/96 reg. at Singapore (#53/1896), mid-11/96 in service. 3/11 t/f to Lim Peng Siang. 6/6/13 t/f to HHSSC. 3/1927 broken up, 13/4/27 register closed [see also M. Cooper, Bill Harvey & Bill Laxon, *Glen and Shire Lines*, SiF, 2005].



GLENFALLOCH at Singapore, mid-1920s. Mainmast removed, shade deck extended aft over No. 3 hatch and accommodation added at poop (KPM/Alg. Rijksarchief).

HONG BEE (1913-26) 3229/1876-1 (iron, 3-dk/mst, 381.6 x 38.8', C2cy/449nhp by J.& G. Thomson, Glasgow)

Built by Chas. Connell & Co., Glasgow (#94) for Geo. Smith & Sons, Glasgow for India line as CITY OF LONDON. 12/92 t/f to City Line Ltd (G. Smith & Sons). 9/00 sold to Lim Ho Puah, 10/9 arr. Singapore from Java for refit at Keppel Dock and c. 6/11 reg. at Singapore (#44/1900) as HONG BEE, 8/11 V1 to China. 4/1911 t/f to Lim Pek Siong. 6/6/13 t/f to HHSSC. 7/26 sold to Lim Bee, Singapore for breaking up, 8/26 rep. sold to Swee Kee & Co. and by 24/8 demolition had commenced at Singapore.



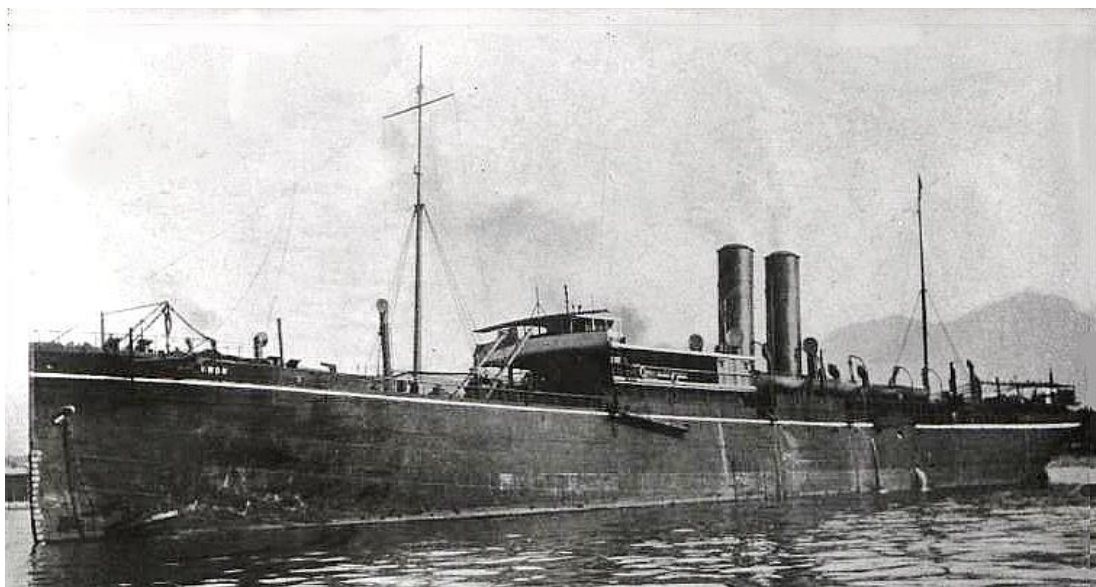
Iron steamer HONG BEE ex CITY OF LONDON (1876) (W.A. Laxon, Straits Steamship Fleets).

HONG WAN I (1913-21) 3230/1876-8 (iron, 3-dk/mst, 381.6 x 38.5', T3cy/369nhp by J. & J. Thomson, Glasgow)

Built by Chas. Connell & Co., Glasgow (#95) for Geo. Smith & Sons, Glasgow (#85/1876) for India line as CITY OF EDINBURGH. 9/86-1/87 new boilers, engines tripled by maker (from 75 to 150 pds stm pressure, higher speed, less coal, more cargo) (Liv. Mercury, 13/1/87). 12/92 t/f to City Line Ltd (G. Smith & Sons). 6/00 sold at Bombay to Lim Ho Puah, refitted at Bombay, 25/11 arr. Singapore and reg. as #36/1900 as HONG WAN I. 4/1911 t/f to Lim Pek Siong. 6/6/13 t/f to HHSSC. 29/1/21 o/v Amoy-Swatow stranded E. of Green Island off Swatow, beached nearby, broke in two before salvage, NZ certificate of Capt. J.S. Liddell suspended 2 yrs for careless navigation (MT, 12/4/21).

HONG MOH (1914-21) 3910/1881-9 (iron, 3-dk/mst, 400.0 x 42.1', C2cy/583nhp, later T3cy/560nhp/13k)

Built by Chas. Connell & Co., Glasgow (#125) for Geo. Smith & Sons, Glasgow as compound-engined str for India line as CITY OF CALCUTTA, reg. Glasgow as #103/1881. 12/92 t/f to City Line Ltd (G. Smith & Sons). 5/01 del. at Calcutta to Lim Ho Puah, 14/5 sd for Singapore where 30/5/01 reg. as #19/1901, refitted at Keppel Dock (40 1st, 44 2nd plus deck pass.), 25/7 comm. service to Penang, thence China as HONG MOH. 5/1911 t/f to Lim Pek Siong. 11/13 offered for sale at Singapore by HHSSC but then 10/1/14 reg. to HHSSC. 1916 engines tripled by Hongkong & Whampoa Dock and fitted with new boilers (1915). 1917 req. for use as army transport. 23/7/19 returned to Singapore for refit, 17/9 resumed service. 23/2/21 sd Singapore for Hong Kong (2/3), 1900 hrs 3/3 o/v Swatow-Amoy struck Boat Rock near Lammock Islands north of Swatow and broke in two, abandoned with loss of est. 900 lives inc. Capt. H.W. Holmes (SFP, 1/4/23). 1/8/21 wreck auctioned for \$1,250 to Woo Wing for shipbuilder Kwong Tak Cheong Co. (ST, 3/8/21, Pinang Gazette, 9/4/21).

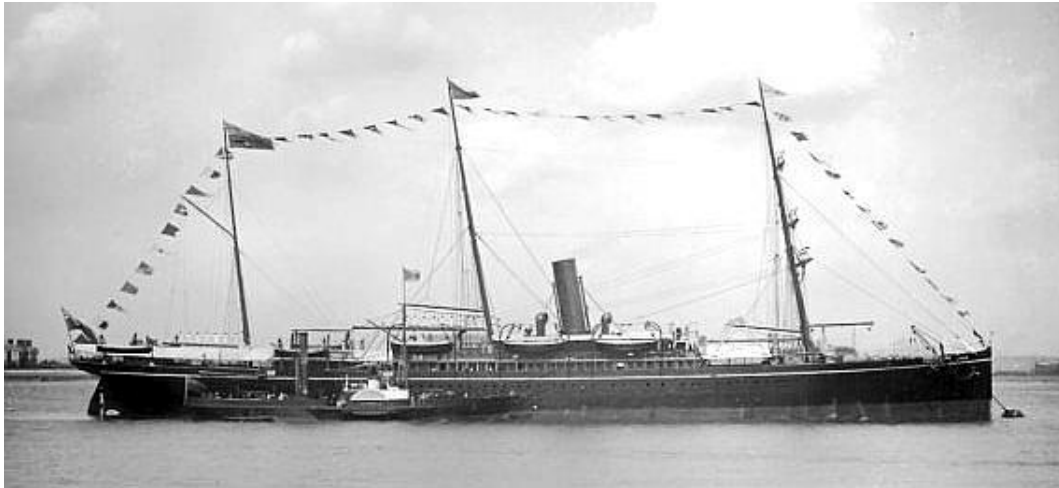


HONG MOH ex CITY OF EDINBURGH (1881) (liverpoolmuseums.org.uk).

HONG KHENG (1915-16) 5284/89-1 (steel, 2-dk/3-mst, 410.5 x 48.0', T3cy/749 nhp)

Built by Caird & Co. Ltd., Greenock (#248) for Peninsular & Oriental S.N. Co., London as ORIENTAL. 1904 refitted and modernised. 7/15 sold for £32,000 to Ho Hong S.S. Co., Singapore (reg. at Hong Kong) r. HONG KHENG and after overhaul at Hong Kong 9/15 entered service. 1/16 sold for £65,000 and 3/16 del. to P.A. Lapicque & Cie. (George Grimble, mgr), Hong Kong. 2/5/16 sd Singapore for

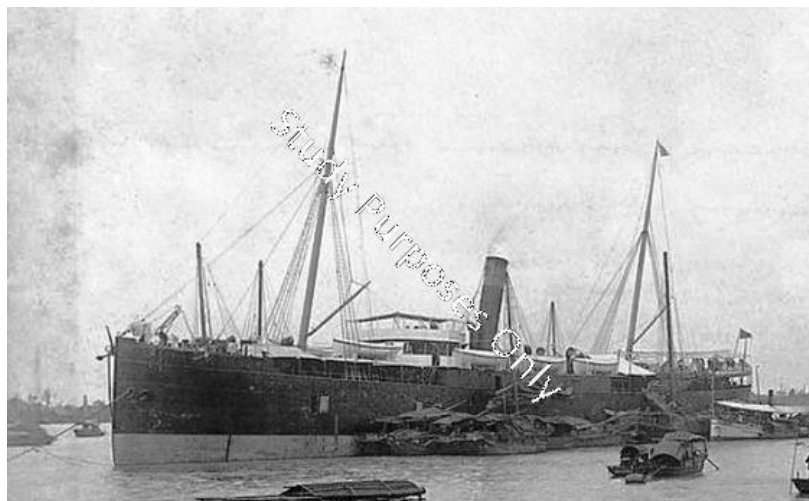
Europe. 7/20 rep. sold for \$410,000 to a Shanghai firm for carriage of refugees from Vladivostok. 17/11/21 sd Singapore for Mauritius. 7/22 t/f to Cie. Maritime Indochinoise, Haiphong (as per LR 1924-25) r. SONG-HOI. Following insolvency of owners, 8/23 repossessed by La Banque d'Indochine, 10/23 sold to G.T.M. Eddins, mgr Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corp to accommodate bank staff at Yokohama after the Kanto earthquake (1/9/23) r. TAI WAY FOONG. Q2/1924 broken up in Japan.



ORIENTAL, dressed off Gravesend, P&O tender alongside.
(NMM/ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22791409>).

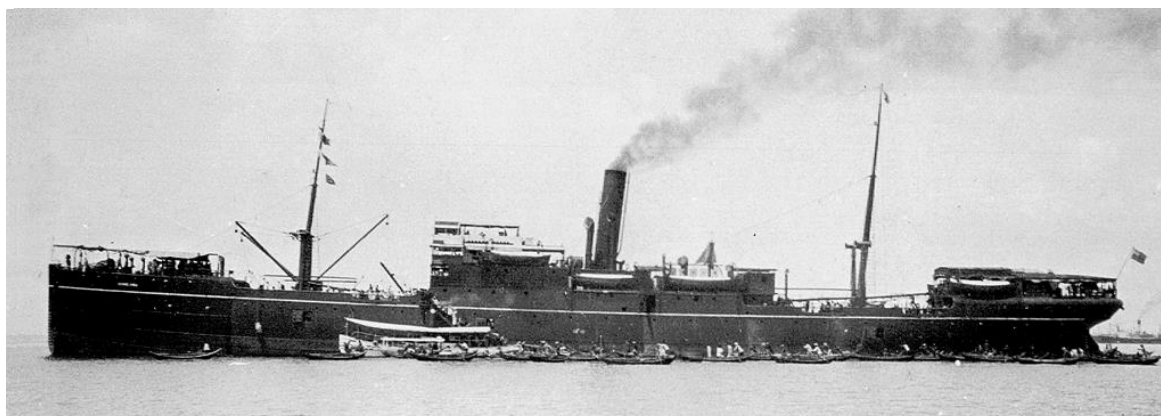


ORIENTAL or HONG KHENG or OCCIDENTAL passing Green Island, Hong Kong (Pikspus@Ebay).



Similar vessel minus mast at the Shameen, Canton (Alamy.com).

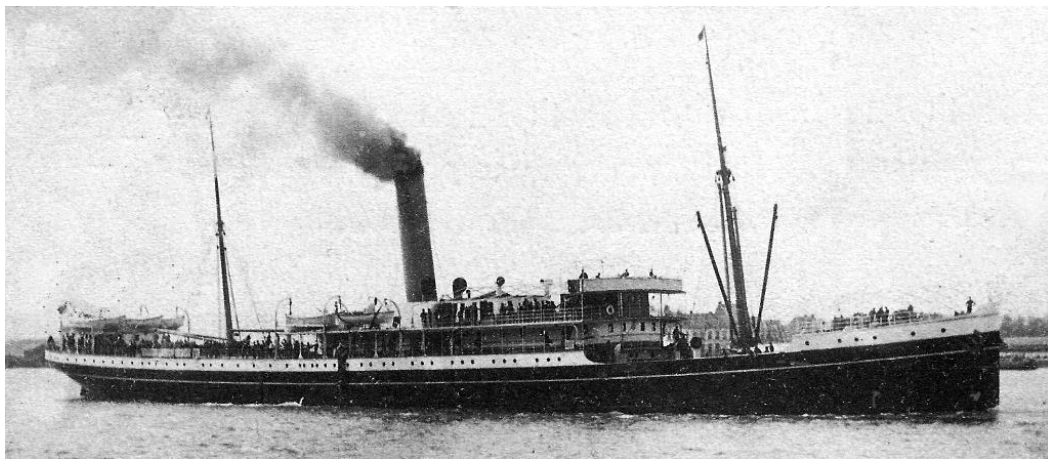
HONG HWA (1917-33) 2981 (c.4000)/1880-11 (iron, 374' oa x 43.3', T3cy/383nhp/11½k)
 Completed by London & Glasgow Engineering & Iron Shipbuilding Co. Ltd, Glasgow (#216) as 530-nhp compound-engined str for McGregor, Gow & Co., London for Glen Line to the Far East as *Glenfruin* (reg. Glasgow). 17/10/85 beached at Belchers Bay, Hong Kong after collision with *Camorta* (2097/80), 7/11 refloated for repair. 17/4/1886 dressed and official party for opening of Tilbury Docks. 9/1891 engines conv. to T3cyl. by Wallsend Slipway Co. Ltd, Newcastle, also new boilers with Howden's Forced Draught. 6/3/1897 arr. London on last voyage for Glen Line. 16/3/97 sold to Andrew McIlwraith, London for £16,500 and 24/4 r. *Kalgoorlie*, fitted with electric light and reefer (6072 cu. ft), 1/6 left London with railway material for Fremantle (19/7), thence in ballast to Melbourne (9/8), where accommodation fitted out with panelling from Orient Liner *Chimborazo* (3847/1871, broken up Preston, UK 1897). 12/7/1897 registered at Melbourne to McIlwraith, McEacharn & Co. Pty Ltd, 24/9 entered WA service, passenger accommodation now 111 1st 237 2nd. Mid-8/1903 laid up in Hobson's Bay, Melbourne. 2-4/1905 *Hong Hwa* overhaul (£6,500) in Melbourne (inc. hull cleaning, new funnel) but not recommissioned. 30/11/1906 sd Melbourne via Sydney and Cooktown for Singapore, where 23/12 arr. to McAlister & Co. and laid up in Roads. By 1912 in service as quarantine hulk. 12/11/1912 sold to McAlister & Co. Ltd, Singapore and converted into coal hulk stripped of engine and most accommodation and stationed off Tanjong Rhu. 6/1/1916 Melbourne registry closed on transfer to Singapore (5/1916). 9/1917 sold to HHSSC, Singapore and by Q1/1918 under reconstruction by Singapore Harbour Board (Ritchie & Bisset superintending) at Tanjong Pagar, including installation of T3cyl. engine (23/36½/62" x 39" by Central Marine Engine Works from Norwegian str *Oscar II* (3060/1893) and fitted out for 70th 60nd c.1000 deck passengers. 14/1/19 ran trials (11¼k) as *Hong Hwa* and 1/19 re-reg. (3081grt) and in service between Rangoon, Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong, Amoy and Swatow. 13/1/1925 o/v Singapore-Hong Kong boarded by pirates seeking bullion mistakenly thought to be on board, taken to Bias Bay (Daya Wan), looted and freed. 10/1932 laid up at Singapore. 11/32 t/f to Ho Hong S.S. Co. (1932) Ltd. 12/1933 sold to Midori Shokai, Osaka and 8/1/1934 arrived Osaka for demolition.



Hong Hwa ex *Kalgoorlie* at Singapore mid-1920s after 1918 reconstruction. Enclosed and built up amidships, extra boats and now two masts (with kingposts) (KPM/Alg. Rijksarchief).

HONG PENG (1924-46) 4034/99-5 (370.1 x 46.1, T3cy/12k)
 Built by Sir Raylton Dixon & Co. Ltd, Middlesbrough (#457) for African S.S. Co. Ltd (Elder Dempster & Co. Ltd, Liverpool and 8/12/98 launched as CLARENCE but completed for Cie. Belge Maritime du Congo, Antwerp got Antwerp-Congo line as ANVERSVILLE (100 1st 70 2nd class pass.). 1906 sold back to African S.S. Co. Ltd (Elder Dempster & Co. Ltd, Liverpool r. DAKAR. 30-31/3/15 en route Liverpool-West Africa burned out at Forcados after fire in bunkers, CTL. 7/17 towed to Lagos and

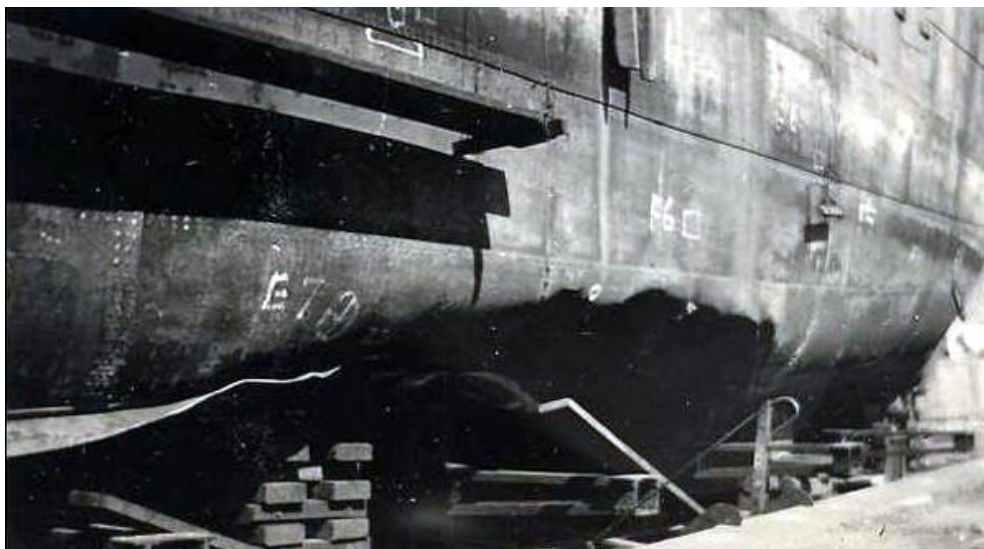
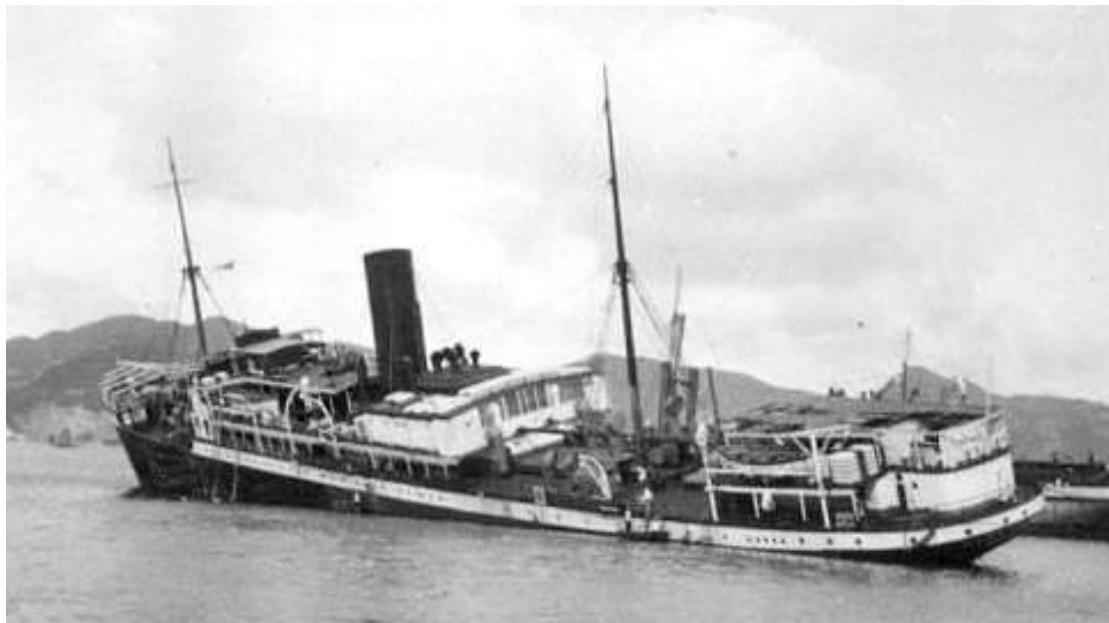
rebuilt by Nigerian Govt, 8/18 re-reg. at Lagos for The Shipping Controller. 1/19 advertised by Messrs Kellocks for auction 5/2 as lies in damaged condition at Liverpool, then again 6/5 by order of Sec. of State for the Colonies. 4/20 sold to N.V. Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Stoomvaart Mij, Amsterdam r. BLOEMFONTEIN, refitted at Hull (12/20 completed Special Survey). 10/22 laid up at Rotterdam. 6/24 sold to HHSSC r. HONG PENG, 9/7 dep. Rotterdam for Swansea (coal), 25/7 sd for Penang, Singapore (arr. 8/9), refitted by Keppel Dock to carry 104 1st 24 2nd 1500 deck passengers. 22/1/25 maiden sailing to Rangoon. Mid-6/36 beached at Swatow after fouling buoy and striking bottom. 2/9/37 while at Hong Kong awaiting docking at Taikoo blown ashore by typhoon, 6/9 refloated and docked. By 1/40 trading Saigon-Singapore/HK except 4/2-3/3 to Western Australia, 15/5-13/6 Singapore-Calcutta. 27/6/40 sd Singapore for Moulmein, Calcutta, then vv. to Rangoon until 23/2/42 arr. Calcutta. 5/3/42 sd Calcutta for Bombay (15/3), where 4/42 req. by The Admiralty for use as ammunition storage hulk. From 2/4/44 on station at Trincomalee. 7/46 released from requisition and redel. to owners but by 10/46 resold to Bombay breakers for demolition [see also Elder Dempster and marhisdata.nl/Bloemfontein].



HONG PENG c.1905 as Belgian-flag ANVERSVILLE (postcard G. Hermans/marhisdata.nl).

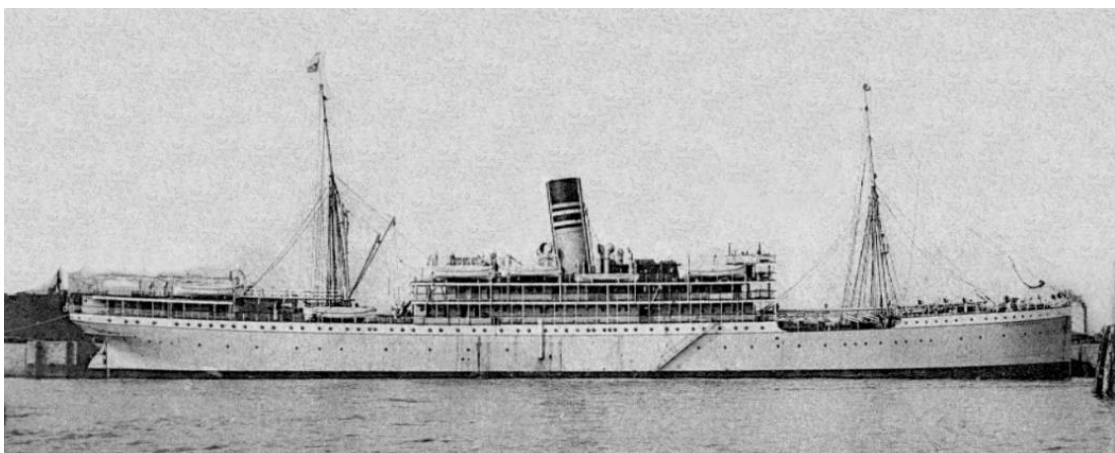


HONG PENG shown as rebuilt, shorter funnel and officers' cabins aft on Boat Deck. Amoy 1 December 1938 (Don Gammon/coll. H. Dick).

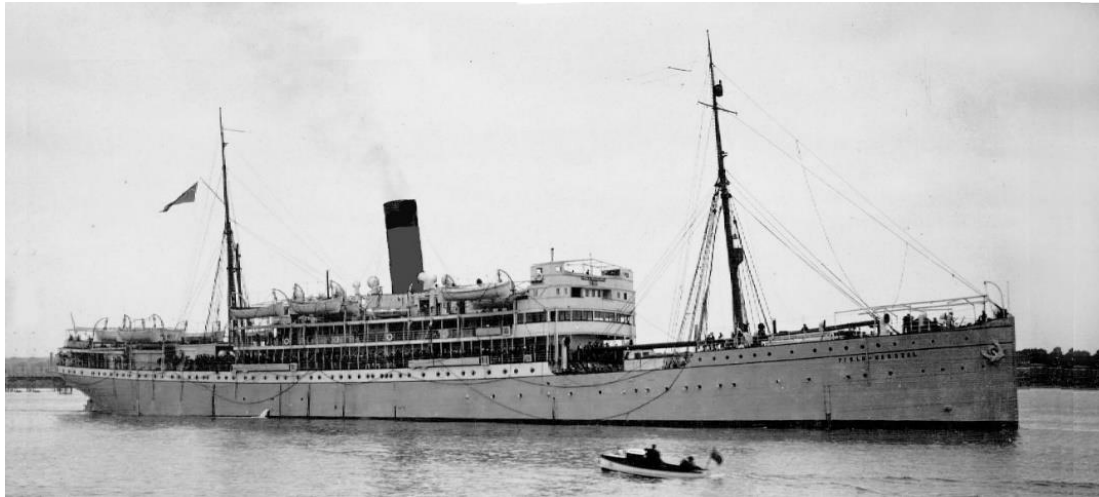


HONG PENG after grounding off Taikoo Dock, Hong Kong, typhoon of 2 Sept. 1937 (centre <https://gwulo.com/node/48603/photos-of-event>; others www.benjidog.co.uk/bisn/Typhoon.php).

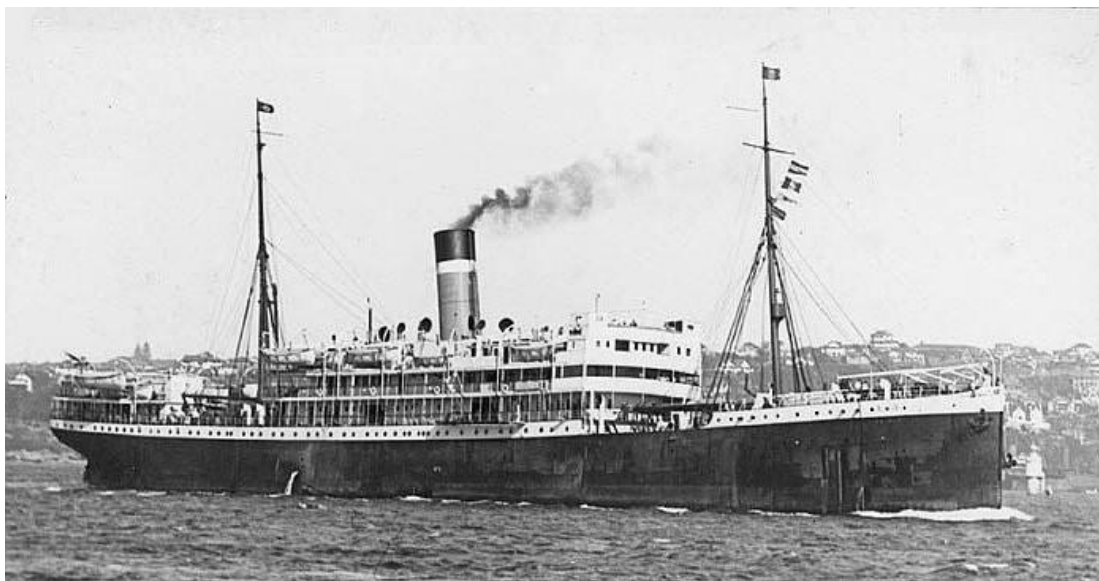
HONG KHENG (1926-47) 6167/03-6 (15.8 x 50.4', 2-sc. T3cy/13k Reiherst Maschinenfab., Hamburg)
 Built by Reiherstieg Schiffsw. & Maschf., Hamburg (#410) for Deutsche Ost-Afrika Linie, Hamburg as FELDMARSCHALL. 2/8/14 refuge at Dar-es-Salaam. 8/8/14 disabled by crew from HMS *Astraea*. 17/8/15 damaged by gunfire from HMS *Hyacinth*. 3/9/16 seized as war prize on British capture of Dar-es-Salaam r. FIELD MARSHALL. 1917 allocated to mgt of Union-Castle Mail S.S. Co. Ltd, London as Expeditionary Force Transport D60. 16/4/18 reg. at London. 27/4/18 troop repatriation Durban-Melbourne. 1-2/19 repatriated German citizens from Dar-es-Salaam to Hamburg, 15/6/19 arr. Rotterdam from Port Natal. 31/7/19 London to Gibraltar. 31/10/19 stranded on Lofoten Is., refloated, laid up for repairs. 7/2/20 London to Constantinople/Port Said, 16/4 London-Alexandria...17/10/20 Istanbul to Karachi (7/12), then trooping UK-Mediterranean/India until 24/3/22 arr. Southampton and laid up. 10/22 sold to Chungwha Nav. Co. Ltd (mng dir. Cesareo Chiu Fuksan), Shanghai for China-Australia-NZ-South America line r. LING NAM. 11/22 fitted for oil fuel. 20/11/22 sd Newport (Mon.) for Singapore (10-22/1/23) and Hong Kong. (V1) 21/3/23 from Hong Kong to Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, Wellington, then Tahiti, Panama, Callao and Iquique, returning 28/6 via Wellington (1/8), Sydney (11-14/8) repatriating 500 elderly Chinese (accomm. now 40 first, 80 second, 1080 deck pass.). (V2) 26/9/23-14/2/24, (V3) 28/2-7/24, (V4) 2/8/23-late 12/24, (V5) 7/1/25 Hong Kong via Rabaul (22/1), Sydney (31/1), Auckland (6/2) to S. America, then 11/3 Callao via Panama (26/3) to Hong Kong (late 4/25). 5/25 sailing (V6) cancelled and ship laid up. 7/25 seized in Hong Kong by creditors as laid up at Shamshuipo. 11/26 sold by auction to Jose Moreno Brodeth. 2/27 sold for \$150,000 to STW, refitted for deck passenger trade S. China-Straits run (now 49/90/2640 pass.). 7/27 reg. at Hong Kong for Ling Nam S.S. Co. Ltd, 4/8 arr. Singapore on V1 southbound. 1/28 o/c to Straits-Hedjaz S.S. Co. for pilgrimage from Straits to Jeddah but second voyage cancelled for lack of bookings, rechartered to Chin S.S. Co. for S. China-Straits-Rangoon voyage, then return voyage from Jeddah (25/7/28 arr. Singapore with 739 pilgrims). 8/28 sold to Ho Hong S.S. Co. Ltd, Singapore, 9/28 r. HONG KHENG. 12/2/42 escaped Singapore for Bombay. Allocated by MOWT to mgt of British India S.N. Co. Ltd and from 4/42 employed in Bombay-East Africa trade. 10/44-1/45 Suez-Jeddah pilgrim trade, then to Mombasa for use as storeship (BI mgrs). 1946 returned to owners and 9/46 resumed S. China-Straits trade. 19/7/47 stranded on Chilang Point near Hong Kong o/v Rangoon-Amoy in ballast with 1800 deck passengers, all saved, CTL [P. Newell, *Union-Castle Line*, 1999; Australian and Singapore press].



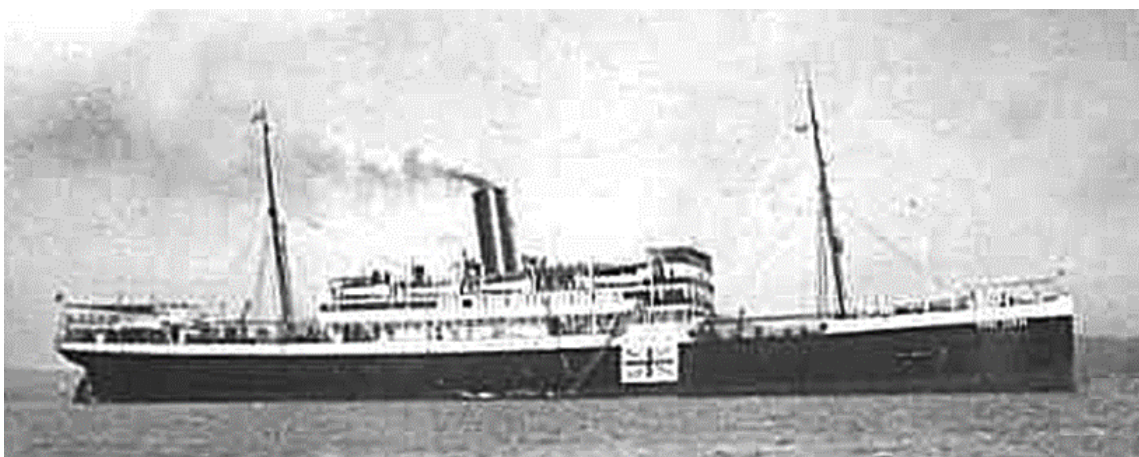
LING NAM as Deutsche Ost-Afrika Linie FELDMARSCHALL (coll. H. Dick).



LING NAM in Union-Castle colours as FIELD MARSHALL (coll. H. Dick*).



LING NAM arriving at Sydney in Chunghwa colours (State Library of NSW).

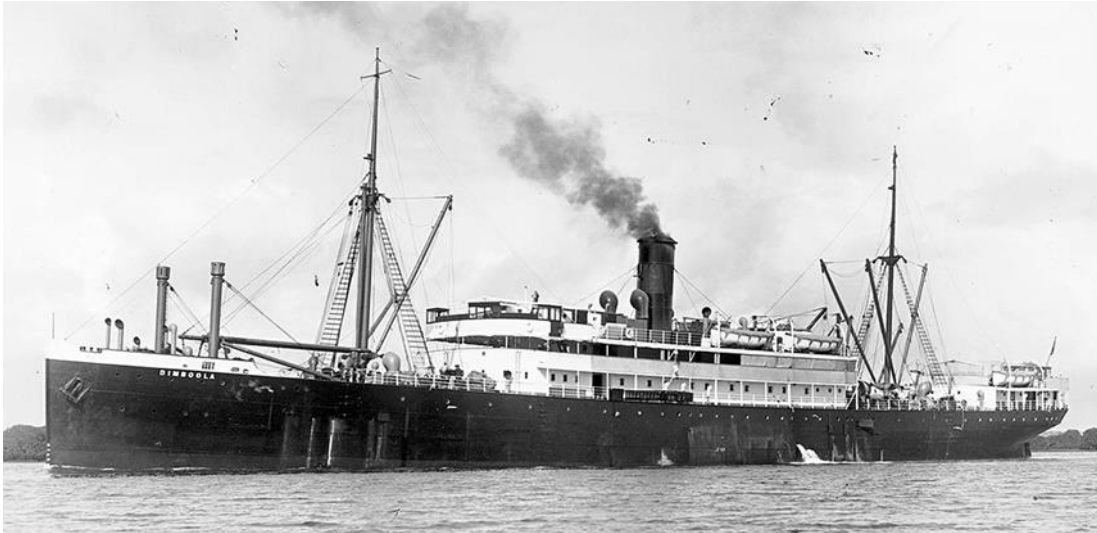


LING NAM in late 1930s as Ho Hong's HONG KHENG, not significantly altered (wrecksite.eu).

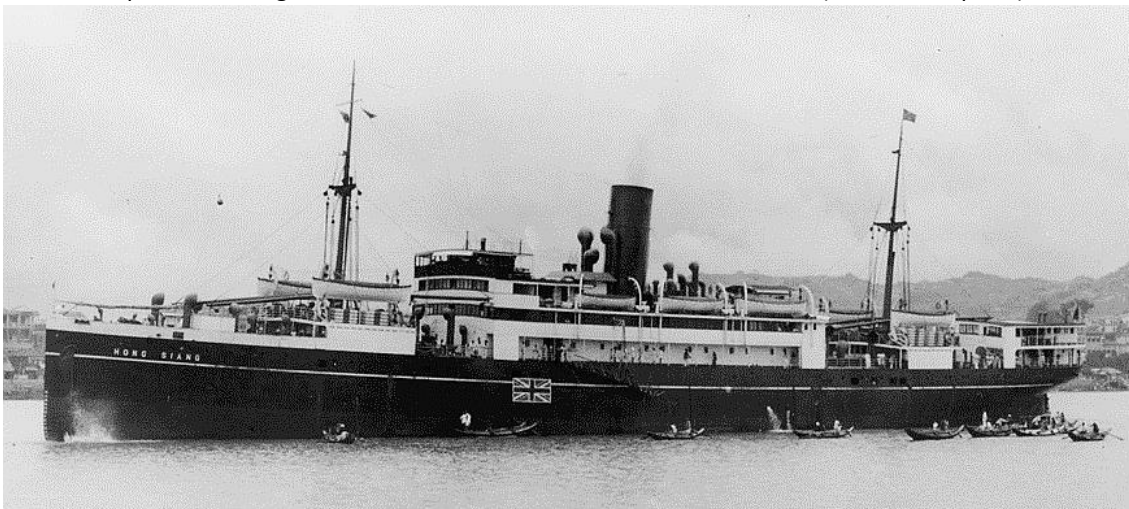
Ho Hong S.S. Co. (1932) Ltd

HONG SIANG (1935-51) 3703/12-7 (360.2 x 50.1', T3cy/12k)

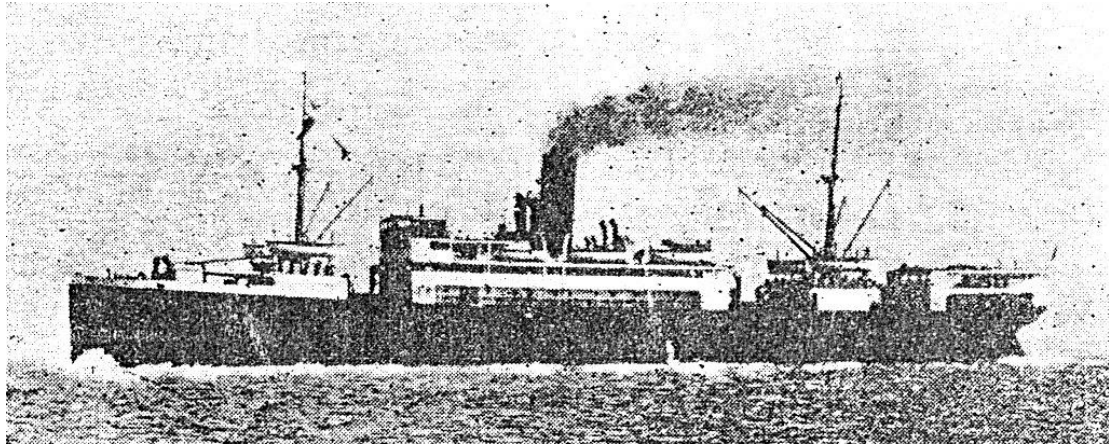
Built by Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson Ltd, Newcastle (#876) for Melbourne S.S. Co. Ltd, Melbourne as DIMBOOLA. 8/35 sold to Ho Hong S.S. Co. Ltd (Straits S.S. Co. Ltd mgrs), Singapore, conv. by Taikoo D.Y., Hong Kong for South China-Straits deck passenger trade r. HONG SIANG. 8/39 req. by MOT for use as naval stores ship at Trincomalee (later to Calcutta). 1946 dereq. and laid up at Singapore for refit. 5/12/46 resumed service to South China. 30/9/49 arr. Singapore and laid up. 10/50 chartered to Ministry of Transport for use as troopship Singapore-Hong Kong-Korea. 9/51 sold to Ministry of Transport (Williamson & Co. mgrs), London (reg. Hong Kong) for use as troopship Kure-Pusan and reg. at Hong Kong as EMPIRE LONGFORD. 4/52 laid up at Hong Kong and 21/4 del. to BISCO for demolition in UK, 21/6 dep. Hong Kong from Singapore in tow of *Castle Peak* (ex *Growler*, 1943), towed from Singapore, 14/10 dep. Singapore in tow of *Witte Zee* (327/46) and 21/1/53 delivered at Dover for breaking up by Dover Industries Ltd.



HONG SIANG leaving Adelaide as Melbourne S.S. Co. DIMBOOLA. The kingposts at Nos 1 and 3 hatches replaced the original deck cranes. The funnel has a wide red band (coll. Ian Farquhar).



HONG SIANG dropping the anchor at Amoy, 28 July 1939. Forward kingposts removed, forecastle extended to foremast, mast houses and boats fore and aft, wooden bridge raised one deck, piracy grilles amidships, extra deck at poop and new funnel (Don Gammon/coll. H. Dick).



HONG SIANG from a 1948 Sin Joo Hong (Penang) advertisement.

Part III

Lim Soo Hean & Co. (Lim Chin Tsong), Rangoon (1899-1923)

Lim Kar Chang (1929-31)

(Seang Line of Steamers)

Lim Chin Tsong (LCT) was born in Rangoon on 28 October 1867 to Lim Soon Hean, who six years earlier had migrated from Amoy & Co. and was educated at local English-language schools. When his father died in 1888, LCT took over the firm of Lim Soon Hean & Co. and diversified from rice-milling into the distribution of lighting oil. In 1891 he was appointed sole local agent for Burmah Oil Co. and invested the consequent large flow of income into agriculture (rubber), mining and manufacturing (milling, cotton gins. By 1900 he was already one of the wealthiest Chinese merchants in Rangoon.

In mid-1899 with affiliate Cheng Taik & Co. he bought the 2000-grt iron steamer *Olivedene* ex *Clan Murray* ex *Muriel* (1881), which as *Seang Leong* was placed in the passenger trade to and from to Amoy via Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong. In July 1902 she was lost off Swatow in a typhoon with all hands, including an estimated 300 passengers. To replace her, in mid-1903 Lim bought from Glen Line for £17,500 the fast cargo liner *Glenogle*, a good match for Ho Hong's *Glenfalloch* and the former 'City' liners. In September 1909 he vied for supremacy by buying the 4-masted Bibby liners *Shropshire* and *Cheshire*, both built by Harland & Wolff in 1891 for the Liverpool-Burma line. *Shropshire* was delivered at Rangoon on 1 December 1909 and renamed *Seang Bee*, *Cheshire* in UK in November 1910 and renamed *Seang Choon* before entering service in February 1911. The largest ships in the trade, they were both refitted to carry up to 2,400 deck passengers as well as 100 cabin class. The company advertised as the Seang Line of Steamers – *Glenogle* was known unofficially as 'Seang Aun [An/On]', though the name change was never registered.

The year 1910 was the peak of Lim's fortunes. Both for his business empire and his philanthropy, he was recognised and respected, including by the British, who appointed him to the Rangoon Municipal Committee and the Legislative Council. Nevertheless, his financial position was unsound.

He was a reckless gambler. According to Wikipedia, by 1911 he was already in debt and by 1914 most of his properties and businesses were mortgaged. Notwithstanding, he poured funds into building a magnificent edifice, completed in 1918 and best known as 'Lim Chin Tsong Palace'.

Between 1914 and 1918 Lim donated generously to the war effort. Soon after the outbreak of the Great War, all three ships of his were requisitioned. *Seang Choon* was torpedoed and sunk off the Fastnet in July 1917 while under serving as a troopship. Then in January 1919 *Glenogle*, still under requisition and carrying rice to Calcutta, stranded below Rangoon and immediately became a total loss. That left Lim with just *Seang Bee* to resume postwar trading.

Things went from bad to worse. In 1919 Burmah Oil terminated its agency. In a desperate gamble to restore his fortunes, in 1921 Lim tried to corner the rice market, succeeding in forcing up the price until the government intervened, causing him to lose another huge sum and face bankruptcy. He died at Rangoon on 2 November 1923 while application was pending. His estate was declared insolvent on 10 June 1924. *Seang Bee* passed to managers China & Southern Trading Co. Ltd of Rangoon, then in 1925 to Penang rubber merchant Ong Keng Seng before being restored in 1929 to eldest son Lim Kar Cheng, who with his brothers Kar Taik and Kar Tye were heirs to the business – second son Lim Kar Hin (Gim) had died at Rangoon on 11 November 1916. There were also four daughters.

It was a short reprieve. The world depression struck Burma very hard. In July 1930 the elderly *Seang Bee* had to be laid up in Rangoon, where in November it was seized by Court bailiff. After sale to Japanese breakers, she sailed from Rangoon at the end of June 1931 as *Seang Bee Maru* for delivery at Osaka. Nothing of the rest of the business survived the Depression and Lim's widow became destitute. Nevertheless, the family remains, scattered around the world, and the palace survives as a national cultural monument.

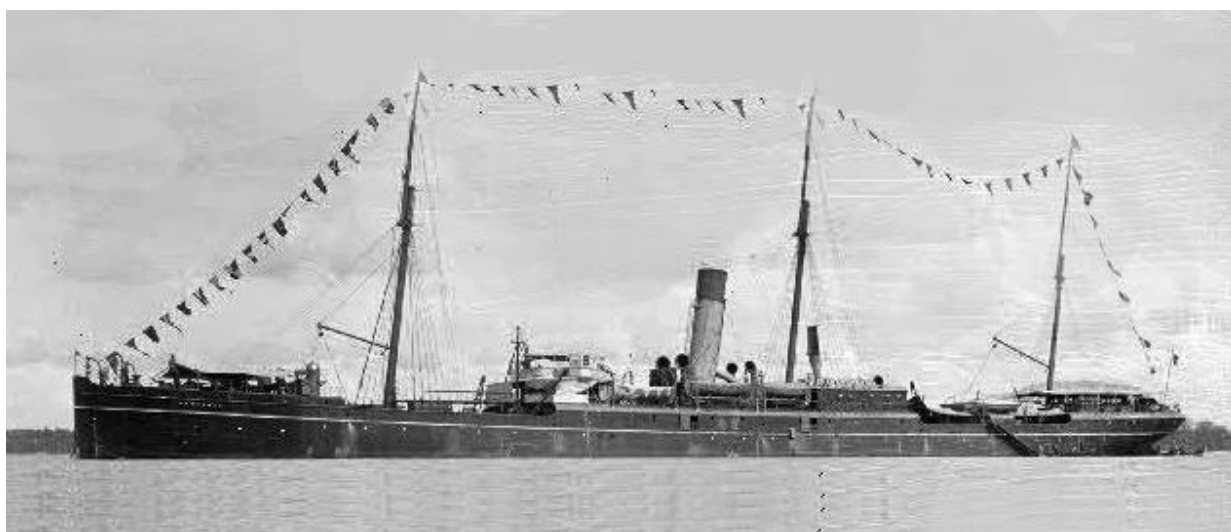
Fleet List

SEANG LEONG (1899-1902) 2060/81-6 (iron, 290.0 x 36.2', C2cy/259nhp)

Built by Tyne Iron SB. Co., Newcastle (\$33) for W. B. Ritchie & Co., Dundee as C2cy/250nhp str MURIEL. 8/81 reg. to Robert S. Briggs, Sunderland. 9/81 sold for £35,000 to C.W. Cayzer (Cayzer, Irvine & Co. mgrs), Glasgow, 10/81 r. CLAN MURRAY. 8/90 t/f to John Muir, Alexander Moore & James Mackenzie (same mgrs.). 1893 engines quadrupled (259nhp) by Westray, Copeland & Co., Barrow-in-Furness. 11/96 t/f to Clan Line Strs Ltd. 1897 engines altered to triple expansion. 4/97 sold to John T. Lunn, Newcastle, 8/97 r. OLIVEDENE. 11/97 t/f to Dene Steam Shipping Co. Ltd (J.T. Lunn & Co. mgrs). 8/99 sold to Cheng Taik & Co. & Lim Soo Hean & Co., Rangoon r. SEANG LEONG, 22/9 arr. Singapore from Penarth (12/8) and converted for deck passengers, thence Rangoon. 26/10/99 sd Singapore on V1 to Hong Kong, Swatow, Amoy. entered service. 25/7/02 sd Singapore for Amoy, subsequently determined foundered in Swatow Channel during typhoon, identifying wreckage found, est. 300 lives (Pinang Gazette, 8/9/02) [J. Clarkson, R. Fenton & A. Munro, *Clan Line*, SiF, 2007].

GLENOGLE/Seang Aun (1903-1919) 3750/82-4 (420.5 x 45.1', T3cy/700nhp/14k)

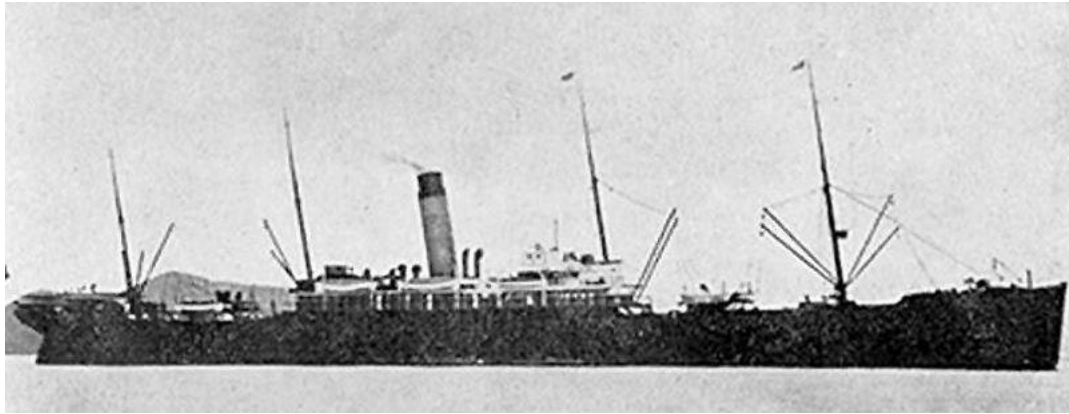
Built by London & Glasgow Eng. & Iron S.B. Co. Ltd, Glasgow (#224) for £64,519 as compound-engined (C2/700nhp) for McGregor, Gow & Co., London (reg. Glasgow) for Glen Line to Far East. 17/7/83 outbound from Thames collided with and sank lt. barque *Achille* (556t) off Sovereign Light vessel, 3 dead, rest of crew landed at Valetta. 11/90 engines tripled by builders (£15,000). 8/03 sold for £17,500 to LCT and 9/04 reg. at Rangoon. 12/09 rep. to be renamed 'Seang Aun' but name change never officially registered. Late 1914 requisitioned. 17/1/19 o/v Rangoon-Calcutta (rice) stranded on Syriam Flats at Rangoon, attempt to tow off at next high water failed, c. 2300 hrs suddenly broke in two, abandoned, submerged at high water, CTL [Bill Harvey & Bill Laxon, *Glen and Shire Lines*, SiF, 2005; SFP, 6/2/19].



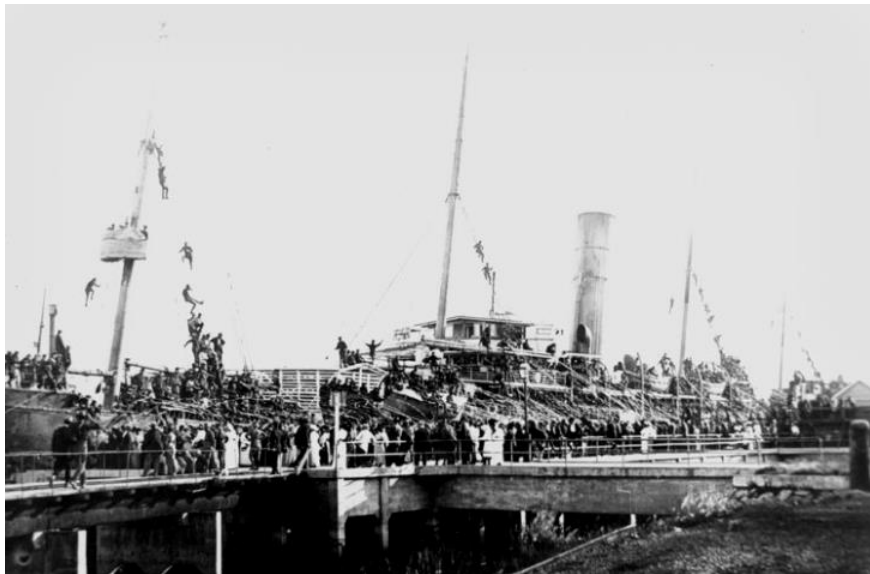
GLENOGLE believed photographed in Far East (ranger_63/shipsnostalgia).

SEANG BEE (1909-1931) 5849/91-10 (445.5 x 49.1', 2xT3cy/650nhp/14k)

Built by Harland & Wolff, Ltd., Belfast (#241) for Bibby S>S. Co. Ltd (Bibby Bros. & Co.), Liverpool for Burma line as SHROPSHIRE (100 1st class). 21/10/09 sd Mersey on final Bibby Line voyage for Rangoon, where 1/12/09 del. to LCT r. SEANG BEE, refitted at Penang by Prye River Dock Co. for carriage of c.2400 deck passengers, 23/12 on board reception prior to entering service (Straits Echo, 24/12/09). 10/14 req. as troopship for Indian Expeditionary Force. 9/15-5/17 as A-48 trooping from Australia (see AWM). 1924 t/f to China & Southern Trading Co. Ltd, Rangoon. 1925 t/f to Ong Keng Seng, Rangoon. 28/1/27 o/v Singapore-Amoy seized by pirates near Hong Kong and directed to Bias Bay, where looted of est. £40,000 and 5/40 Chinese cabin passengers seized ex 700 deck pass./108 crew, 31/1 returned to Hong Kong. 1929 t/f to Lim Kar Chang, Rangoon. 17/7/30 arr. Singapore from Amoy, 18/7 sd for Penang, Rangoon, where laid up. 11/30 seized by Court bailiff. 29/6/31 sd Rangoon via Singapore (6-7/7) as SEANG BEE MARU for delivery to shipbreakers at Osaka, Q3/1931 broken up [Schell; L. Dunn, *Famous Liners of the Past, Belfast Built*, Adlard Coles, 1964; FSFP, 5/11/31].



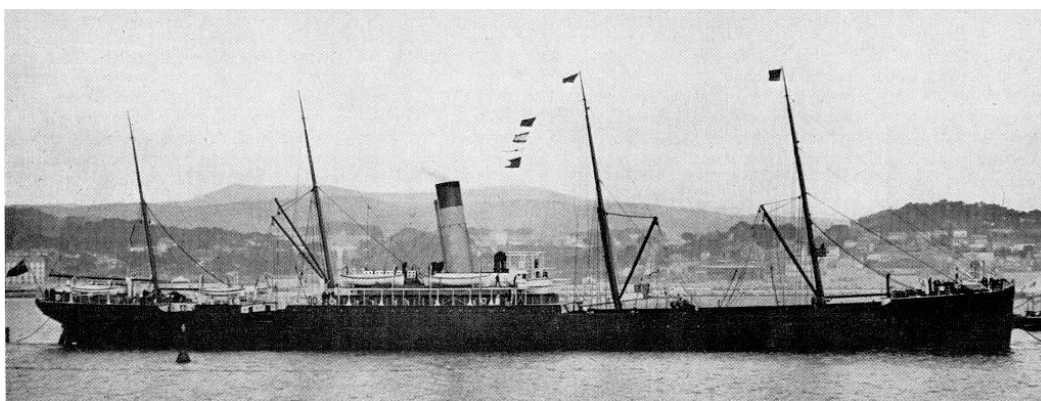
HMAT SEANG BEE (https://birtwistlewiki.com.au/wiki/File:HMAT_A48_Seang_Bee_2.jpg).



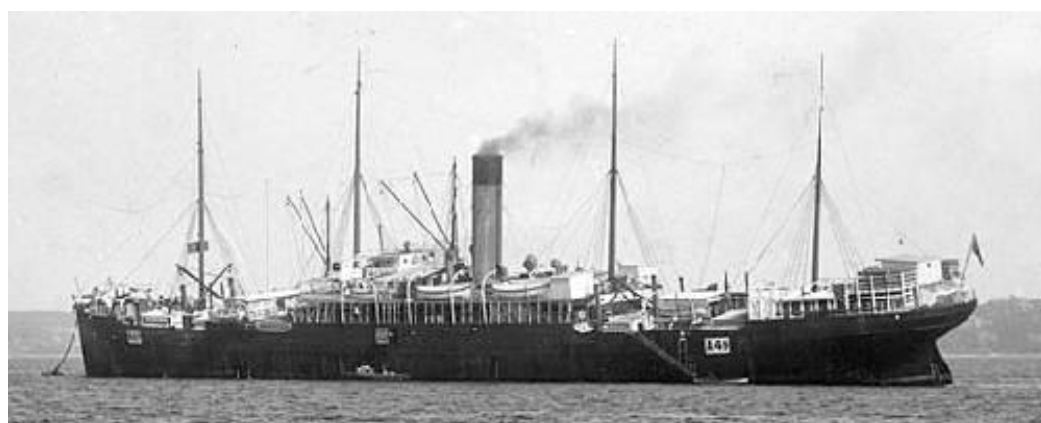
SEANG BEE as transport departing Brisbane 21 October 1915 (SLQ).

SEANG CHOON (1910-1917) 5807/91-9 (445.5 x 49.1', 2xT3cy/650nhp/14k)

Built by Harland & Wolff, Ltd., Belfast (#240) for Bibby S.S. Co. Ltd (Bibby Bros. & Co.), Liverpool for Burma line as CHESHIRE (100 1st class). 1899 chartered as transport for Boer War. 9/09 sold to LCT with forward delivery mid-11/10 at Liverpool, where refitted by H. & C. Grayson Ltd to carry original 100 1st plus 50 2nd class (at poop) and c.2000 deck passengers in a continuous tween deck (side bunkers removed), officers/engineers rehoused on Boat Deck, all derricks and winches replaced, 27/12/10 sd Mersey (Capt. Larkins) for Rangoon as SEANG CHOON (Liv. Journal of Commerce, 28/12/10). WWI req. as troopship A-49, from 2/15 trooping from Australia (see AWM). 26/4/17 sd Sydney via Adelaide (1-4/5) for Liverpool via Dakar (general) but 10/7/17 torp. and sunk by U-87 10 miles SW of Fastnet, 19 lives, 1000t lead and copper later salvaged [as above].



SEANG CHOON as Bibby's CHESHIRE (L. Dunn, *Famous Liners of the Past, Belfast Built*, 1964).



SEANG CHOON as a His Majesty's Australian Transport during WWI (SLNSW a639566).

Part IV

Koe Guan & Co. Ltd (1903)

Koe Guan was the trading name of Hokkien immigrant Khaw Soon Cheang (1797-1882), who in 1822 emigrated to Penang and at first earned a living as a peddler of fruit and vegetables before accumulating enough funds to set up a small store at Takuapa on the coast of Siam. In 1844 he gained a concession from the King of Siam to mine tin in the remote coastal district of Ranong. He was so successful that in 1862 he was appointed governor of the province as Phra Rattana Setthi. His sixth son by a Thai wife was Khaw Sim Bee (1860-1913), who in turn was appointed as governor of Trang and Phuket but carried on the business of Koe Guan & Co. from Penang in conjunction with his nephew Khaw Joo Tok (1871-1951), who was educated in Penang and became Managing Director of Koe Guan & Co. According to Cushman, the 'chop' Koe Guan (gao yang) was after Soon Cheang's birthplace in Fukien.

Since at least 1889 the Khaw family had long run small steamers out of Penang to supply their settlements and tin mines and to bring back the ores for smelting. In early 1903 the various family-owned ships were consolidated in the ownership of Koe Guan & Co. Ltd. Through Captain Edward Miles, Koe Guan negotiated with the Union S.S. Co. of New Zealand Ltd to buy four more steamers,

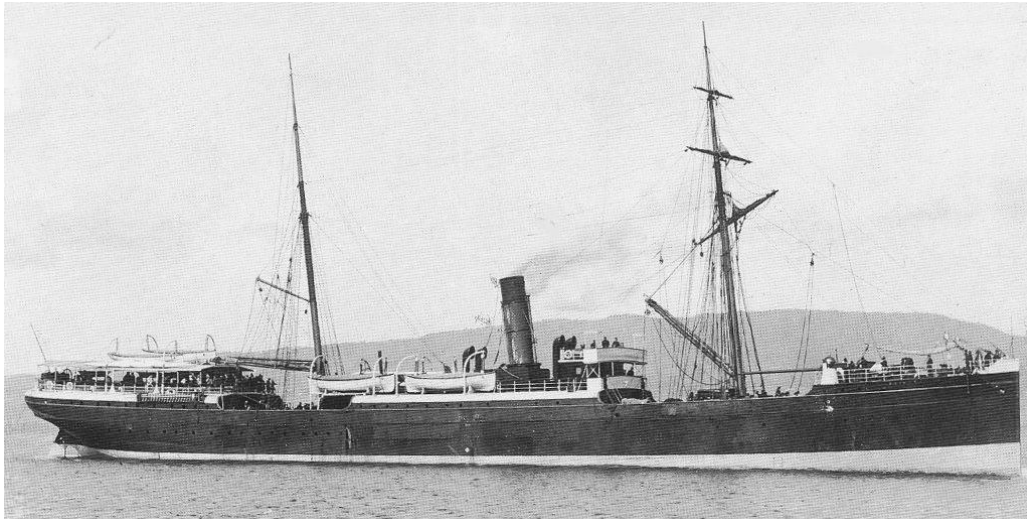
the coastal colliers *Janet Nicoll* (779/84) and *Omapere* (601/82), the passenger steamer *Rotorua* (925/76) and the trans-Tasman liner *Waihora*. After a quick refit of the tweendeck to carry a large number of unberthed passengers, *Waihora* was placed in the passenger trade between Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Swatow and Amoy. Nevertheless, Koe Guan did not long persevere with *Waihora*. A single ship could not match the weekly service offered by Ho Hong Steamship or foreign lines and in the face of lively competition she was probably not a profitable investment. Instead, the Khaw family decided to focus their efforts on the new Tongkah Harbour Tin Mining Co. Ltd, a joint venture with Captain Miles that required expensive investment in mechanical floating tin dredges. *Waihora* was sold in August 1906 before a year later the rest of the shipping interest was sold into the Eastern Shipping Co. Ltd, an amalgamation with other Penang-based shipping interests under a \$1.8 million prospectus dated 23 September 1907 to meet aggressive competition from the Straits S.S. Co. of Singapore (Straits Echo, 24/9/07; Cushman 1991). Perhaps by agreement with Ho Hong, Eastern did not seek to move back into the China trade but concentrated on the Straits of Malacca through to southwestern Siam and Lower Burma. In 1909 Eastern S.S. purchased the impressive *Cametense* ex *Carlo Poerio* (2184/91), renamed *Tong Hong*, but despite being of around the same size as *Waihora* she seems to have plied between Singapore and Rangoon until sold to Shanghai in June 1914.

Sources

The seminal English-language account of the Khaw family is Jennifer W. Cushman, *Family and State: The Formation of a Sino-Thai Tin-Mining Dynasty, 1797-1932* (Oxford U.P., 1991). This has been heavily drawn upon by Raymond Boon at <https://teochiewkia.blogspot.com/2010/02/thailand-ranong-na-ranong-family.html>.

WAIHORA (1903-06) 2007/82-11 (steel, 3 dks, 285.0 x 36.2', C2cy/258nhp/11k)

Built by Wm Denny & Bros., Dumbarton (#264) for Union S.S. Co. of New Zealand Ltd, Dunedin for trans-Tasman mail/passenger line (124 1st, 80 2nd, 90 3rd class), 29/1/83 sd Glasgow via Cape (27/2), Melbourne (24/3) for Dunedin. 17/2/86 o/v Hobart-Melbourne struck uncharted rock off Eddystone Point, NE Tasmania, beached on Swan Island, 21/3 refloated and proceeded to Melbourne for and repairs. 1/03 at Port Chalmers sold to Koe Guan & Co. Ltd, Penang for Straits-China trade, fore and aft saloons removed, mid-3/03 del. and 23/3 sd (Capt. Daniels) via Newcastle (2300t coal), sd 2/4, put back with leak from burst engine-room pipe, 5/4 after repair resumed voy. to Penang (25/4). 4/8/06 sd Penang on final voyage to Amoy, 8/06 at Hong Kong. del. to Diederichsen, Jebsen & Co., Hamburg for China Coast trade r. LYSHOLT, 20/8 arr. Shanghai on charter to Østasiatiske Kompagni for Shanghai-Vladivostok line. 1/08 charter t/f to China Eastern Railway Co. (same line). 1909 owners restyled as H. Diederichsen & Co. 28/10/10 sd Vladivostok for Shanghai, en route stranded or collision off Tsingtao, lost propeller, rudder and sternpost; after temporary repairs towed to Shanghai where 3/11 rep. sold to local breakers, Q2/1911 demolition completed.



WAIHORA under Union S.S. ownership (coll. De Maus/Union Fleet).

Part V

N.V. Handelsmaatschappij Kian Gwan (1901)

N.V. Samarang Stoomvaart Maats. (1904)

Heap Eng Moh S.S. Co. Ltd (1912)

(Oei Tiong Ham & Chew Joon Hiang)

Purchase in January 1901 of Oei's first ocean-going ship was primarily to carry sugar to China, mainly to Hong Kong but sometimes also to Shanghai, but on the return voyage emigrants from South China could be accommodated in the spacious tween deck. *Simongan* ex *Bucephalus* (1884) was a former horse carrier that was readily converted for that purpose. For several years she sailed as a lone ship, then in late 1905 he bought a larger consort in form of the Rotterdamsche Lloyd mail steamer *Merapi* (1889), similarly converted to carry around 1,000 deck passengers on the usual route Amoy, Hong Kong-Singapore-Samarang. She was registered under the Dutch flag to the N.V. Samarang Stoomvaart Maatschappij (SSM), to which *Simongan* was also transferred a couple of years later. In 1904-5 SSM had also acquired through repossessed mortgages the Singapore-Java traders *Giang Ann* (557/88) and *Giang Seng* (722/96) while at Semarang it operated a fleet of tugs and lighters to handle cargo in the roadstead.

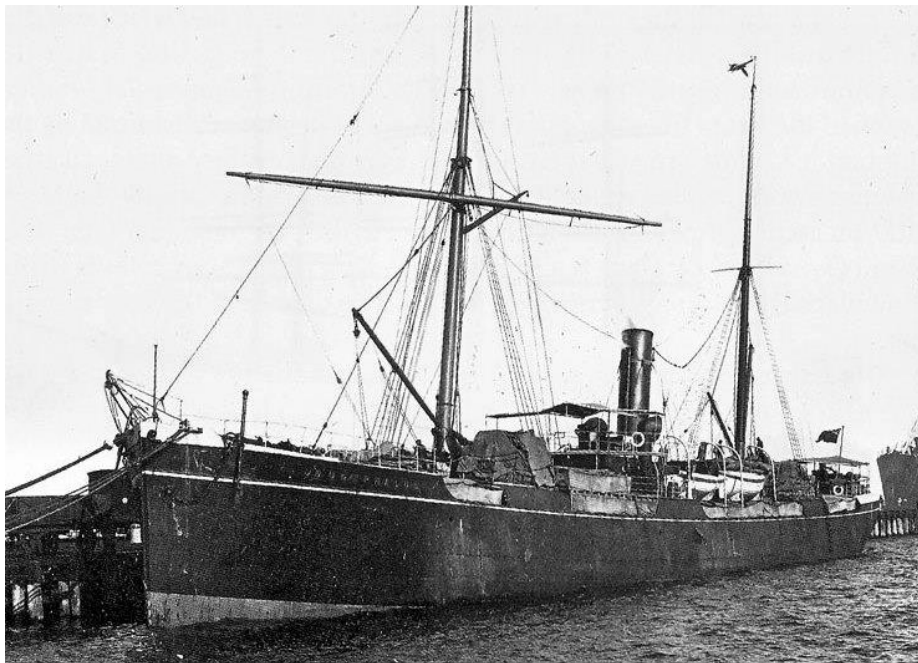
Nevertheless, though he had ample funds, Oei did further invest in ocean shipping. His sugar could be carried by the growing fleet of the Java-China-Japan Line or, if necessary, by charter. In 1911, in consequence of the liquidation of the Wee Bin kongsi, there was a complicated reshuffle of local shipping interests. Oei sold his two ocean-going steamers under mortgage to his Singapore agent, Chew Joo Hiang, trading under the name Heap Eng Moh. In December 1912 this fleet was transferred to the newly formed Heap Eng Moh S.S. Co. Ltd (HEM), which also took from SSM the local traders *Giang Ann* and *Giang Seng*. A few months later SSM's lighterage fleet at Samarang was sold to a local entity. Oei/Kian Gwan thereby sold out as a shipowner under the Dutch flag while maintaining control of a fleet under the British flag through HEM.

Probably by agreement with Lim Peng Siang of the newly formed Ho Hong S.S. Co. Ltd (see above), in mid-1913 HEM sold the two ocean-going steamers to Japan, thereafter confining their interest to the Singapore-Java-East Indonesia trade. HEM's local operations, which continued until the mid-1970s, will be covered in an adjacent post.

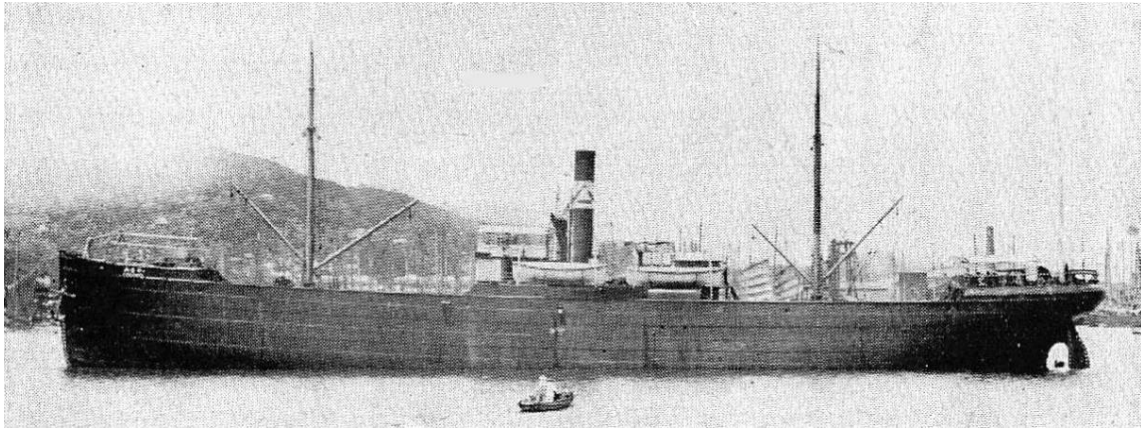
Fleet List

SIMONGAN (1901-13) 1689/84-4 (276.0 x 38.2', C2cy/171nhp)

Built by Palmers S.B. & Iron Co. Ltd, Jarrow (#537) for Archibald Currie & Co. Ltd, Melbourne with 171-nhp compound engine horse carrier BUCEPHALUS (c.3000t cargo, 400 horses, 14 pass.) c.24/3/84 trials (12k), 29/7 arr. Melbourne from Middlesbro' via Calcutta. 1892 re-engined as T4cy/195nhp by Blackwood & Gordon at Port Glasgow, 25/10 trials. 12/12/00 sd Sydney on last Currie Line voyage, 7/1/01 arr. Singapore under sale, 9/1 to Samarang for del. to N.V. Handels Maats. Kian Gwan, Semarang and sent to Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock for refit, late 7/01 entered service Amoy-Hong Kong-Singapore-Java-Hong Kong. 1908 t/f to N.V. Samarang Stoomvaart Maats. 21/6/11 reg. at Singapore (#18/1911) to Chew Joon Hiang (chop Heap Eng Moh), Singapore r. BUCEPHALUS. 14/7/11 m/g back to NVHM Kian Gwan. 18/12/1912 m/g paid off, t/f to Heap Eng Moh S.S. Co. Ltd, Singapore. 15/4/13 rep. sold through Kishimoto Shokai, Dairen for £8,000 to T. Yoshida, Toyonaka (reg. Uraga), 27/5 arr. Singapore from Surabaya and laid up, c. 6/13 del. at Singapore r. ASAKA MARU. 1915 sold to K. Kusakabe, Amagasaki. 1920 t/f to Kusakabe Kisen K.K. (Kusakabe Kyutaro), Gifu (reg. Amagasaki, grt 1902). 3/12/23 at Shimonoseki minor damage in collision with *Neisei Maru* [see below]. 1924 t/f to K. Kusakabe, Amagasaki. Q2/1930 broken up in Japan [See W.A. Laxon, *The Currie Line of Melbourne*, NAA, 2002; SMH 9/7/84, 14/12/92; Singapore Shipping Register; also marhisdata.nl, Straits Times, W.A. Schell].



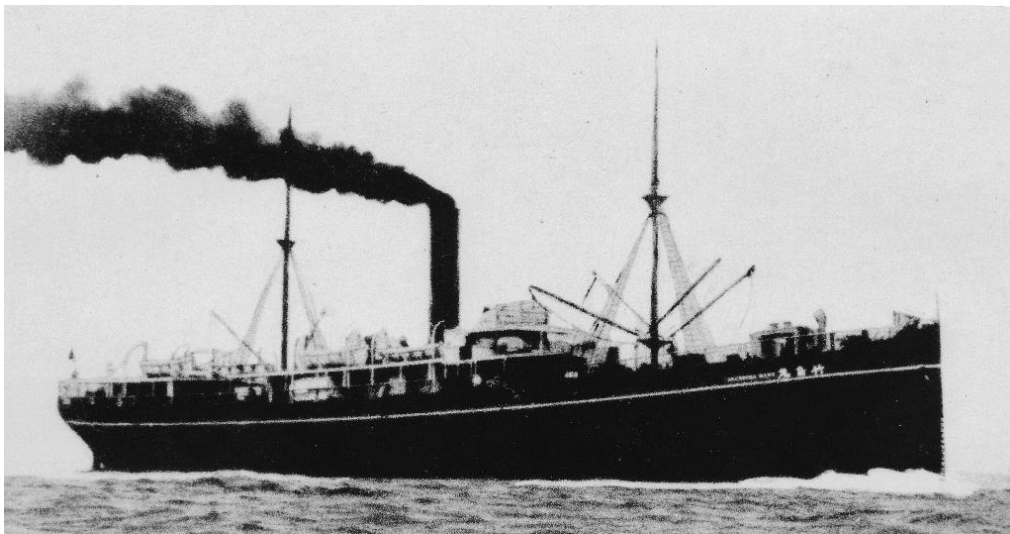
SIMONGAN as Currie Line's horse carrier BUCEPHALUS (W. Laxon).



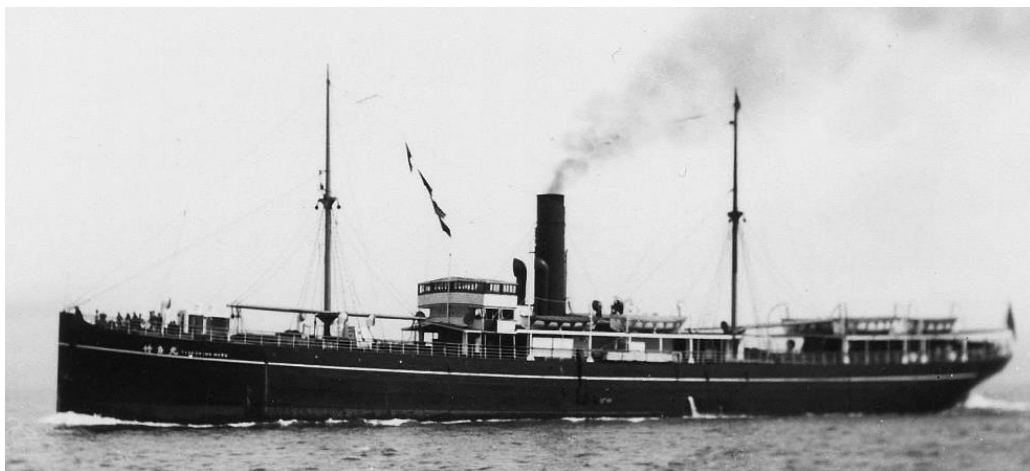
SIMONGAN as extensively rebuilt ASAKA MARU (1924 Japan Steamships Register).

GIANG BEE (1905-05) 2012/02-3 (290.0 x 40.2', T3cy/276nhp/9-10k)

Built by Ramage & Ferguson Ltd, Leith (#181) for Tan Kim Tian S.S. Co. Ltd, Singapore (12 1st, 24 2nd, 900 3rd pass. in teak shade deck), after trials (av. 13k) 16/4 sd Shields for Singapore. 7/02 entered Singapore-Batavia-Semarang trade. 5/1/04 t/f to Tan Hup Seng, Tan Hup Leong and Tan Hup Swee under mortgage to Oei Tiong Ham, Semarang. 27/2/05 advert. by Powell & Co. for auction 15/3 'by order of the mortgagee', 16/3 readvert. for auction 5/4 but passed in at \$175,000. 12/4/05 t/f under mortgage to Chew Joo Hiang (Heap Eng Moh), Singapore. 6/05 one voyage Singapore-Amoy (11/6)-Singapore (23/6) (664 'coolies'), 7/7 last arrival at Singapore from Semarang. 19/7/05 mortgage discharged on sale to broker Harold Latham, Singapore and same day t/f to D.P. MacDougall under sale to Nippon Yusen Kaisha, Tokyo. 11/9/05 register closed on t/f to Tokyo r. TAKESHIMA MARU (later 2673 grt). c.30/6/16 ashore near Omishima in Inland Sea and flooded in No. 2 hold, c.7/7 refloated and proceeded to Kobe under own power for docking. 1927 t/f to Kinkai Yusen K.K., Tokyo. 2/34 sold to Shibaura K.K., Tokyo r. SHIMEI MARU (1938 SINMEI MARU). 10/35 sold to Kuribayashi Syosen K.K., Tokyo. 5/7/44 torp. and sunk at Okhotskoe More, Kuriles (51.28N, 156.28E) by USS *Sunfish*.



GIANG BEE after sale as early TAKESHIMA MARU from a postcard (coll. Nakamura/S. Kizu).



TAKESHIMA MARU, new enclosed bridge, in Kinkai Yusen service (Otaru City Museum).

MERAPI (1905-13) 2473/89-11 11.5k

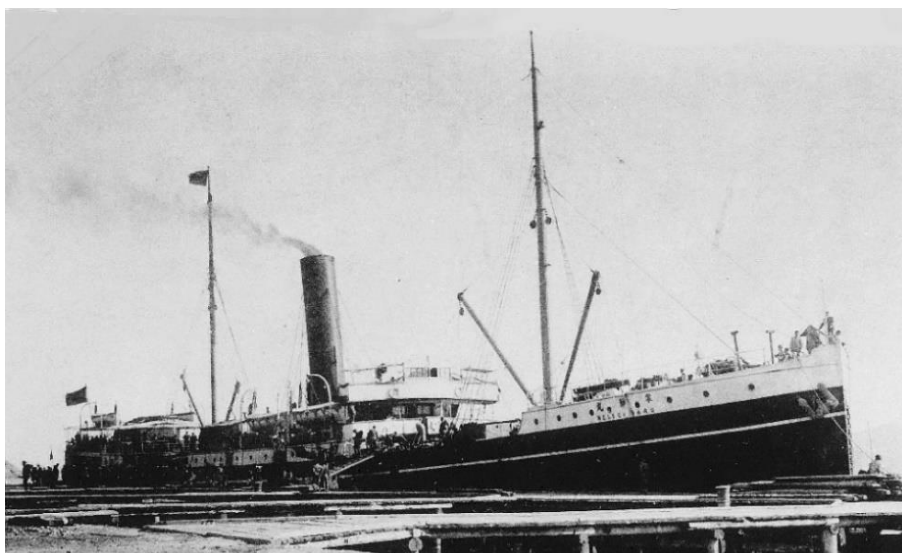
Built by N.V. Kon. Maats. 'de Schelde', Vlissingen (#67) for N.V. Rotterdamsche Lloyd (Wm Ruys & Zonen), Rotterdam for Rotterdam-Java line as MERAPI. 10/05 sold to N.V. Handels Maats. Kian Gwan, Samarang. 11/05 del. at Samarang and reg. as #157 to N.V. Samarang Stoomvaart Maats., sent to Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock for refit (c.1,000 unberthed pass.), 1/06 entered service S. China-Singapore-Java-Hong Kong-Shanghai. c.12/10 reg. at Singapore (#18/1910) to Choo Joon Hiang & Co. (chop Heap Eng Moh) under m/g 6/12/10 to NVHM Kian Gwan. 18/12/1912 m/g paid off, t/f to Heap Eng Moh S.S. Co. Ltd, Singapore. 15/4/13 rep. sold for £6,000 through Kishimoto Shokai to F. Suda, Dairen, c.6/13 del. and r. NEISEI MARU. 1915 sold to Harada Kisen K.K., Osaka, 3/15-12/15 operating Osaka and Kobe-Tsingtao. 1916 reg. Kobe. 24/11/22 at Shimonoseki badly damaged in bows by fouling *Awaji Maru*. 3/12/23 at Shimonoseki sprung leaks after collision with *Asaka Maru* [see above], beached for temporary repairs prior to docking. 23/5/24 o/v Antung-Hakata (beancake) stranded in 'Korean archipelago', refloated and beached but 15/7 broke up in gale, salvage abandoned. Other report says refloated, same month laid up outside Kobe, then scrapped. [marhisdata.nl; Schell; Liverpool Journal of Commerce].



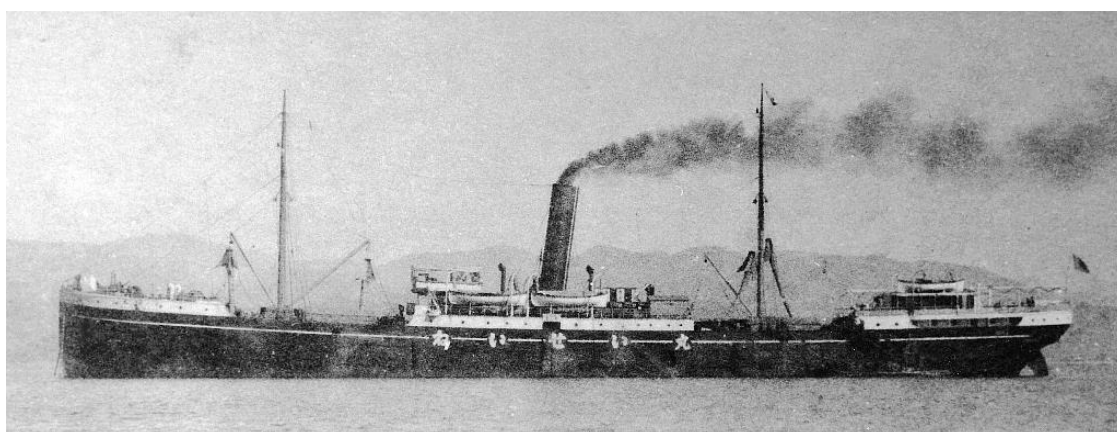
Rotterdamsche Lloyd's mail steamer MERAPI (coll. M. Lindenborn/marhisdata.nl).



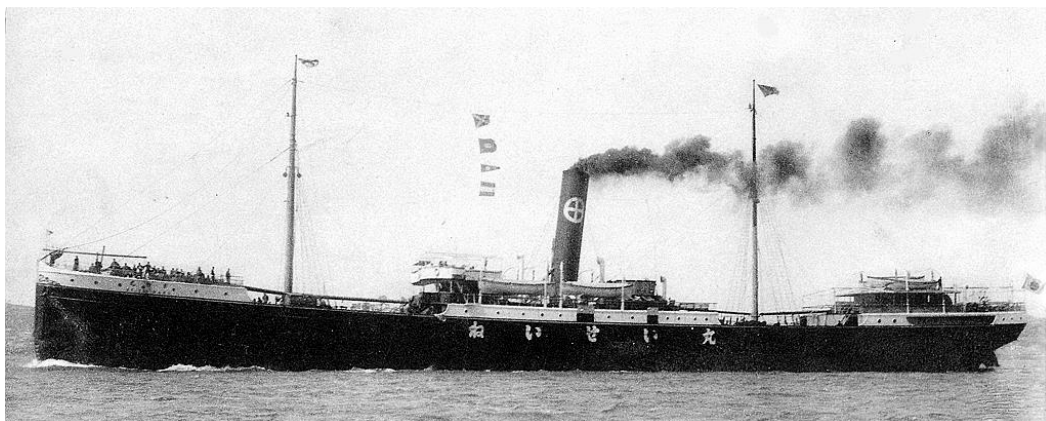
MERAPI under Oei Tiong Ham ownership, passenger space extended across after well deck and extra boats amidships (coll. J.G. Nierop/marhisdata.nl).



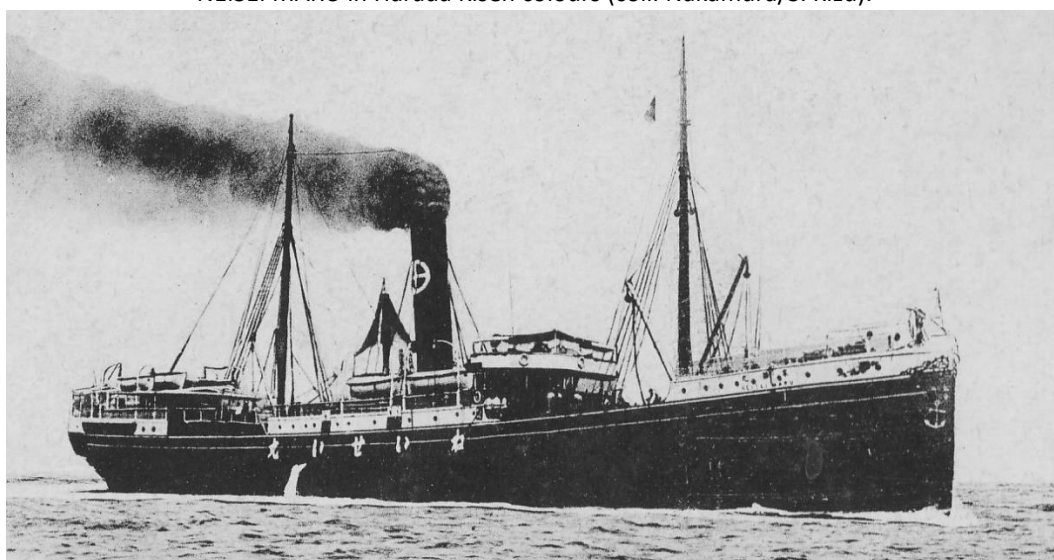
NEISEI MARU (coll. Azumi/S. Kizu).



NEISEI MARU (coll. Nakamura/S. Kizu).



NEISEI MARU in Harada Kisen colours (coll. Nakamura/S. Kizu).



NEISEI MARU from a Harada Kisen postcard (coll. S. Kentwell)

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