

# The China-related Ships of Čechofracht Ltd (1952-59)

(Czechoslovak Shipping Company Ltd)

捷克货运有限公司 and

## Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping International Joint Stock Company (joint operations with COSCO until c.1970, again 1988-90)

(Československá námořní plavba)



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also Risto Brzoza, Malcolm Cranfield, Hans Hoffman, and Bill Schell.*

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### Preface

In mid-2024, we posted an overview and fleet list of the Chinese-Polish Joint Stock Shipping Company (Chipolbrok) (1951), which complemented earlier postings on the 'Hoping'/'Zhandou' and 'Nan Hai' ships of the Shanghai and Guangzhou Maritime Bureaus. Another element is Čechofracht (subsequently Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping International Joint-stock Company), formed one year later and for the same reason of providing flag protection for the ocean shipping of the People's Republic of China. The Polish and Czech-flag entities worked together. Western intelligence described them as 'false flag' operations but 'flag of convenience' is more apt.

A short fleet list of Čechofracht/Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping up to 1966 by R.J. Pryde appeared in the World Ship Society's 'Marine News' in January 1968 at a time when little was known of the actual relationship between Czechoslovakia and China beyond what had been published in Harbron, 'Communist Ships and Shipping (1962: 227-30). Since then more detail has come into the public domain, most notably the well-documented, English-language history by Lenka Krátká, *A History of the Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping Company, 1948-1989* (2015) – I am grateful to Roger Hurcombe for bringing this to my attention. As yet however, there is no consolidated fleet list and a good deal of inconsistency. Marek Gono posted on shipspotting.com on 2 August 2010 his calculation that all up Čechofracht/Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping operated 53 vessels including seven Danube traders, although we exclude here 39 ships with no evident China ownership or management connections. Of the fourteen listed, *Ostrava* was a tanker, *Slapy* a large passenger liner under transfer to the PRC, and two were China coasters on delivery voyages as *Odra* and *Labe*.

Ship details have been taken from Lloyd's Register and associated publications, vessel histories from the Schell registers (by year of build), most accessible online through the Miramar website, ship movements from 'Lloyd's Shipping Index', and further detail from a miscellany of other sources. We would be grateful for advice on errors and/or omissions. We thank those who have kindly provided photographs.

## Čechofracht to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping

As explained in the Chipolbrok post, after the revolutionary victory in 1949, the new People's Republic of China (PRC) was unable to conduct deepsea shipping under the Chinese flag because of its very limited diplomatic recognition and the American-backed nationalist blockade of Chinese ports, which after outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 was intensified under the authority of the United Nations. The USSR, for its part, and Jozef Stalin in particular, was anxious to ensure the supply of equipment, weapons and munitions but also of investment goods and chemicals for China's postwar recovery and industrialization, then backed by Soviet technical support. Some USSR-flag ships were sent out to China but it was considered that Polish-flag ships would be a useful supplement and less likely to incur sanction. The first Polish-flag ship to reach China, arrived off Taku Bar in October 1950 to unload 'Czechoslovakian automobiles and machinery and Polish industrial and army equipment, including light industry machinery' and return with barter exchange goods including 'pig iron, tungsten, antimony, hog castings, tea and menthol' ('Malaya Tribune', 30/10/50). Next to arrive in February 1951 was the big ex-German steamer *Kosciuszko* (1939) from Gdynia (Gdansk) to Dalian and Taku Bar, now under the flag of the recently formed and state-owned Polskie Linie Oceaniczne (PLO, or Polish Ocean Lines/POL). In June 1951 the cooperation was formalized by the formation of the Chinese-Polish (Joint Stock) Shipping Company (中波轮船股份公司 Zhōng bō lúnchuán gǔfèn gōngsī, rendered in short form as 中波轮船公司 Zhōng bō lúnchuán gōngsī - Chinese-Polish Steamship Co. Ltd), this being the PRC's first foreign joint-venture company. Continuing as such from the outset, it was strictly a 50/50 venture with the People's Republic having beneficial ownership of half the fleet and also providing seagoing personnel.

Meanwhile, in June 1950 China had established diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia and sought to develop trade and maritime links. At the time, land-locked Czechoslovakia had no ships under its own flag and not much of a maritime tradition but Bohemia was an industrial heartland that supplied vehicles, machinery, weapons and munitions, for all of which China had great need. According to Krátká, in due course on 27 September 1951 the Czechoslovak government signed a contract for £375,000 to purchase the 10,420-dwt, 12-knot, Greek-owned tramp *Evanthia* (1920). Documents reveal that there was a prior understanding with Chinese counterparts that the ship would be used to trade with China, though Krátká (pp. 37-38) is unsure whether or not the PRC contributed financially. In light of the state of negotiations between the two countries, other ocean-going ships that the PRC purchased around that time (under Panamanian and Polish flags), and also the subsequent history of *Evanthia*, a 50/50 arrangement seems very likely. Delivery must have occurred at Szczecin (prewar Stettin) or Gdynia (port of Gdansk/Danzig) towards the end of 1951, after which the ship, now renamed *Republika*, was sent to Stavanger for necessary repairs. While the ship was still under repair, in February 1952 an ownership entity was established in the form of Čechofracht Ltd (also on company letterhead as Czechoslovak Shipping Co. Ltd) as counterpart to China's Sinofracht. It was modeled upon and enjoyed support from POL/Chipolbrok, also with Soviet backing. Čechofracht's operations were to be based in a leased area of a free trade zone near Szczecin.

*Republika* looked to be a good cargoliner that until two years previously had been trading across the Atlantic as the French Line's *Michigan* and was in Lloyd's class. On 1 January 1952 at Gdynia she hoisted the Czechoslovak flag with Czech officers and registry at Prague, then sailed to Stavanger for part Special Survey, which were completed in mid-April. Unfortunately on the return voyage to Gdynia she stranded in the Øresund and required further docking and repair by Stocznia Gdansk before in mid-May 1952 sailing on her maiden voyage for

Cechofracht to Dalian, North China. The voyage did not go well. As Krátká recounts, the scratch crew proved fractious and the ship was prone to mechanical problems from poor work at Stavanger. Things went from bad to worse in mid-August 1952 when, at the start of the return voyage via Qingdao to Shanghai, she ran into a typhoon and sprang leaks. International news reported the ship to be in distress some 100 miles off Shanghai with US destroyers, ironically, rushing to her aid. In the event she was escorted by *Eastway*, Jardine's former Calcutta trader *Kutsang* (1922) to the mouth of the Yangtse, towed in by Chinese tugs, pumped out, discharged, docked, then laid up awaiting repair. Nothing much happened for the next eight months because Shanghai dockyards were underequipped for the task of repair and spare parts had to be sent out from Europe. Even after repairs had commenced at Jiangnan Dockyard in April 1953, they took over a year. Not until mid-June 1954 was *Republika* able to resume her voyage back to Europe.

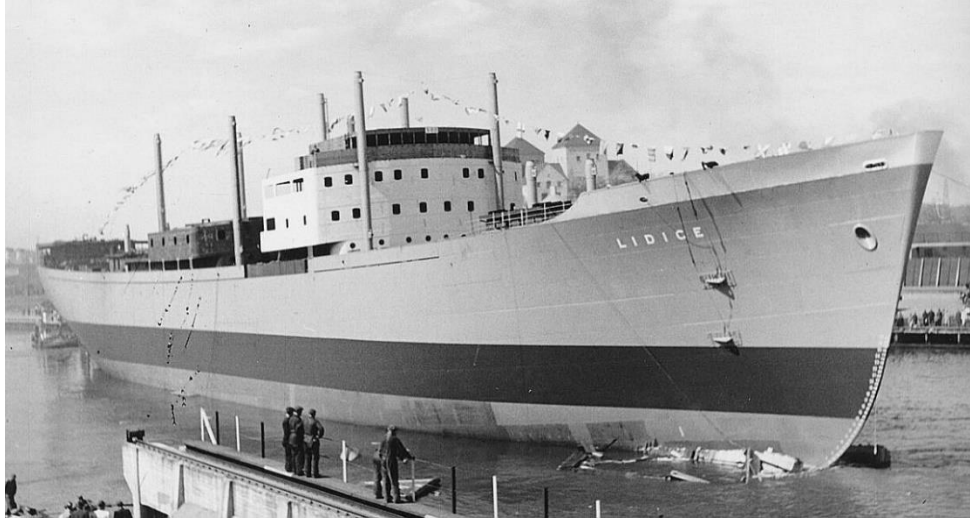


REPUBLIKA depicted on a Czech postage stamp.

Over the two years that *Republika* was lying idle in Shanghai, the maritime relationship between China and Czechoslovakia was formalized. In March 1952 it was reported in Hong Kong that ten secondhand ships had been acquired through dealers in Hong Kong and 'other Eastern ports' and that 300 Chinese were boarding in seamen's homes at Gdynia while their ships were being refitted (SCMP, 3/3/52). This was exaggerated by an order of magnitude. At the time, only *Republika* had been acquired and she duly sailed under a Czech and Polish crew. Nevertheless, according to Krátká, in July 1952 the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party had approved maritime cooperation with the PRC, leading to detailed negotiation in Beijing at the end of the year. The outcome in January 1953 was a Protocol on the Development of Maritime Transport which, after ratification by both governments, came into effect on 11 June. The most salient point was that ships would be acquired by the PRC to be registered under the Czechoslovak flag while the PRC would determine the shipment priorities under the bilateral trade agreement, nominate the freight rates, accrue the earnings, and bear the risks. Whereas Chipolbrok was from the outset a genuinely 50/50 joint venture, the Sino-Czech arrangement was therefore, apart from *Republika*, simply a disguised agency arrangement whereby Čechofracht worked on a 3% commission. To protect the interests of both parties against foreign interference, the Protocol was kept top secret.

Once the Protocol came into effect, things moved quite briskly. Already in July 1953 negotiations were set in train to purchase the Fabre Line's 7,000-dwt, 13½-knot cargoliner *Volta* built five years previously in France; she was delivered at Marseille in January 1954 and as *Julius Fučík* (1949), named after the martyred Communist journalist Julius Fučík (1903-43), commenced her maiden voyage to China at the beginning of March. Krátká explains that to get around the embargo on ship sales to China, the purchase price of £385,000 was nominally paid by barter for Czech trade goods. The next purchase, in mid-May 1954, was a smart, 8800-dwt, 16-knot cargoliner under construction at the Crichton-Vulkan (Wärtsilä) yard at Åbo (Turku) in Finland. Krátká dates the purchase as 14 May 1954, one day before the ship was launched, nominally for Čechofracht, as *Lidice* (named after the village of Lidice infamous for the Nazi massacre of June 1942 in revenge for the assassination of

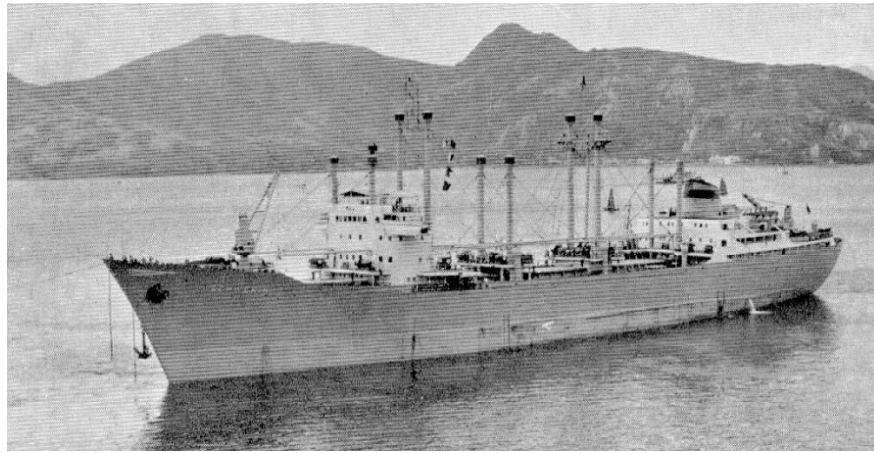
Bohemia's governor, Reinhard Heydrich). She was completed and delivered six months later. The prototype had been launched for Finland-Sydamerika Linjen as *Equator* before being completed for the USSR's Baltic fleet as *Archangelsk* in December 1952 (Brzoza, 1975). The hull to become *Lidice* may have been purchased from Finland-Sydamerika Linjen or, quite possibly, through Soviet intervention, from the USSR, whose Baltic Shipping Company took delivery of 15 of her subsequent 20 sisters. Either way, the hull was certainly not laid down for Čechofracht or the PRC.



LIDICE immediately after launch at the Wärttilä yard at Turku (builders).

In 1955 the PRC widened its commercial relations with Eastern Europe when China National Machinery Import Corporation did place a direct order with VEB Warnowwerft at Warnemünde (Rostock), East Germany, for two 10,000-dwt, 16-knot, engines-aft 'Frieden' [Peace]-class (Type-IV) carginers, of which the lead ship *Frieden* (#301) was launched on 14 January 1956 and delivered five months later to VEB Deutsche Seereederei (German Sea Shipping Company), which had been established on 1 July 1952, at almost the same time as Čechofracht. This impressive 'Type-IV'-class had been designed for the Far East (China) route and was particularly well equipped with cargo handling gear - one 50-ton heavylift, two 15-ton cranes and 14 three to eight ton derricks. It seems that the first quartette was planned in a Chipolbrok-like 50/50 arrangement with the PRC.

The next vessel (Yard No. 302) was the first Čechofracht vessel, though she was launched on 27 March 1956 as *Völkerfreundschaft* ['Peoples' Friendship']; on 30 July Yard No. 303 was launched for VEB Deutsche Seereederei as *Freundschaft*, followed by the second Čechofracht vessel (#304), launched on 17 November 1956, also nominally for VEB Deutsche Seereederei as *Solidarität* ['Solidarity']. The fitting out of all four hulls proceeded rather slowly: *Frieden* was delivered in June 1957 and *Freundschaft* in December 1957. The latter proceeded in January 1958 to commence the first voyage to China by an East German ship, arriving in Shanghai at the end of February with 8,000 tons of fertilizer (Sing. Free Press, 26/2/58). Meanwhile, in October 1957 *Völkerfreundschaft* had been 'sold' on completion in October 1957 to Polish Ocean Lines (Chipolbrok) and was delivered as *Zeromski*, while *Solidarität* was likewise 'sold' to Čechofracht and completed in March 1958 as *Dukla*. Her sister, now *Zeromski*, would transfer the following year to the Czech flag and become *Orava*. Warnowwerft continued to build another eleven of the class but evidently without further direct Chinese involvement, one indication being that henceforth the ships carried not good socialist names but those of East German cities, hence *Berlin* (1957), *Dresden* and *Magdeburg* (1958), *Erfurt*, *Leipzig*, *Halle*, and *Schwerin* (1959), *Karl Marx-Stadt* [formerly and latterly Chemnitz] and *Gera* (1960), and finally *Halberstadt* and the Cuban delivery *Sierra Maestra* (1961). None of these ships subsequently passed to China, though some were broken up there.



East German SCHWERIN at Taikoo Dockyard, 1963 (*Taikoo Dockyard, Autumn 1963*).

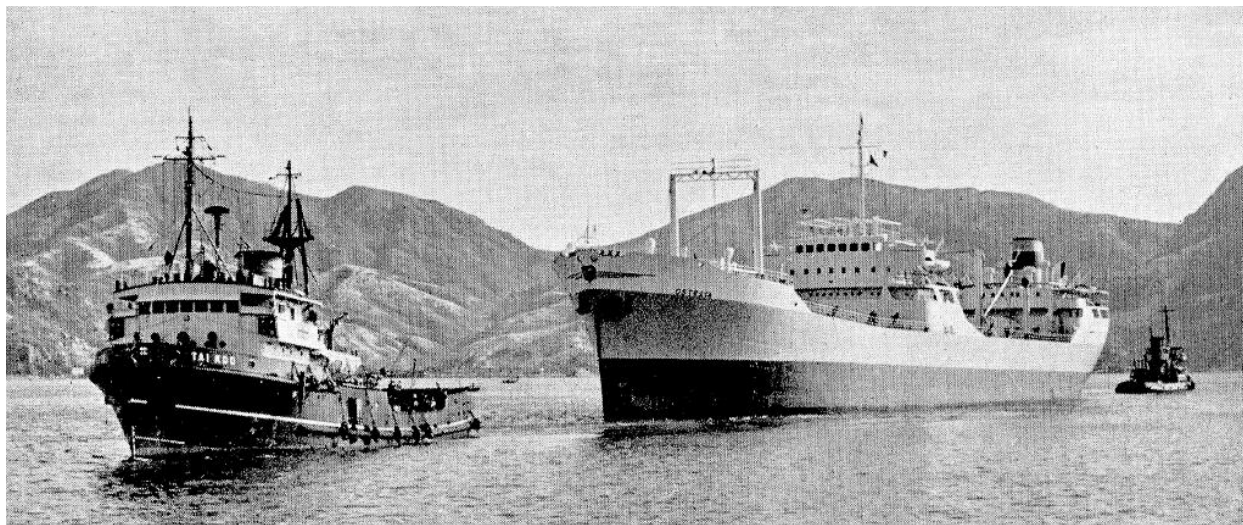
As reflected in the somewhat erratic purchases and transfers, Čechofracht was not only a much smaller entity than POL/Chipolbrok but also highly constrained by the Protocol with the PRC. In February 1959, the Ministry of Foreign Trade authorised Čechofracht to establish an international joint-stock shipping company, which was duly registered on 1 April 1959 as Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping International Joint Stock Company (Československá námořní plavba) and two months later received final approvals from the Minister – ‘námořní plavba’ could also be translated as ‘maritime navigation’. The fleet transferred consisted of 6 cargoliners adding up to 59,000 dwt, plus the recently commissioned, Yugoslav-built, 20,200-dwt tanker *Ostrava*, altogether 7 ships of 79,000 tons. Except for the 39-year-old *Republika*, the average age was just three years. Formation of Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping allowed the Czechoslovak fleet to expand, eventually beyond the exclusively China trade.

In December 1959, Hitachi Zosen delivered the 13,477-dwt, 14-knot (17-knot maximum) *Kladno*, paid for under a barter deal for Czech malt and other items (Kratka: 53; *Fune no Kagaku*, Sept. 1959). *Kladno* was an impressive ship, the external hull dimensions and B&W five-cylinder 6250 bhp engines being identical to those of Brodogradiliste ‘Uljanik’-built *Mir* completed 14 months earlier, but with a changed layout for improved cargo handling and four heavier derricks. In place of the Yugoslav bipod arrangement were solid masts with both upper and mid trees and three pairs of kingposts. The ship was strengthened to Ice Class 3 for northern sea ice and also airconditioned throughout for comfort in the tropics. With an all-welded hull and first class steel, she was a preferred vessel, lasting in the fleet until 1974, well beyond her contemporaries. Although doubtless initially loading in wintery North China, from 1960 *Kladno* was trading not with China but with Cuba along with other break-bulk units in the Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping fleet. Indeed, on 29 October 1962 *Kladno* had almost reached Cuba with a general cargo when ordered to stop just 60 miles outside the US-imposed ‘quarantine line (CIA, 30/6/62). After some delay, *Kladno* was allowed to proceed because it was carrying civilian cargo only. Krátká notes that *Lidice* was already at anchor off the Cuban port of Matanzas.



KLADNO in Kiel Canal 29 June 1968 (Malcolm Cranfield).

The following year the PRC would transfer the 11,160-dwt, 16-knot *Hoping 50* ex *Fryderyk Chopin* to become *Orlik*. The latter had been delivered to POL/Chipolbrok, then for a few months traded under the Chinese flag before being switched to the Czech flag where she would join the similar *Mir* and *Kladno*. That brought the Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping fleet to 10 vessels of 82,760 dwt, not quite half the capacity of Chipolbrok's 18 vessels of around 200,000 by the end of 1961. Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping continued to work with POL/Chipolbrok in the Northern East Europe-China trade while also providing sailings from Black Sea ports, notably Varna (Bulgaria) and Constantza (Romania). From 1959 the tanker *Ostrava* also sailed from the Black Sea to South China. The China-related ships often carried out survey or special survey at Taikoo Dock in Hong Kong.



OSTRAVA arriving at Taikoo in 1961 for docking and engine repairs (*Taikoo Dockyard, Summer 1961*).

## The COSCO era

In April 1961 China Ocean Shipping Corporation (COSCO) was established in Guangzhou to become China's national deepsea shipping line. It was an evolution of the Ocean Shipping Bureau that the Ministry of Transport had established in 1958 by with an operational branch at Guangzhou. The English version of the name probably reflected that of Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. The timing was influenced at a distance by an Indonesian government law passed in 1959 forbidding Chinese residents to henceforth own and operate businesses in the countryside. This triggered a large demand for repatriation to China, something that the PRC wished to encourage as a manifestation of Chinese patriotism. Awkwardly, however, the PRC had few passenger vessels large enough for that task, so that at first the Ocean Shipping Bureau had to charter. A seemingly suitable ship was found in the old 14,200-grt passenger liner *Highland Princess*, which as *Marianna* had come onto the market at Piraeus at the end of 1959 after Greek shipowner John Latsis had been forestalled by Chandris Lines in his initiative to open an emigrant line from Italy via Greece to Australia (Shaw, 2019). The PRC bought the ship in January 1960, took delivery in July in the Romanian port of Constantza, and for the delivery voyage to China placed it under the Czechoslovak flag as *Slapy* (named after a large new dam and hydroelectric power station). After delivery to China, she was renamed *Guanghua*, refitted in Hong Kong to carry many more passengers than her original 200 cabin and 500 steerage, and on 27 April 1961, amidst much ceremony, was officially commissioned as COSCO's first ship. she sailed for Indonesia on the first of several voyages that would be repeated over the course of the 1960s, though she also sailed to East Africa and the Middle East and was not broken up until 1982, then 52 years old. Her original consort was the much smaller *Xin Hua*, previously the 2335-grt, coastal passenger motorship *Sigurd Jarl* (1942), which was sold to the PRC in June 1960. In her case, there was no Czech involvement: she arrived at Guangzhou in mid-August 1960 under her original name and still flying the Norwegian flag. The rest of the COSCO fleet would be built up by cargoliners and some tankers.



GUANGHUA in COSCO colours, June 1970, unchanged from 1962 appearance (Michael Lennon/coll. S. Kentwell\*).

There was further Czech involvement with *Odra* and *Labe*, which can be identified as the Chinese-built freighters *Hoping 25* (6117-dwt, 1959 Dalian) and the 7042-dwt *Hoping 58* (1959 Jiangnan). These were designated to open COSCO's cargo service from Guangzhou to the Bay of Bengal but the challenge was how to sail them through the blockade from North to South China. Accordingly, it was arranged to send out a Czech crew and sail them under the Czech flag. As Krátká recounts, a 25-man crew was flown from Prague to Beijing at the end of December 1960 and on 5 January 1961 embarked at Qingdao and hosted the Czech flag on the first ship, renamed *Odra* [Oder], which arrived at Zhanjiang on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The crew then flew back to Qingdao, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> embarked on the second ship, renamed *Labe* [Elbe], and duly arrived at Zhanjiang on 2 February before flying home. Neither ship was registered under the Czech flag, or officially transferred to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. Though it cannot be determined which was *Odra* and which *Labe*, they became *Heping* ('Peace') and *You Yi* ('Friendship') respectively (see first postscript). In September 1962 something similar was done in the other direction when the 'Liberty' *Zhong Hua*, recently converted to a passenger vessel, was sailed from Guangzhou to Shanghai by a Polish crew as *Ignacy Krasicki* prior to conversion back to the freighter *Hoping 54*.

During 1965 tensions arose between the Czechoslovak and Chinese parties over the issue of how to respond to the threatened US blockade of North Vietnam following the Bay of Tonkin incident in August 1964. As Krátká recounts, the Czechoslovak approach, as during the Cuban crisis, was that the ship would heave to if forced to do so but not cooperate in any boarding or search while diplomatic representations were being made to release the ship; the Chinese insisted that the ship should maintain course, which would expose Czechoslovakia to all the risks. The dispute came to a head in July 1965, after which it was agreed that the three Chinese-crewed ships would be handed over, thus *Dukla* on 4 August en route to Haiphong, *Orava* and *Julius Fucik* the following month as they arrived at Whampoa. All three passed to COSCO as *Hang Zhou* (two words), *Lanzhou* and *Foshan* respectively and like other units of the COSCO fleet, carried the name as one word on the bow. For want of cargo from the Black Sea, the tanker *Ostrava* was transferred in February. That left the joint fleet, all beneficially owned by the PRC, as just four conventional cargo ships, being *Lidice*, *Mir*, *Kladno* and *Orlik*. In the context of ongoing tensions in the relationship, some arising from the Sino-Soviet split, some more commercial, on 20 December 1966 the Czechoslovak Minister for Foreign Affairs sent a diplomatic note to the Chinese Ambassador terminating the Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping agreement at three months' notice. The note was accepted by the PRC a month later: *Lidice* was transferred to COSCO on 2 February, *Orlik* on the 16 February, and *Mir* on 21 March to become *Xichang*, *Lintong*, and *Wuxi* respectively. As mentioned above, *Kladno* was retained by the Czechs.

The beginning of the Prague Spring under First Secretary Alexander Dubcek in early 1968 was anathema to Maoist China, by then in the throes of the Cultural Revolution. After the Russian invasion of August 1968 had crushed this attempt at social democracy, a strong regime was imposed and there was some restoration of

relations with the PRC but more in trade than in shipping. The last vessel that can be identified as having a Chinese connection was the 14,000-dwt, 17-knot cargoliner *Mir* (II), which was launched by Warnowwerft in October 1971 for COSCO as *Shimen* but completed two months later for Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. Her movements through 1972 are not recorded but she does not appear to have been used for the China line. Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping was developed as an operator of bulk carriers and Danube traders. Krátká notes that during the 1970s Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping ships were also trading less with Cuba and more to Basra in Iraq under Ba-athist rule.

By the late 1980s there was a modest renewal of commercial and maritime ties between Czechoslovakia and the PRC and on 1 January 1988, Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping and COSCO formed the 50/50 joint venture COSSHIP with Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping contributing the 15,000-dwt, Yugoslav-built *Orava* (II) and COSCO a vessel that Krátká names implausibly as 'Funtushan', perhaps the 20,000-dwt, Mitsubishi-built *Fu Yu Shan* (1985). According to Krátká, the venture did not thrive, not least because the two parties had differing interests, and it was terminated in 1990, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In 1992 Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping privatized and upon the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia on 1 January 1993, Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping ships flew the Czech Republic flag, then eighteen months later the company officially became Czech Ocean Shipping. According to Wikipedia, in 1995, [Michael D. Dingman](#) and [Viktor Kožený](#) bought out widely fragmented holdings to become the majority shareholders. In 1996/97 the remaining ships were flagged out to Malta and within a year or so all had been sold. In its place there emerged Czech Ocean Shipping Group, which has focused on non-vessel freight forwarding and logistics (<https://oceanshipping.cz/about-us/>). No ships apparently now sail deepsea under the Czech flag.

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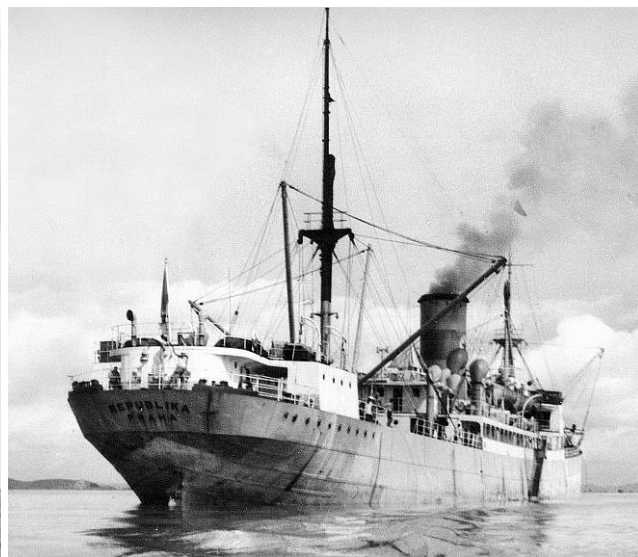
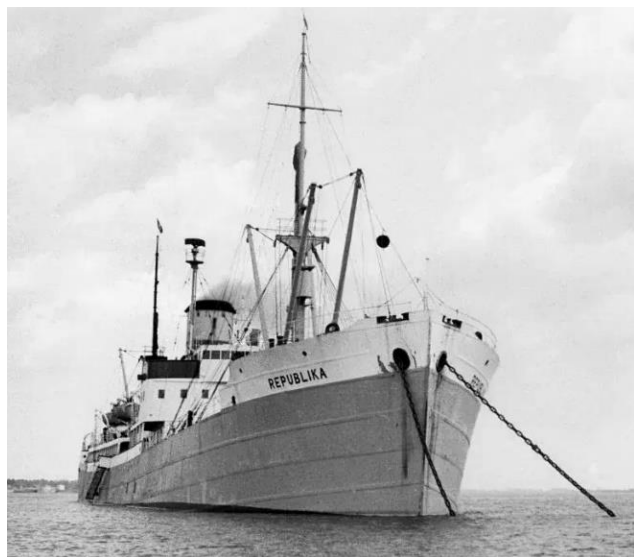
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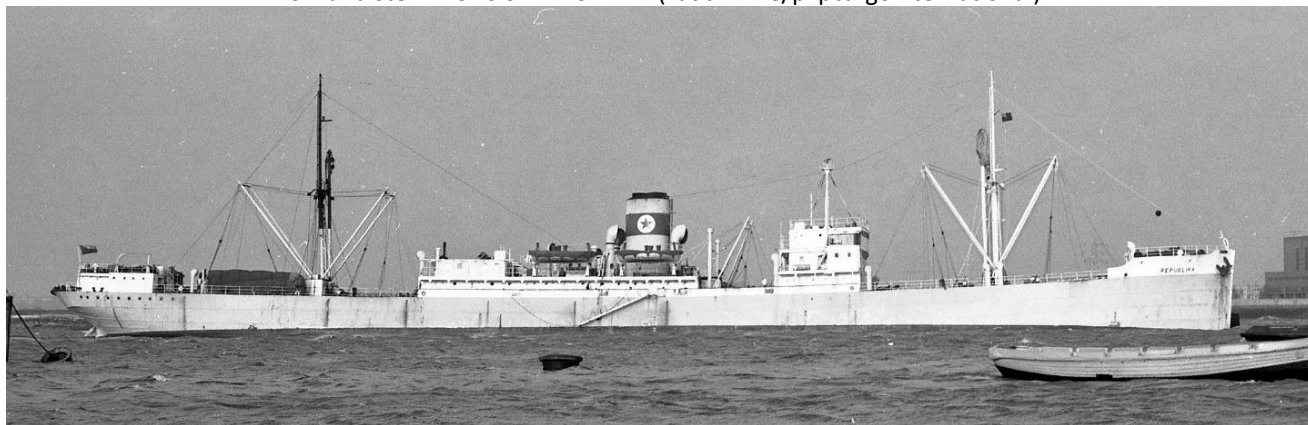
## Fleet List (vessels with China ownership/management connections only)

Tonnages, year of build, dimensions, and engine details are according to Lloyd's Register, owners and fates from the Schell-Starke annual registers (also at Miramar).

**REPUBLIKA (I)** (1952-62) 6419 (10,420)/20-4 (427.4 x 55.6', T3cy/12k by J. Dickinson & Sons, Sunderland)  
Built by J.L. Thompson & Sons Ltd, Sunderland (#526A) as Michigan for Cie. Générale Transatlantique, Le Havre as MICHIGAN. 6/41 detained in US waters. 6/2/42 req. at New Orleans by USWSA (Waterman S.S. Agency Ltd, mgrs.) (reg. Panama). 11/42 Blidberg Rothschild Co., mgrs. 11/44 French Line Inc., mgrs. 2/4/45 returned to owners at Houston. Early 1950 sold to Cia Maritima Atychides S.A. (Pierre Atychides), Panama r. EVANTHIA. 3-4/50 conv. to oil fuel at Marseille. 1/5/50 passed Dover eastbound Alexandria-Hull (sulphur). 23/7/51 arr. Bombay with 9608t US wheat. 9/51 sold for £375,000 to Government of Czechoslovakia, subsequently del. at Gdynia, where 11/1/52 r. REPUBLIKA (CS flag). 1-4/52 docking and repairs at Stavanger. Mid-4/52 completed part special survey but stranded on Saltholm Is. while passing through Øresund o/v Stavanger-Gdynia, refloated, to Gdynia for docking and repair. 18/5/52 commenced maiden voyage via Holtenau Roads (Kiel) for LR inspection to Dairen. 7/52 crankshaft repairs at Tianjin. 17/8/52 o/v Qingdao-Shanghai caught in typhoon c.250 miles E. of Shanghai, sprang leaks in shaft tunnel, radioed and in distress, escorted to mouth of Yangtze by *Eastway* (ex *Kutsang*, 5847/22), 18/8 (20.00 GMT) handed over to tugs, towed in for discharge and docking [LRF: CF to LR, 25/7/52]. 10/52 LR class expunged, t/f to USSR class. 2/59 at Colombo for repair leaking boiler tubes. 4/11/61 passed Dover o/v Szczecin-Havana; 20/4/62 arr. Calcutta from Gdansk. 27/7/62 laid-up at Trieste. 8/62 sold to "SIDEMAR" S.p.A. for demolition at Trieste, 12/62 work completed [Schell; LRF/Republika].



Bow and stern views of REPUBLIKA (Láďa Kníže/pkpcargointernational).



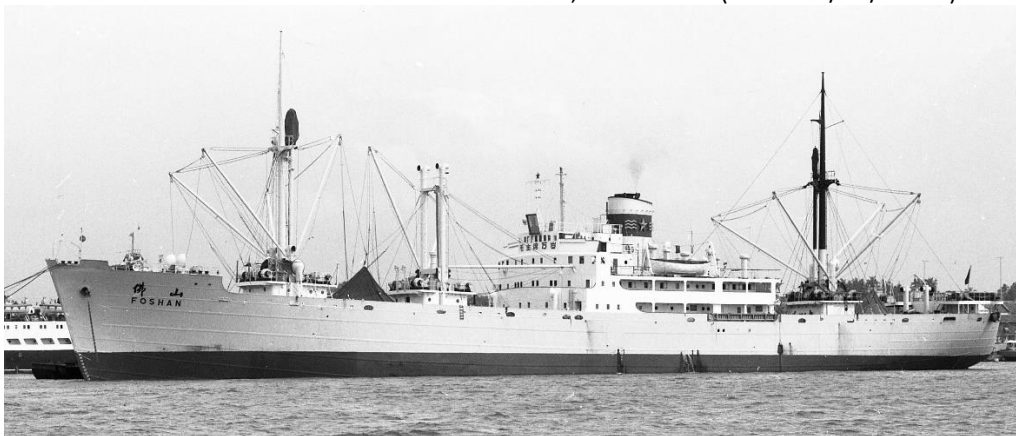
REPUBLIKA (1920) lying on a buoy in the Thames, January 1962, six months before final lay-up at Trieste (A. Duncan/W. Schell).

**JULIUS FUČIK** (1954-1965) 5082 (6995)/49-8 (424.10' x 59'.1', 3ST (1935)/13½k)

Built by D.A. des Forges & Chantiers de la Mediterranée, La Seyne (#1292) for Cie de Navigation Fraissinet, Marseille as VOLTA. 1951 t/f by merger to Cie de Nav. Cyprien Fabre, Marseille. 1/54 del. at Marseille to 'Cechofracht' and sailed to Gdynia, where 2/54 r. JULIUS FUCIK. 3/4/54 commenced maiden voyage, 4/54 arr. Shanghai after evading Nationalist blockade. Mid-1959 t/f to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping . 9/65 t/f to PRC (COSCO) r. FOSHAN. 11/91 RLR. [Note: Name FOSHAN appears consistently spelt as one word.]



JULIUS FUCIK as Fabre Line VOLTA at New York, March 1953 (Ed. Gibbs/W./ Schell).



JULIUS FUCIK as COSCO's FOSHAN in the Cultural Revolution period (coll. W. Schell).

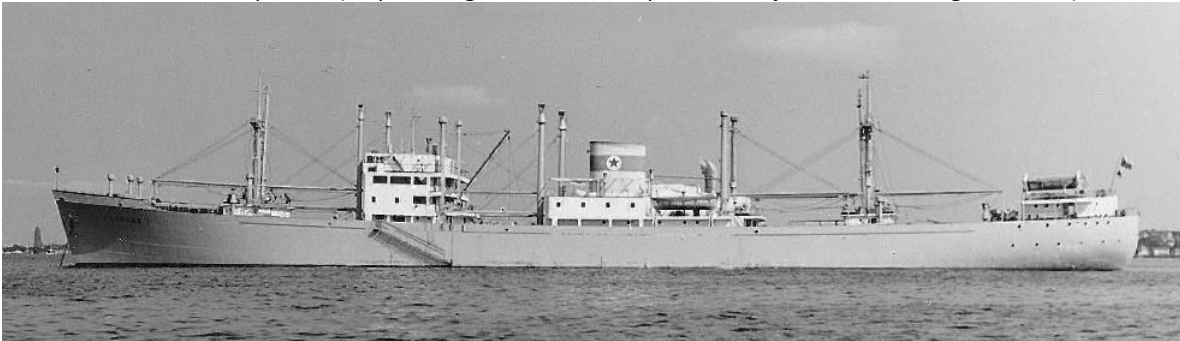


FOSHAN Malacca Strait, same Mao portrait with slogan '10,000 years for Chairman Mao' (P. Foxley\*).

**LIDICE** (1954-1967) 5659 (8813)/54-11 (457.4 x 57. 9', M7cy/16k by Masch. Augsburg-Nürnberg, Augsburg). Built by Wärtsilä Koncernen A/B Crichton-Vulcan, Åbo (#960), possibly laid down for USSR as the second 'Equator' class but 15/5/54 launched for Cechofracht as LIDICE. 7/4/59 o/v Gdynia-N. Vietnam via Suez seized by French naval patrol and taken to Mers-el-Kebir naval base (Oran) to discharge 581t arms (12,000 rifles, 12m. rounds) claimed to be destined for Algerian National Liberation Front; after Czech and Moroccan protests, 12/7 released (Scotsman, 9-13/4/59). Mid-1959 t/f to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. 2/67 t/f to PRC (COSCO), Guangzhou r. XU CHANG. 1985 broken up at Lianyungang [Schell].



LIDICE on completion (<https://blog.idnes.cz/lidice/pribeh-lodi-jmenem-lidice.Bg15063096>).



LIDICE (Wiki).



LIDICE as COSCO's XU CHANG (one word on hull), now with radar mast, at Singapore (coll. W. Schell).

**MIR** (1958-1967) 9312 (12,560)/58-9 (489.8 x 61.10', M5cy/15k B&W)

Built by Brodogradiliste 'Uljanik', Pula (#219) for Tugobanka-Beograd, 2/3 launched as POLET but completed for Cechofracht as MIR. Mid-1959 t/f to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. 3/67 t/f to PRC (COSCO), Guangzhou r. WUXI, from LR 1979 as WU XI. 1985 t/f to Fujian Province Shipping Co. (Fuzhou Branch), Fuzhou r. DA PING SHAN. 4/10 RLR ('existence in doubt').



Yugoslav-built MIR as COSCO's WUXI at Hong Kong, 7 Dec. 1969 (W. Schell).



WUXI at Yokohama 17 September 1975, now with radar on funnel (Stephen Kentwell\*).

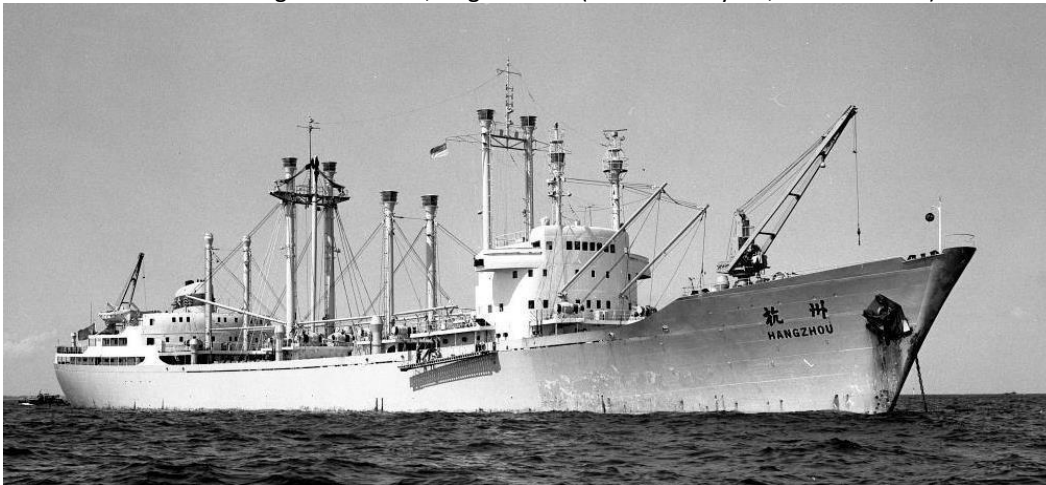


WUXI in the English Channel, fourteen 5-ton and one 30-ton derricks (FotoFlite/coll. Roger Hurcombe permission Nigel Scutt).

**DUKLA (II)** (1958-1965) 6508 (10,070)/58-3 (518.4 x 67.6', 2x2M8cy/14½k by Masch. Halberstadt, Halberstadt)  
 Built by VEB Warnowwerft, Warnemünde (#304) and intended for delivery to PRC but 17/11/57 launched for VEB Deutsche Seereederei (reg. Rostock) as 'Frieden'-class SOLIDARITÄT and then completed for 'Cechofracht' as DUKLA.  
 Mid-1959 t/f to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. 8/65 t/f to PRC (COSCO), Guangzhou r. HANGZHOU. 1988 broken up at Guangzhou [Malcolm Cranfield; Schell].



DUKLA entering Taikoo Dock, August 1963 (Taikoo Dockyard, Autumn 1963).



DUKLA as COSCO's HANG ZHOU (name on bow as HANGZHOU) (Malcolm Cranfield).

**ORAVA** (1959-1965) 6507 (10,070)/1957-10 (518.0 x 65.7', 2x2M8cy/16k by Maschb. Halberstadt)  
 Built by VEB Warnowwerft, Warnemünde (#302) as 'Frieden'-class for intended delivery to PRC but 27/3 launched for VEB Deutsche Seereederei, Rostock as VÖLKERFREUNDSCHAFT, then 12/10/57 t/f on completion to POL/Cipolbrok (reg. Gdynia) as ZEROMSKI (12 pass.). 6/59 t/f to 'Cechofracht', Prague r. ORAVA. Mid-1959 t/f to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. 9/65 t/f to COSCO, Guangzhou r. LANZHOU. By 1969 in service China-East Africa. 1976 t/f to Guangzhou Salvage Branch, Guangzhou and conv. to salvage vessel r. SUI JIU LAO 6. 1993 RLR [Marek Gono, M. Cranfield].



ORAVA at Singapore, 28 July 1963 (Dr. George Wilson).

**OSTRAVA** (1959-1965) 13,339 (20,192)/59-4 (tkr, 560.0 x 71.10', M7cy/15½k). Built by Brodogradiliste 'Uljanik', Pula (#220) for Jugoslavenska Banka za Spoljnu Trgovinu, Pula and 25/5/58 launched as ISTINA but completed for 'Cechofracht' as OSTRAVA. Mid-1959 t/f to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping. 2/65 t/f to PRC (COSCO) r. HONG HU. By 4/74 trading as DA QING 230 (TACHING 230). 1992 RLR.



OSTRAVA arriving Taikoo Dockyard mid-1963 for engine repairs and special survey, salvage tug *Tai Koo* in foreground (*Taikoo Dockyard*, Autumn 1963).



OSTRAVA at Aden c. 1965 (?Roger Sherlock/W. Schell).



HONG HU (on hull as HONGHU) eastbound in Malacca Strait (Peter Foxley\*)



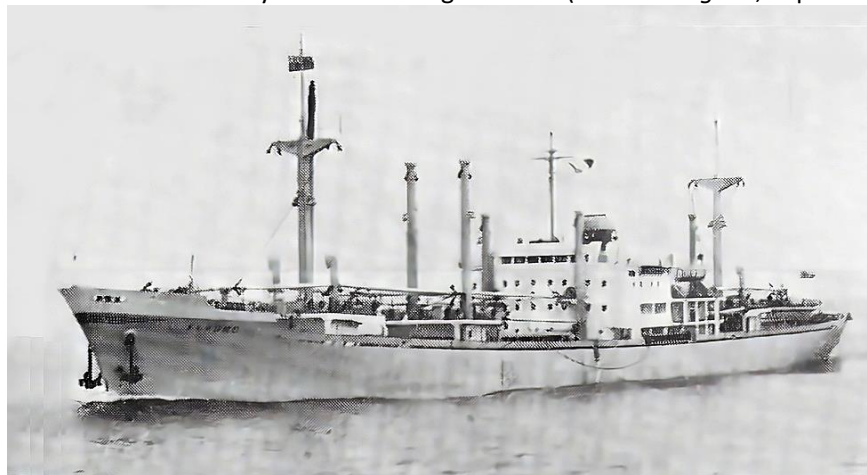
DA QING 230 (Mike Lennon\*).

**KLADNO** (1959-73) 8837 (13,577)/59-11 (489.8' x 61.10', M5cy/14k, 17k max B&W)

Built by Hitachi Zosen K.K., Osaka (#3868) for Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping, Prague. 7/73 sold to Apostolos Maritime Co. Ltd (N. Papathomas), Famagusta r. APOSTOLOS A. 1976 t/f to Apostolos Maritima Armadores S.A., Panama. 1978 reg. t/f to Piraeus. 2/81 sold to Zaima Shipping Pte Ltd, Singapore r. NAZAKAT. 1982 sold to El Hawi Shg (Pan Ocean Nav. & Tdg Co. (Pte) Ltd), Jeddah r. ELHAWI SHAMS. 1983 sold to Ali Sameer Shg Corp., Jeddah r. SHEIKH IBRAHIM. 10/7/85 arr. Jamnagar for demolition by Ashok Steel, Ltd, 25/9 work began, 11/85 completed.



KLADNO dressed ornately at launch 5 August 1959. (*Fune no Kagaku*, Sept. 1959).



KLADNO - twelve 5-ton, four 8-ton, and one 30-ton heavylift derricks (Alex Duncan/*Marine News* 1/68).



KLADNO as APOSTOLOS A, Antwerp 1980, outdated but still looking smart after 21 years' service (Schovfinn/Shipspotting).

**ORLIK** (1960-1967) 9935 (11,156)/57-5 (504.11 x 63.9', M8cy (1953)/16k by FIAT, Turin)  
Built by Stocznia Gdanska, Gdansk (#B54/7) for Polish Ocean Lines, Gdynia as FRYDERYK CHOPIN. 1959 t/f to PRC r. HOPING 50 [WU SHI]. 1960 t/f Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping r. ORLIK. 1967 t/f to PRC (COSCO), Guangzhou r. LINTONG, from LR 1979 as LIN TONG. 4/72 last reported foreign voyage. 1992 RLR.



ORLIK sailed for a short period in 1959-60 as HOPING 50 (Dr George Wilson, 1959 photo, edit SK).



ORLIK ex HOPING 50 as COSCO's LINTONG inbound for Rotterdam in 1967 (coll. Malcolm Cranfield).



ORLIK as COSCO's LINTONG in Malacca Strait, including two heavier derricks (Peter Foxley\*).

**SLAPY** (1960-60) 14,216 (8811)/30-2 (pass., 544.6 x 69.2', 2M8cy/15k B&W)

Built by Harland & Wolff Ltd, Belfast (#814) for Nelson S.N. Co. Ltd (Royal Mail Stm Packet Co.), London for UK-River Plate-UK pass./refrig. meat trade as **HIGHLAND PRINCESS**. 8/32 after bankruptcy of Kylsant Group t/f to newly formed Royal Mail Lines Ltd, London (route unchanged). 8/12/59 del. at London to John S. Latsis, Piraeus r. **MARIANNA** (to have been **HELLAS**), 30/12 sd London for Piraeus (7/1/60); to have been refitted for a new emigrant line from Genoa, Naples and Greece to Australia but after Chandris Lines 12/59 commenced from Piraeus with *Patris ex Bloemfontein Castle* (1950), only limited conversion for pilgrim trade, then Tripoli-Jeddah. 7/60 del. at Constantza to Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping on behalf of PRC and r. **SLAPY** for delivery to China, 26/7 passed Istanbul for Whampoa. 24/9/60 arr. Hong Kong for refit by Hongkong & Whampoa Dock, c.24/11 onboard fire. 4/61 t/f to COSCO r. **GUANGHUA**, from LR 1979 as **GUANG HUA**. 24/4/61 sd from Whampoa to Indonesia on first ocean voyage under Chinese flag. 1992 broken up in China [LR voyage cards; Shaw, 2019].



GUANGHUA Hong Kong, April 1962 (coll. Malcolm Cranfield)



GUANGHUA April 1963, probably at Bangkok (coll. Malcolm Cranfield).

<b>5136983</b>	<b>GUANGHUA</b>	14 216	1930-2	Harland & Wolff Ltd.—Bel	(814)	<b>TM Passenger/General Cargo</b>	2 Oil 4DA each 8Cy. 680 × 1000
	ex Slapy-60 ex Marianna-60	8 516	165.97	21.09	8.751	Ref	7 162kW (9 600bhp)
	ex Highland Princess-59	8 952	158.50	21.04	13.34	3 Ho ER 3 Ho	Harland & Wolff Ltd.
Df Esd	<b>China Ocean Shipping Co.</b>	✳Classed LR until 3/62	B 29.6	F 47.3	4 dks	B.15 729 In.14 753	Gen 4 × 200kW
Gc Pfd	China		R			3 Ha ER 2 Ha	Fuel 1 831.0t
Rdr RTV						Der 2(10) 1(7) 10{	

Lloyd's Register to 1978-79 (entry above) and the name indicated on the ship's hull show **GUANGHUA** as a single word. However, Schell/Miramar and the official magazine *China Pictorial* (July 1963, May 1965) present as 'Guang Hua'.

The following two ships were registered in China for their full working careers but briefly flew the Czechoslovak flag, showed port of registry Prague, and presumably wore Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping markings for transfer from north China to south China in 1961.

Extract from <https://www.docin.com/p-783871490.html>

1958年9月1日，交通部批准成立远洋运输局驻广州办事处。在组织和人员等各方面作了准备，从国际航运市场购买了“光华”、“新华”两艘客船，从上海海运局调拨“和平

25”，改名为“和平”轮；“和平58”，改名为“友谊”轮两艘货船南下广州。对船舶进行了整修，通过各种渠道培养和选调远洋航海人才和业务骨干，配备了整套船员；草报了国际航线及行李运送章程；设计了中国远洋运输公司的标志、中国远洋船队的船旗、船名、烟囱标志、船体颜色；拟定了整套的船用业务单证；设计了《中华人民共和国海员证》。

Google translation:

“On September 1, 1958, the Ministry of Communications approved the establishment of the Guangzhou Office of the China Ocean Shipping Bureau. Preparations were made in terms of organization and personnel. Two passenger ships, "Guanghua" and "Xinhua," were purchased from the international shipping market. Two cargo ships, "Heping 25" (renamed "Heping") and "Heping 58" (renamed "You Yi"), were transferred from the Shanghai Maritime Bureau and sailed south to Guangzhou. The ships underwent repairs while ocean shipping personnel and key business personnel were trained and selected through various channels, and a complete crew was assembled. International routes and baggage handling regulations were drafted. The logo of the China Ocean Shipping Company, the flags, ship names, funnel insignia, and hull colors of the China Ocean Shipping Company fleet were designed. A complete set of ship-related business documents was drafted, and the "People's Republic of China Seaman's Book" was designed.”

Note: The reference to ‘repairs’ of the two cargo ships presumably includes upgrading for them to gain a maritime insurance class; international classification was not required in the case of the purely domestic voyaging for which they were built.

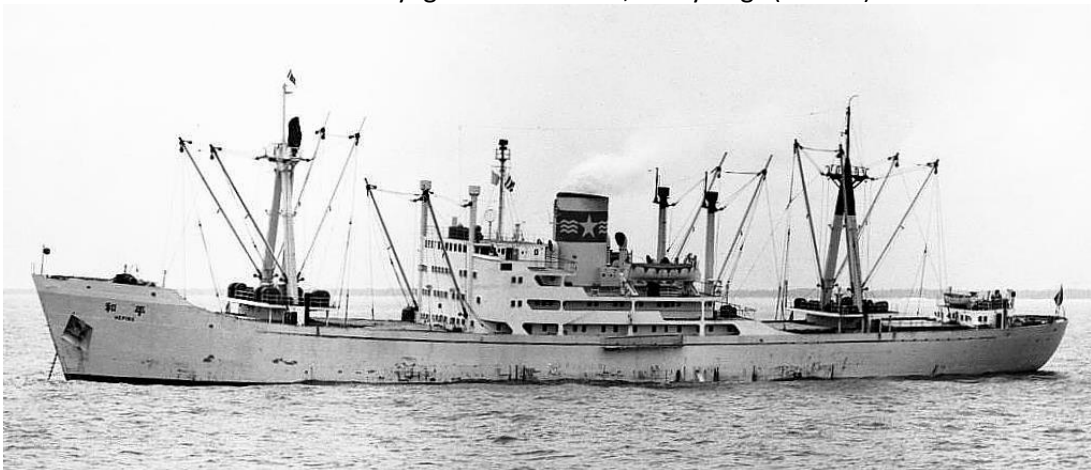
**LABE/ODRA** (1961) 5024 (6117)/57-59 (dimensions unknown, 5cy/11k Uniflow steam engine by Hudong)  
Built by Dalian D.Y., Dalian for Shanghai Maritime Bureau as HOPING 25 (II) [Akaiwa gives as 4707 grt/7240 dwt]. 1-2/61 sd Qingdao-Zhanjiang (Zhanjiang) under Czechoslovak flag as LABE or ODRA. c.4/61 t/f to COSCO, Guangzhou r. HE PING. 1962 sailed to Guinea with aid materials as the first voyage outside Asia by a PRC ship [Muller]. 6/63 voyage to Bay of Bengal. 10/63 voyage to Rangoon and Calcutta. 1965 voyaging to North Vietnam. c.1975 r. HONG QI 163. 1993 RLR [Miramar]. [LR early 1960s rep. HOPING 25 as 3000/58. Later and evidently in error reported HOPING 25 (II) as a 1959 build that became ZHANDOU 25.]



The new HOPING 25 at Dalian (Xinhua\*).



Evident trial voyage of HOPING 25, many flags (Xinhua).



COSCO's HE PING ex HOPING 25 at Colombo, 28 August 1961 (Dr George Wilson/Alan Lee).



HE PING July 1965 from a USN P2V in South China Sea off North Vietnam (USN).



Ex-HE PING's final guise as HONG QI 163 ([https://www.sohu.com/a/330430972\\_796569](https://www.sohu.com/a/330430972_796569)).

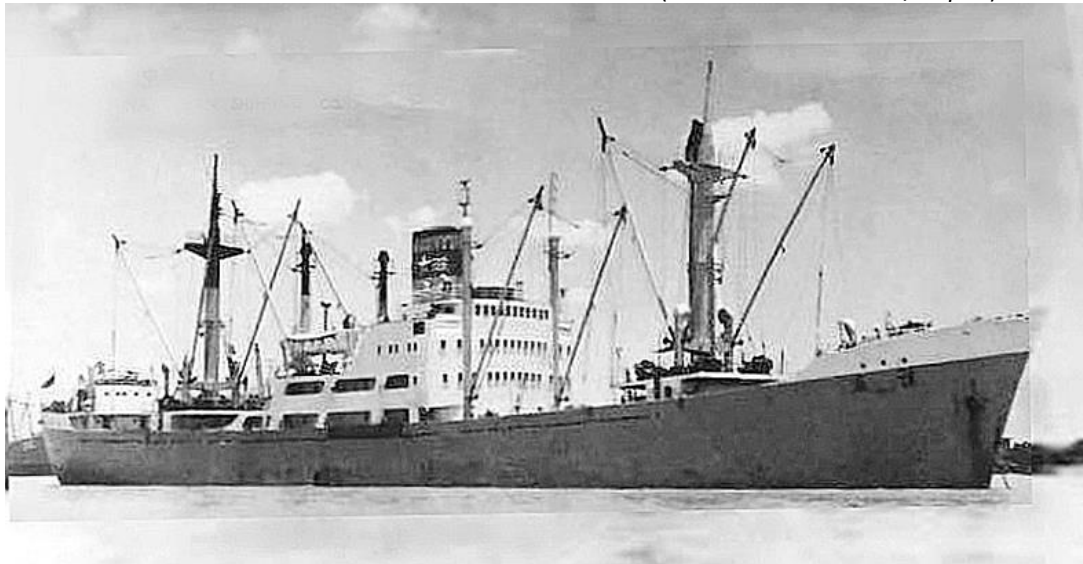
**LABE/ODRA** (1961) (4882 (7042)/59-9 (dimensions unknown, steam engines/15k)

Built by Jiangnan D. & E. Co., Shanghai for Shanghai Maritime Bureau (SMB) as HOPING 58. 1-2/61 sd Qingdao-Zhanjiang under Czechoslovak flag as LABE or ODRA. c.4/61 t/f to COSCO, Guangzhou r. YOU YI [<https://www.docin.com/p-783871490.html>]. 9/61 sailing for COSCO to ports such as Colombo as far as Mediterranean. 11/70 sailed Hong Kong for Whampoa. Later returned to SMB r. ZHANDOU 58. LR 1992 deleted.

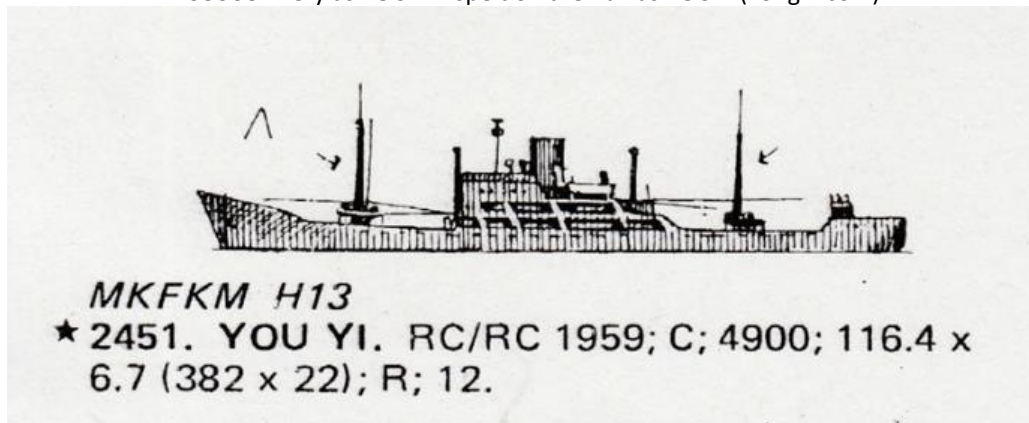


Yang Fu-tuo  
Kiangnan Shipyard workers cheer the  
launching of the 5,000-ton "Peace 58", as-  
sembling of which was done in 35 days.

(China Reconstructs 11/59 p. 7).



In COSCO livery as YOU YI - spelt on the hull as YOUYI (kongfz.com).



YOU YI sketch (Talbot Booth) dimensions stated but evident error regarding bipod masts.

**The following vessel built in 1972 for Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping had a China connection in being ordered and launched for COSCO**

**MIR (II)** (1972-93) 9651 (13,870)/72-12 (171.72(bb) x 20.38m, M8cy/17k by Dieselmotorenwerk Rostock)  
Built by VEB Warnowwerft, Warnemünde (#367) for delivery to PRC/COSCO, 20/10 launched as SHIMEN but completed for Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping, Prague as MIR. 1993 sold to Red Rose Shg Co. Ltd, Valletta r. MARA. 2000 t/f to Flexible Shg & Tdg Co. S.A., Belize. 8/6/00 arr. Mumbai for demolition.



East German-built MIR arriving Abu Dhabi, early November 1979 (Jackosan/Shipspotting).

**Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping contribution to COSSHIP (50/50 joint venture with COSCO 1988-90)**

**ORAVA (II)** (1981-96) 10,416 (15,236)/81-9 (genco, 145.55 x 21.65m, M4cy/14¾k Sulzer)  
Built by Brodogradiliste '3 Maj', Rijeka (#602) for Czechoslovak Ocean Shipping, Prague. 1/1/93 Czech Republic flag, 1994 t/f to Czech Ocean Shipping. 1996 t/f to Deneb Ltd, Limassol. 1997 t/f to Xing Da Shg Pte Ltd, Singapore r. JIN YING. 2006 t/f to Panama flag. 2007 sold to One One Sg Pte Ltd, Panama r. EVER BRISK. 2008 sold to Pan Star Sg Pte Ltd, Panama r. FEG DALIAN. 6/09 broken up in China.



ORAVA at Liverpool, 1 August 1983 (Paul Tunney/Shipspotting)



ORAVA at Camden, N.J. 20 May 1996 (shipjohn/Shippotting).

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