

# China Navigation's 'S'-Class (1946-47)

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The core of the following text is extracted and edited from material by Mike Carolin, Chris Coy and Howard Dick that was published with Martin Speyer's memoir *In Coral Seas* (NAA with John Swire & Sons, 2004). Mike was 3<sup>rd</sup> Officer of *Shansi* (1966-67); Chris Coy was 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer of *Szechuen* (Feb.-March 1962), then 2<sup>nd</sup> Officer of *Soochow* from October 1962 to July 1964 and Chief Officer July 1966 to May 1967; John Asome was Radio Officer of *Szechuen* (1955, 1960) and *Shansi* (1957-58). Howard has added introductory text and new sections on the China-Straits line, Australian Oriental Line and 'The Singapore Years' while Stephen Kentwell has edited the photos. We are grateful for the assistance of Malcolm Cranfield, Chris Gee, Trevor Jones, Russell Priest and Bill Schell for details and permissions to reproduce photos and to Matthew Edmondson/Swire Archives to use excerpts of *Shansi's* GA plan.

*We welcome any corrections or comments.*

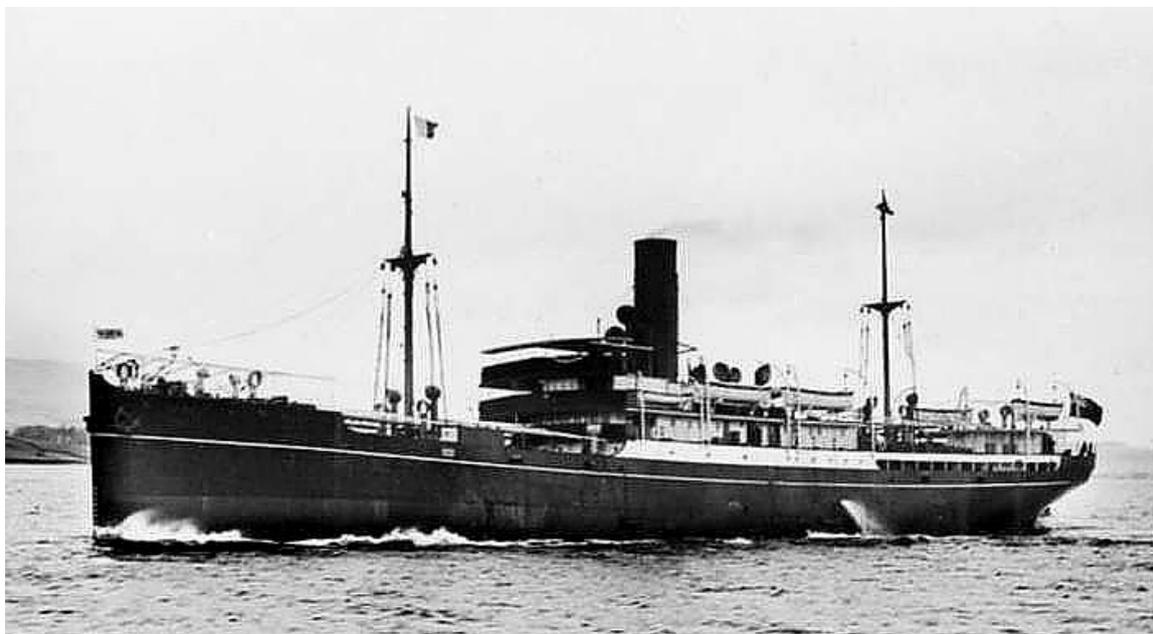
## Introduction

The early postwar 'S'-class of *Szechuen*, *Sinkiang*, *Shansi* and *Soochow* were the last true China coasters to be built for the China Navigation Company (CNCo) fleet and by the time of their sale in the mid-1960s were also the last to serve in that fleet. Although designed for the emigrant trade from South China to Southeast Asia, they actually spent most of their lives trading successfully to and from Australia and PNG or, in the case of *Szechuen*, between Hong Kong and Taiwan. After disposal, they all traded out of Singapore for another ten years or more.

The background to their design and construction was that CNCo had suffered a grievous loss of tonnage during and after the Japanese invasion and occupation of China and Southeast Asia. Of the coastal alone, by mid-1942 the company had lost two 'C'-class (1914), three 'S'-class (1915-20), 4 'K'-class (1921-22), one 'N'-class (1922), two 'A'-class (1925, 1930) and *Taiyuan* (1929). Over the next two years, *Kingyuen* (1921) and *Kaying* (1922), *Hoihow* (1933) and the express steamer *Shuntien* (1934) would also become casualties, in all 17 ships. Even though the Treaty of Chungking (1943) reserved postwar carriage between Chinese ports for Chinese-flag shipping, replacement tonnage was still needed for international services, including to and from Hong Kong. The outcome was the new 'S'-class quartette.

In design the new 'S'-class could be seen as a modified 'K'-class, which itself was a modest improvement of the old 'S'-class, all suitable for the China Coast but intended primarily for what used to be referred to in colonial parlance as the 'coolie' trade from South China and Hainan to Haiphong,

Saigon, Bangkok and the Straits. In other words, these ships were designed to carry a quantity of freight with a few cabin passenger but spacious tweendecks for up to a thousand Chinese emigrants and returnees. The new 'S'-class were three feet shorter between perpendiculars than the eight 'K' class but two feet more in beam, as may be seen from the accompanying table:



KWEIYANG on trials on the Clyde, May 1921. The postwar 'S'-class had a very similar layout but with a sharply raked bow, cruiser stern and enclosed bridge (Wikiswire).

Table. EVOLUTION OF CHINA NAVIGATION'S CLASSES FROM OLD TO NEW 'S'-CLASS

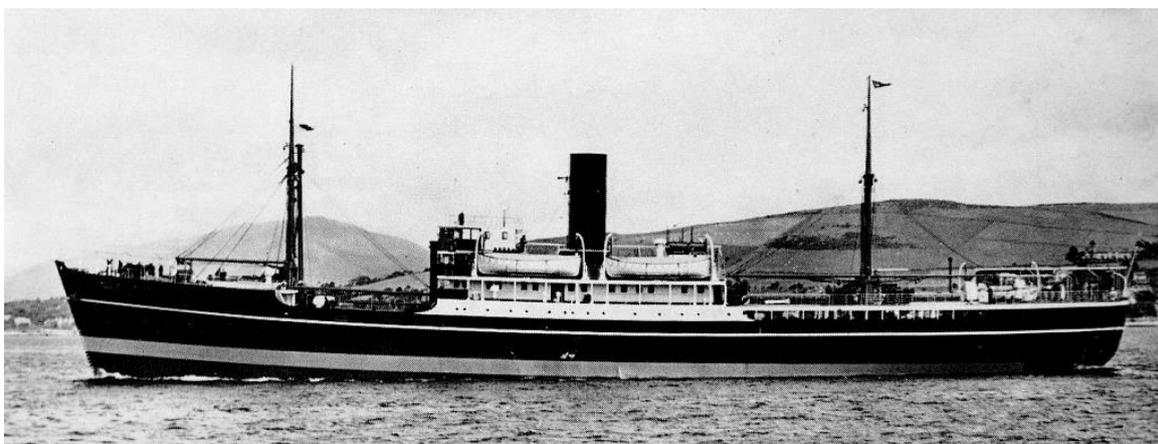
Class	Gross tons	Dwt	Length (bp)	Breadth	Engine/knots
Szechuen '20	2604	N/A	310.3	41.2	ST/11k
Kaying '22	2626	3150	310.3	44.2	ST/11½k
Anking '25	3472	4600	338.4	49.2	ST/12k
Anshun '30	3188	3658	338.4	50.2	M/12k
Tsinan '29	3040	3345	312.0	45.2	T3cy/12k
Yochow '33	2810	2778	300.0	44.2	M/12½k
<b>New 'S'</b>	<b>3020-3150</b>	<b>2500-2600</b>	<b>307.2</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>M/12½k</b>

Sources: Lloyd's Register, Wikiswire

The reason for the remarkable consistency in size among these China coasters is that maximum length of around 310 feet was set by the diameter of the swinging basin at the North China port of Tientsin (Tianjin). The 'A'-class were the exception because they were intended to trade from South China to the Straits. Nevertheless, the extra beam of the new 'S'-class combined with their extended forecastle resulted in a measured gross tonnage some 400-500 tons more than the 'K'-class, though deadweight was considerably less. They also had more efficient diesel engines instead of steam turbines.

## Construction and general layout

The order for the first ship (yard no. 638) was placed with CNCo's usual builder, Scotts' of Greenock, on 28 September 1944, about three months after D-Day, and was followed by a second order (yard no. 641) on 4 December. Because Scotts' were still heavily committed to naval construction, orders for the other two ships were placed with Caledon's of Dundee and A. & J. Inglis of Glasgow. Work proceeded slowly. The Caledon ship was launched first, on 18 January 1946, as *Szechuen*, followed a month (22 February) later by Scotts' *Sinkiang*, both delivered in July 1946. *Shansi* was launched by Miss Bridget Swire on 28 November 1946 and delivered on 25 February 1947 while *Soochow* was launched by Inglis on 23 April 1947 and delivered last on 18 December 1947. The Scotts'-built *Sinkiang* cost £238,451, *Shansi* rather more at £275,773. Prices for the other two are not available.



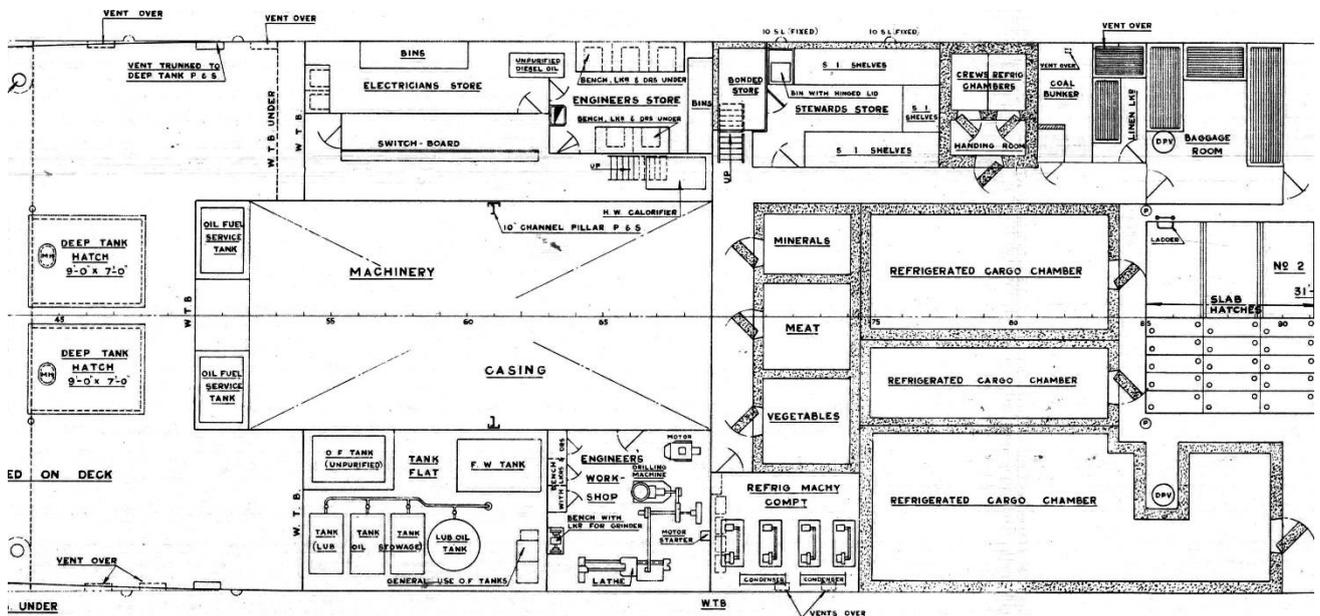
SINKIANG on trials in the Clyde, upper deck open at Nos 3/4 (CNCo/L. Dunn, *Passenger Liners*).

*Shansi* may be taken as exemplar of the quartette. Despite her modest size, she was quite a complex ship. Built by the Swire affiliate, Scotts of Greenock in 1946 and delivered in February 1947, she was registered in London but managed from Hong Kong. Her tonnages were 3,161 gross on dimensions of 321 feet (97.8m) overall length by 46.3 feet (14.1m) beam and 18 feet (5.5m) summer loaded draught.

The 4-cylinder Doxford engine working at 1,800 bhp (*Szechuen*'s 4-cylinder Sulzer was rated at 1,900 bhp) was designed to maintain a service speed of 12½ knots. Trials speed for *Sinkiang* was 13.51 knots, not known for the other three. They would prove to be a bit under-powered with no reserve to make up lost time. Chris Coy's experience on *Soochow* in the early 1960s was that on the return voyage from PNG in fairly light condition she could manage bursts of up to 14 knots along the 100-fathom line down the east coast of Australia with a following 2-3-knot East Coast Current but a swell from ahead could drop speed down to about 8 knots. Northbound and well laden, *Shansi* could manage 11-12 knots if course was set inshore up the coast to pick up the weaker and tidal 'counter current'. Through the Coral Sea there would be a following sea and usually a southeasterly wind that helped to maintain speed at better than 11½ knots. In short, a deal of experience and navigational skill was required. Mike Carolin notes that on some ships there was friendly rivalry between the watches as to who could make the best 4-hour run. Southbound this involved frequent requests to the engine room for a sea temperature reading to show whether or not the ship was keeping to the swirling East Coast Current, while northbound there was a lot of zig-zagging. The watchkeeper with the least miles per 4-hour watch would stand the winner a slab of beer.

*Soochow* was distinctive in being powered by a secondhand 3-cylinder Doxford (also rated at 1,800 bhp) that had been salvaged from the prewar 4,852-grt British tramp *Statira* (1937). On 3 August 1940 while north of Stornaway in convoy, *Statira* was bombed and set on fire, subsequently being towed to Stornaway, where the fire was extinguished. After discharge of cargo, the ship was laid up in the Firth of Clyde until reportedly in June 1944 towed to Troon for breaking up. Just how the engine ended up being fitted to *Soochow* in unknown but there must have been a cost saving and it proved to be very serviceable, notwithstanding an engine breakdown in 1960 when *Soochow* had to be towed from the NSW North Coast to Brisbane by CNCo's *Fukien* (see Wikiswire).

Though deadweight was just 2,628 deadweight, balespace of 158,163 cubic feet equated to almost 4,000 tons (40 cu. ft/ton). *Shansi* had four holds, all with 'tweendecks, with hatch sizes 13½ x 12' (No. 1), 31 x 16' (No. 2), 27 x 16' (No. 3 and 16 x 14' (No. 4), these served by five sets of union-purchase derricks (2 x 10t, 4 x 5t and 4 x 2t SWL) plus a 30-ton (later rated 20-ton) heavy lift derrick on the foremast to serve the big No. 2 hold, whose lower part extended back under the accommodation block as far as the engineroom. In the unsheathed Main Deck (tweendeck) were mail lockers forward of No. 1 hatch, then lockers for special cargo - usually tobacco, alcohol, and mail – either side of the foremast. Aft of No. 2 hatch were refrigerated lockers for cargoes such as frozen meat, fish and cheese and, facing the machinery casing, smaller cool stores lockers for shipboard minerals, meat and vegetables. Small pockets of cargo could be stowed in various parts of the holds and 'tween decks for discharge in various ports by means of the ship's union-purchase derricks. All this took quite a bit of planning, tallying and supervision. On northbound NGAL voyages, the ship was a store-cum-supply ship, carrying most things that could be found in a modern supermarket, hardware, or automotive store, plus such other items as lubricating oils, chemicals, personal effects, cars and machinery, with some of the latter stowed on deck.



SHANSI's Main Deck amidships as of March 1954 showing (clockwise) electrician's and engineers' stores, crew's refrigerated store, baggage room, refrigerated chambers and machinery compartment, engineers' workshop, tankroom and deeptank hatches (Swire Archives).

In NGAL service, the Jumbo derrick was often used to load heavy vehicles such as fire engines, Caterpillar tractors, generators, etc. These heavy lifts were placed in the square of the lower hold and usually stowed in with bags of rice (a staple cargo). All heavy lifts as well as all the cars were handled by the C/O and Duty Officer together with the Bosun and his crew, which included driving them off the wharf to the open areas behind the sheds.

A quirk of design quirk was the athwartship deep tank forward of No. 3. Unlike the contemporary 'F' class and the later 'C' class, this deeptank was not used for liquid cargo but only for saltwater ballast. Despite having two hatches, it was common above the shaft tunnel, so if the water came up over the tunnel when filling or dropped a few feet when emptying, there would be a large free surface area of water. Furthermore, because the ship was usually light when filling or emptying the tanks and without a large GM, any slight list would suddenly be exaggerated. If the Chief Officer was not attending and alert and the tanks kept on filling, the ships had been known to list as much as 15 degrees, which made a dramatic photo in next morning's newspapers.

Because the 'S' class were delivered in 1946-47 when MacGregor power-driven folding hatch covers were only just being introduced, their covers were still the norm for the time. The exposed upper deck hatches had several steel beams – the actual number depending on the length of the hatch – that were slung into place athwartships with the union-purchase gear. Heavy timber hatch boards about 60cm wide and about 6 cm thick were then fitted fore and aft in the inverted 'T' between the beams or, in case of the end ones, between the beam and the hatch coaming. Once the hatch boards were snug, the hatch would be covered with at least two and most times three heavy canvas tarpaulins, which were secured by banging in wooden wedges around the hatch coaming about a meter or so apart. The wedges were hammered in from forward to aft so that any heavy seas would not loosen them. It was all a lot of work for the crew but actually more watertight than Macgregor covers, which had a tendency to rust and loosen. In the tween decks, however, the hatch boards were fitted without tarps and No. 4 was flush with the timber deck.

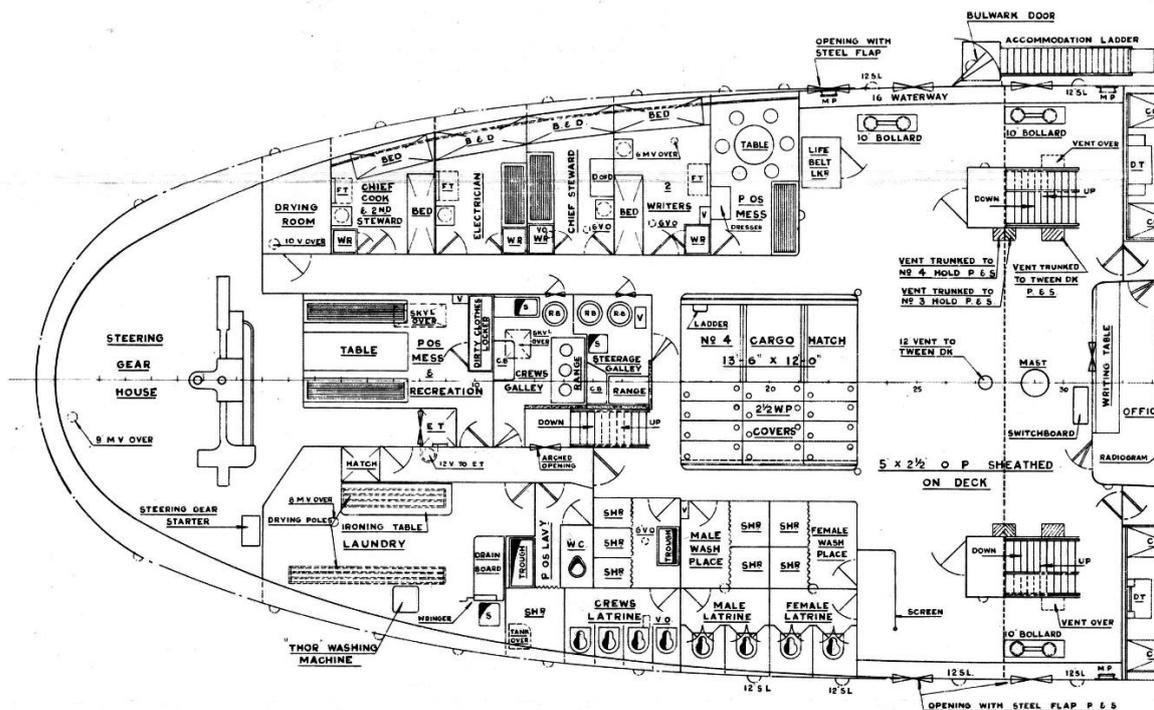
In short, the 'S' class were distinctively 'China coasters' but with the flexibility for regional trading. They were neat vessels but there was little concession to modern streamlining apart from the sharply raked bow and cruiser stern. There were prominent knuckles along the forecastle and the stern quarter, in the latter case being disguised by the hull band. Otherwise they were built 'straight up-and-down' and, for motorships, had a surprisingly tall funnel, much more so than on the earlier motorships *Yochow* (1933) and *Yunnan* (1934). They were best seen from the bow quarter, when their long forecastle and high timbered bridge front made them look bigger than they really were. Nonetheless, they proved to be sturdy ships.

### **Passengers and manning**

Although the 'S' class were designed to carry a small number of cabin passengers and hundreds of 'deck' passengers, the actual numbers of both categories varied considerably over the life of the ships and are hard to pin down. It may be that the original configuration was 15 cabin passengers, that is twelve in six 2-berth cabins on Upper Deck plus three more above in two staterooms (one 2-berth, one single-berth) forward of the officers' accommodation and adjacent to the lounge on what the GA plan identified as the Promenade Deck. As of March 1954, this was the certainly the configuration of *Sinkiang*, though by 1960 *Szechuen* was listed by Dunn as carrying only 13 first class (but 76 steerage). *Shansi*, however, was completed with three staterooms (two 2-berth and one single)

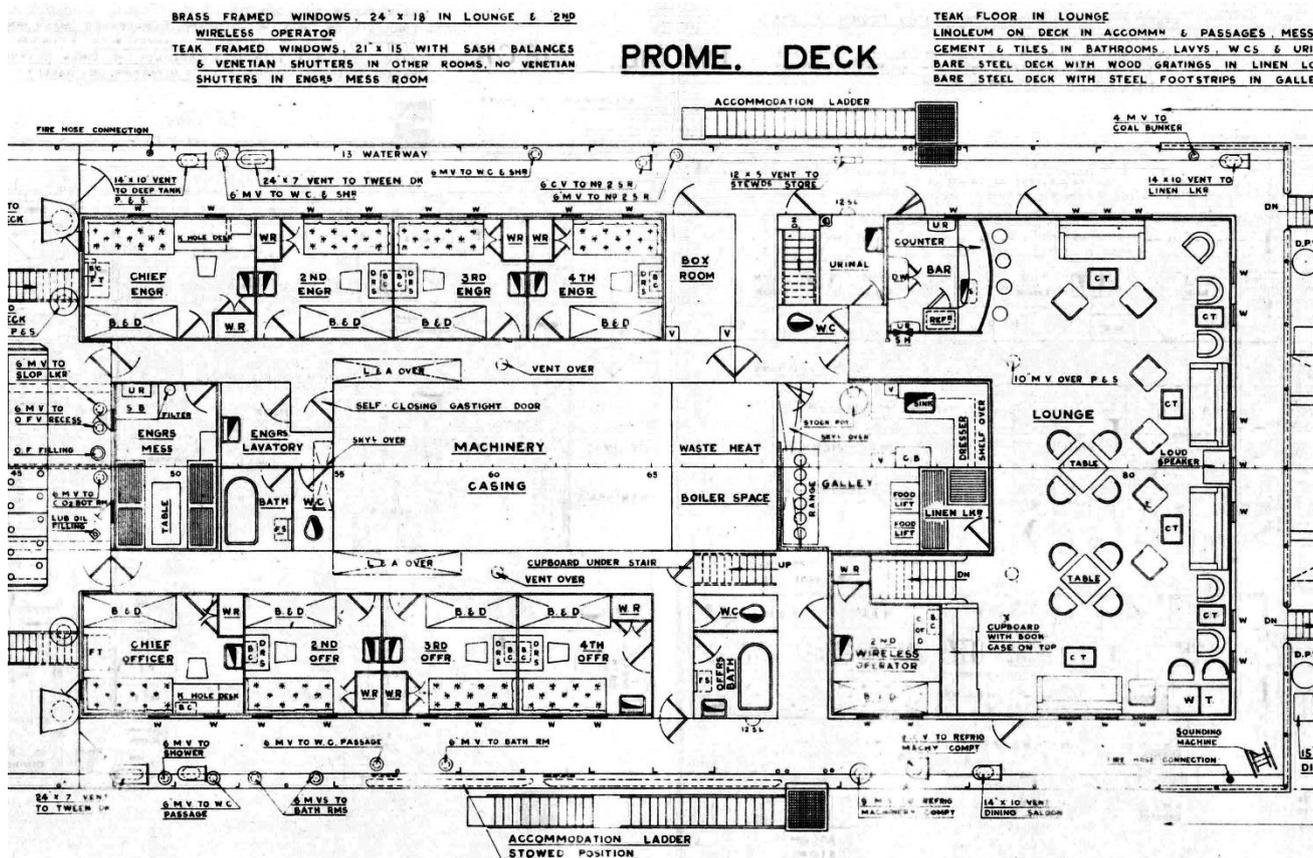
forward on the port side next to the lounge with a cocktail bar on the starboard side. Though nowhere is this explicitly stated, it seems likely that the open Promenade Deck was intended as a self-contained European deck with the cabin berths available if required for Butterfield & Swire personnel, otherwise for paying European passengers. Cabin passengers on the enclosed deck below would have been Chinese merchants or professionals while those crowded aft were the labouring class and some students. In other words, they were really three-class ships but in the postwar world of a fully sovereign China the formal distinction between first and second class was no longer maintained. In the mid-1950s for New Guinea Australia Line (NGAL) service, the passenger numbers for *Shansi* and *Soochow* would be increased to 27 and 25 respectively (see below). By the 1960s, however, just eleven passengers were carried in six cabins on the port side of the Upper Deck centre castle.

For the carriage of unberthed/steerage passengers, the 'S'-class differed from the prewar 'K'-class in that they were accommodated only aft. Whereas the surviving *Kweiyang* could carry over a thousand unberthed passengers, as also the subsequent *Anking* (1950) and *Anshun* (1951), the 'S'-class could carry therefore no more than about 500. Licensed capacity was determined by the Marine Department of Hong Kong with passenger certificates issued for each trade according to distance and weather conditions. Actual passenger numbers would depend upon prevailing political and economic conditions in South China and the Southeast Asian countries of destination and repatriation. For the purpose, the 'S'-class ships were fitted out with awning frames over most of the decks, but some of these would be removed over the years as an encumbrance to cargo-handling. The after part of the Upper Deck around Nos 3 and 4 holds was a true 'shelter deck' in that it could not be made watertight, having swinging plate doors for ventilation in good weather (see above trials photo of *Sinkiang*). On the Starboard side in way of No. 4 hatch were male and female latrines and wash-places, right aft the laundry, with the steerage passenger galley aft on the centre line aft of the hatch abutting the crew galley. A similar number of unberthed passengers, probably around 250, could be carried below in the tweendeck, which had portholes and other necessary fittings and was sheathed in Oregon pine, unlike the steel deck forward.



SHANSI's Upper Deck aft as of March 1954, showing steerage facilities (Starboard), Petty Officers (Port), and on centre line galleys and Petty Officers' mess and recreation (Swire Archives).

Though hardly large ships, the 'S'-class carried a complement of around 10 European officers and at least 40 crew. Apart from the Master, there was Chief Officer, 2nd Mate, 3rd Mate and sometimes a 4th Mate (relieving the C/O from night work at sea or in port), then the Chief, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Engineers and two Radio Officers. The Master's en suite cabin and day room was forward on the Boat Deck with the Radio Room and Senior Radio Officer's cabin aft, also with en suite. Deck officers berthed below on the starboard side of the Promenade Deck, engineers on the port side. In early years a doctor was also carried but after the passenger complement had been reduced to just 11 this position was no longer required.



SHANSI's Promenade Deck as of March 1954: shared passenger lounge and galley forward; W/O, 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, C/O (Starboard), 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, C/E (Port) (Swire Archives).

The Chinese crew had its own hierarchy and varied in size over time according to the run and the number and type of passengers. The Petty Officers consisted of the Bosun, Cassab (Bosun's assistant) and Carpenter, Fitter, Electrician, No. 1 Fireman (Oiler) and Donkeyman, Chief Steward and Chief Cook plus a Writer. Deck crew (in the 1960s about 12) was something like 4 Quartermasters, 6 Sailors, 1 Sailors' cook and 1 Sailors' Boy; engineroom crew (11) was made up of 3 watch keepers (quartermasters), 6 greasers, Cook and Boy; finally Catering (8) was 5 stewards, 1 Mess boy, 2 cooks and 1 Pantryman. Of these five stewards, one looked after the Master, one after the deck and radio officers, one after the engineers and two the passengers and public areas. On the China Coast the ship would have carried compradores and tally clerks as well. Until 1964, *Shansi* and *Soochow* carried six tally clerks and a Writer, thereafter only the Writer. On two or three trips each year, CNCo would also attach a furniture polisher, who would work his way through all the passenger and officers' furniture and paint any space in the accommodation that the Mate





L: *Soochow's* small, wood-panelled wheelhouse, Capt. Frank Hindle, 1961 (Wikiswire).  
R: Boat drill on *Shansi* (J. Asome).

The Chinese crew came from Hong Kong and changed over every twelve months or so in Sydney, which effectively was home port because, to avoid dead running to and from Hong Kong, annual dockings were carried out at the NSW State Dockyard in Newcastle. Deck crew were mostly Mainland Chinese from the vicinity of Swatow [Shantou] and Amoy [Xiamen] and were excellent seamen. CNCo still had strong family connections with their crews, so that father and sons often served many years with Swires. The stewards and catering Chinese were mostly Cantonese and in the 1960s berthed with the petty officers on the starboard side of the upper deck previously occupied by passengers. The engine-room crew, often taller and darker Northern Chinese, were housed in the poop (c.f. 1950s) with the Dispensary and Hospital above. Each group preferred to cook its own distinctive food, with fish being popular among the seamen.



L: Chinese Quartermaster (SHANSI), R: Radio Room, Siemens unit (both J. Asome).

The revised General Arrangement plans of *Shansi* show the detail of the passenger and cargo fit-out after the 1954 refit. Dated 10 March 1954 at Hong Kong, they were drawn up by S.H. Leung on the scale of 1/8-inch/foot and have been made available by courtesy of Swire Archives. Passenger cabins were arranged on Upper Deck along both sides of the centrecastle extending aft to the mainmast around a now trunked No. 3 hatch. No. 1 'stateroom' on the Starboard side was a single-berth cabin plus a 'folding bed settee', a mirror image of the adjacent Doctor's cabin, then six slightly larger 2-

berth cabins with cot beds; Port side had No. 2 as a somewhat larger single-berth, then another five 2-berth cabins. Washrooms and WCs were shared. Forward was a full-width dining room with six tables of six, thus sufficient to accommodate the 24/25 passengers and the ship's officers and doctor.

Above on Promenade Deck, removal of the three passenger cabins on the port side had allowed the timbered lounge and smoking area to be extended the full width of the ship with a 'counter bar' and stools in the place of the third stateroom. Between the lounge and the exhaust space was the galley with two foodlifts to the dining saloon below. As previously, the four engineers were berthed Port side with their duty Mess Room behind the engineroom casing while the four deck officers were berthed Starboard, plus the second wireless operator's cabin tucked in behind the lounge and stairway on that side. Farthest aft, the Chief Officer's and Chief Engineer's cabins were a bit larger as befitting their responsibilities but, as Chris Coy recalls, it was still 'all fairly "wee", a bunk on the inboard bulkhead, a settee under the window, a 'knee hole' desk opposite the door, a wardrobe and washbasin. *Soochow* was much the same but *Sinkiang* retained something close to her original configuration for just 15 passengers with separate smoking room and lounge on Promenade Deck.



SHANSI arriving Melbourne with buff funnel while on Australian Oriental Line charter, still with open plating in way of No. 4 hatch, long forecastle and knuckle clearly seen (A.C. Greene/SLV).

### **The China-Straits run**

As explained above, the 'S'-class were designed to replace the six lost 'K'-class ships in the South-China-Straits/Bangkok lines. The first pair of *Sinkiang* and *Szechuen* must have experienced some teething problems because their entry to that service was somewhat protracted. *Sinkiang* sailed out via the Straits on a Blue Funnel berth, due to arrive in Hong Kong in mid-October, then mid-November, finally on 24 November 1946. It was then another four weeks before she was released by Taikoo to take her first sailing for Singapore and Penang. Shanghai arrived more promptly in Hong Kong via Shanghai on 22 October but then spent almost three months at Taikoo, probably waiting for a new engine part to be sent out, before making her first sailing to the Straits on 17 January 1947. The claim that the ships made several initial China Coast voyages between Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tientsin under cabotage dispensation is not borne out by movements in the 'South China Morning Post', though older CNCo ships including *Tsinan* certainly did so.

From early 1947 the two sisters mostly ran in tandem alongside the passenger-carrying *Anhui* and *Kweiyang*, the 'N' and 'F'-class freighters and often *Yochow*, *Pakhoi* or *Poyang*. Routing was somewhat flexible. The 1948 'Taikoo Gazette' advertised weekly from Hong Kong to Singapore, fortnightly to Java, three times a month to Bangkok and twice monthly to Saigon; northbound it was every four days from Hong Kong to Swatow, three times per month to Amoy, fortnightly to Foochow, weekly to Shanghai, and fortnightly to North China and also to Japan (Kobe and Yokohama); calls at Hoihow, Haiphong and Pusan were now occasional while Keelung, Tsingtao, Chefoo and Manila no longer featured – Keelung would soon be reinstated.

Consequently, there was a good deal of switching between southbound and northbound sectors to maintain the advertised frequencies. At first *Sinkiang* and *Szechuen* turned around in Shanghai but from March 1947 some northbound voyages extended to Japan, some proceeded to Foochow and Shanghai, while others turned around at Swatow and Amoy. Southbound voyages from South China (Amoy, Swatow and sometimes Hoihow on Hainan Island) went through to Penang and sometimes the North Sumatran port of Belawan, alternatively to Makassar, Java ports and then Palembang for rubber before topping up in Singapore for Hong Kong.

*Shansi* (delivered end February 1947) and *Soochow* (delivered mid-December 1947) were also intended for South China-Straits/Bangkok service but, as set out below, instead began their CNCo careers on charter to the Australian Oriental Line.

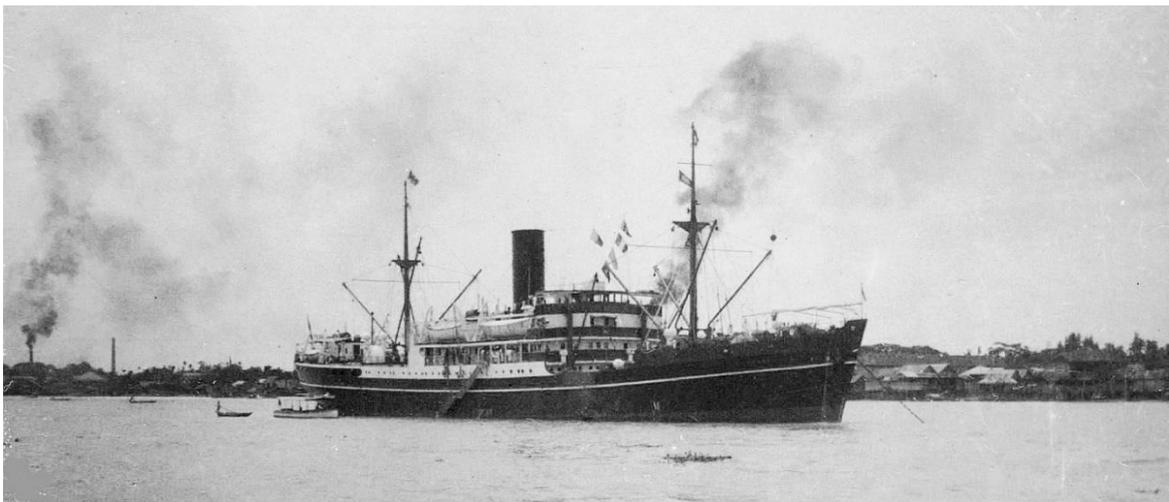
In November 1948 a new schedule saw *Sinkiang* and *Szechuen* proceeding from Singapore to load northbound at Palembang (rubber), then Sibuluan and Miri in Sarawak and, on occasion, Brunei for Foochow, Amoy, Swatow and Hong Kong. This service ran to a two-to-three weekly frequency. From November 1949 to the end of March 1950, *Sinkiang* completed two round voyages for the Australian Oriental Line (see below), then returned to Singapore, Sarawak and Brunei voyages, from early April 1950 with *Soochow*, until in September 1950 settling back into the Hong Kong-Straits shuttle. *Soochow* transferred to the Bangkok line at the end of that year.

The 'Singapore Standard' of 26 February 1951 detailed *Szechuen's* 2,000-ton general cargo for Hong Kong because it included 15,000 reels of old telephone wire, for the rest 1,567 tons of rubber, 500 bags of paraffine wax, 1,059 drums of coal tar, 25 drums of lubricating oil, 268 drums and 800 tons of coconut oil (also 280 drums for Keelung), 59 cases of soap, 40 tons of logs, 40 tons of timber, 415 bags of cassia, 605 cases of abalone and, presumably by way of transshipment, 554 cases of wine and brandy. It was certainly an assorted cargo but what stands out most is that three quarters of it was rubber. On the previous voyage in January 1951 she was reported by the 'Malayan Tribune' to have loaded 1,900 tons of rubber for Hong Kong, Tsingtao and Swatow – 'Straits Times' erroneously carried the figure as 3,000 tons.

There were also occasional insights into the passenger carriage. On 2 August 1950 *Szechuen* arrived at Singapore from Hong Kong with 70 wives and children of Gurkha soldiers whose rifle brigades had recently been posted to Malaya. Two months later when the Swatow-Hong Kong-Straits trade resumed after the mining of *Anhui* in June 1950, *Szechuen* replaced her as the consort to *Kweiyang* but with more limited passenger capacity. On 28 October 1950 she sailed from Singapore with 188 passengers for Swatow and another three for Hong Kong along with 1,500 tons of cargo, including rubber. Two months later she sailed with 409 passengers for Swatow and Hong Kong (for transfer to Macao and Canton). On 8 March she sailed with 400 passengers, including Swatow passengers from

Penang who had transferred from *Anking*. At the end of March 1951 she arrived in Singapore from Japan, China and Hong Kong, departing with 363 passengers for Swatow and another three for Hong Kong. Her next sailing on 5 April with 400 saloon and deck passengers was reported to be her last. The People's Republic of China had begun a public campaign to attract Chinese citizens to return. Because of the consequent rising demand for deck passage to China, *Szechuen's* certificate for a maximum of 500 passengers was regarded as too small. Accordingly, she would swap with the older 1,200-passenger *Kweiyang*, which latterly had been sailing northbound from Singapore via Bangkok to embark returnees to China. When *Kweiyang* was withdrawn for sale a year later in March 1952, *Szechuen* returned to the Straits-South China run, passing *Kweiyang* in the South China Sea and at Singapore 20-21 March en route to Penang crossing with the northbound *Shansi* in port from Penang and loading for Hong Kong. *Sinkiang* had sailed from Singapore for Hong Kong and Japan on 3 March.

*Shansi* had been the last of the quartette to appear in the Straits trade. After delivery from UK, she was immediately chartered out to the Australian Oriental Line (see below) and did not appear in the China-Straits trade until the end of January 1950, then became a regular consort to *Sinkiang* and *Szechuen* until her last and final sailing from Singapore to Hong Kong in March 1952. She then joined *Soochow* and *Sinkiang* in the Bangkok trade until in November 1952 being reallocated with *Sinkiang* to inaugurate the New Guinea Australia Line, in which she would be joined in mid-1953 by *Soochow* (see below). *Szechuen*, however, would remain in the Straits trade until mid-1954.



SHANSI midstream in the Chao Phya and ready to sail from Bangkok, 19 September 1952, a few weeks before transfer to NGAL. Name amidships in Chinese characters, light yards crossed on both masts to carry lights for night working. Klong Toey wharves did not open until 1954 (H. Dick coll.).

### **Australian Oriental Line**

After extended postwar requisitioning of *Changte* and *Taiping* and then prolonged refits, Australian Oriental Line was unable to retonnage its monthly line from eastern Australian ports to Manila and Hong Kong [see separate PDF on Australian Oriental Line via 'Overseas' page]. Accordingly, in April 1946 it took on charter CNCo's China coasters *Yochow* and *Yunnan*. A year later, after completing an outward passage from UK via Singapore to Hong Kong and Japan on a Blue Funnel Line berth, the passenger-carrying *Shansi* replaced *Yochow* and would remain on charter until *Taiping* recommissioned in September 1949. Over this period she would wear AOL's buff funnel and looked very smart indeed. *Soochow* commenced CNCo service with an AOL sailing from Hong Kong on 27 April 1948 and remained on AOL charter until March 1950, by which time *Sinkiang* had joined AOL at

the end of November 1949. Neither is known to have been repainted with the AOL funnel. Rex Cox in 'Ships of Hobart Harbour' mentions that on 22 March 1950 *Sinkiang* arrived at Hobart from Sydney to inaugurate an AOL service from Tasmania, loading wool and general before proceeding via Melbourne (13 April), Sydney (21<sup>st</sup>) and Newcastle (22<sup>nd</sup>) to China and Japan, thus a month loading northbound for around 2,500 cargo deadweight tons. This was the only known 'S'-class call at Hobart in what for the first few years would be an infrequent AOL service.



New SHANSI berthed at No. 2 Circular Quay, Sydney, probably mid-June 1947 on her first Australian Oriental Line voyage, AO Line buff funnel and name on side in Chinese characters (David Finch/NAA).

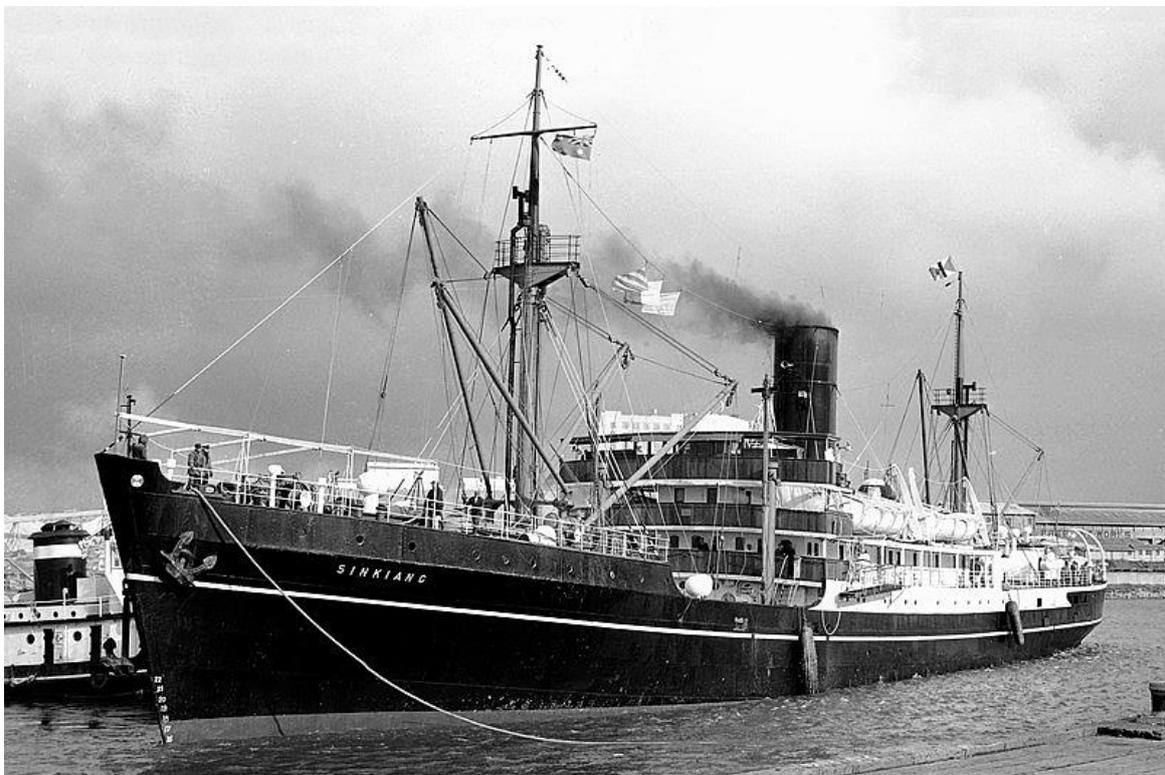
### **The New Guinea Australia Line (NGAL)**

The commissioning of *Anking* and *Anshun* in 1949/50 meant that adequate tonnage was now available for the Hong Kong-Straits line, potentially releasing at least two new 'S'-class for deployment elsewhere. When CNCo determined to open a line between Sydney, Brisbane and the Australian colony and Mandated Territory of Papua New Guinea in competition with Burns, Philp & Co., the 'S' class with their passenger accommodation were considered to be suitable. It may have helped that they were already known in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane from their voyages for Australian Oriental Line. Events moved quickly in the latter half of 1952. *Shansi* arrived at Sydney on 22 November in preparation for the inaugural sailing on Tuesday 2 December via Brisbane to Port Moresby, Samarai, Lae, Madang, Rabaul, Port Moresby and return. *Sinkiang* took a British Phosphate Commission (BPC) supply voyage from Melbourne to Nauru on 20 November, then returned to Sydney in time for the next sailing on 19 December.

Although the 'S' class had been completed with limited accommodation for first-class cabin passengers amidships on the upper deck, the larger complement were deck passengers in the open upper deck at Nos 3 and 4 hatches. This configuration was not appropriate for NGAL service, which required more well-paying cabin accommodation for Australian expatriates and their families travelling to and fro as public servants, businessmen and missionaries, though there would often be a quite a mix of nationalities, personalities, and professions. The solution was to plate in the after Upper deck around No. 3 hatch and fit more cabins. While *Shansi* and *Sinkiang* took the early sailings in their original form, *Soochow* was refitted by Taikoo to carry 25 first-class, then once she came into service in July 1953, *Shansi* was similarly refitted for 27 passengers, returning to NGAL service in November after a positioning voyage from Hong Kong on 31 October for Sydney via Nauru with Chinese contract labourers. From 1961, however, the larger *Anking* and *Anshun* were carrying

passenger to Port Moresby, which was also well served by airlines. Accordingly, during 1962 dockings, the passenger complement of *Shansi* and *Soochow* was scaled back to just 11 (five twin-berth and one single) – the starboard cabins in way of No. 3 tween were reallocated to Chinese petty officers and catering crew. Notwithstanding the rating of First Class, there were now absolutely ‘no frills’ for ‘S’-class passengers on the Moresby shuttle and no formal entertainment while at sea. The experience was therefore hardly comparable with the amenities and bustle of Burns Philp’s heavily subsidized 15-knot pocket liner *Bulolo* (1938) but, for all that, *Shansi* and *Soochow* retained a loyal clientele.

*Sinkiang*, however, retained the flexibility of her steerage capacity and never had cabin accommodation for more than 15. This allowed her to be chartered once a year by BPC for a recruitment and repatriation voyage from Nauru and/or Ocean Island to the Gilbert & Ellice Islands, thence Hong Kong with Chinese repatriates. At such times, an ‘F’-class or prewar China coaster would relieve in NGAL.



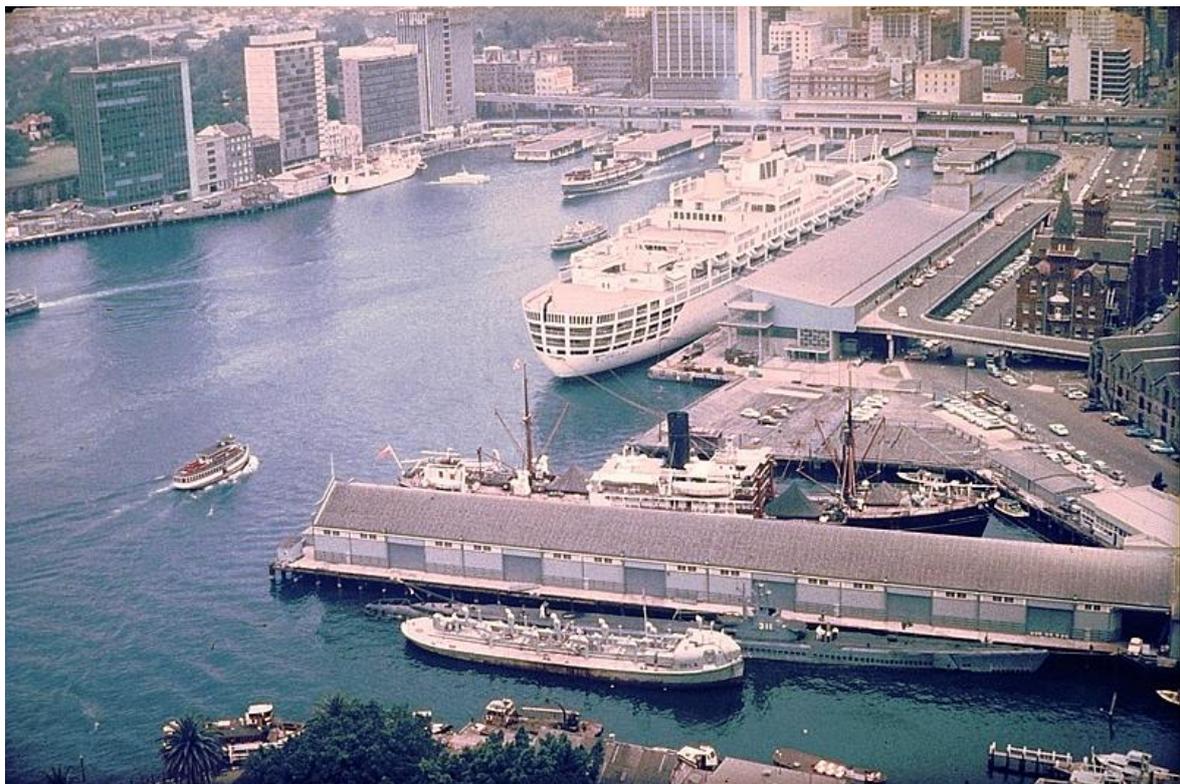
SINKIANG berthing at North Corio Quay, Geelong, after an inducement call (W.G. Volum/NAA).

From February 1954 the NGAL service was extended south to Melbourne, hitherto served by transshipment in Sydney from AOL ships, at first only in the case of the slightly faster *Soochow* while *Shansi* and *Sinkiang* continued to load only at Sydney and Brisbane. This penalized Melbourne shippers, so it soon became a three-ship, three-port service. Nevertheless, the combination of 12-knot ships and unpredictable turnaround in Australian ports was a scheduling headache. When the larger and faster *Anking* and *Anshun* were introduced to the AOL service in 1960-61, replacing the elderly *Changte* and *Taiping*, they were advertised to carry NGAL passengers and cargo from Melbourne to Port Moresby, thereby upgrading the passenger accommodation as well as the frequency for cargo. The ‘S’-class continued to call at Melbourne into 1962, then reverted to a simpler

Sydney and Brisbane loading. At the end of 1962 *Sinkiang* was released, leaving *Shansi* and *Soochow* to maintain a fortnightly, two-ship shuttle to Port Moresby and Samarai only.



SOOCHOW loading at Sydney, c.1962, during re-development of Circular Quay (D. Finch/NAA).



Taken from the Sydney Harbour Bridge pylon 30 or 31 December 1965, SOOCHOW at 7a Circular Quay. In foreground at 7b, the 'CNC berth' of the early twentieth century, is submarine USS ARCHERFISH for R&R leave. At passenger terminal white-hulled ORIANA, opposite fisheries research vessel OSHORO MARU, plus harbour craft including first hydrofoil MANLY. Former AUSN building with steeple at right (S. Kentwell).

Captain Chris Coy qualified for his Mate's Certificate at Hong Kong in 1962 and sailed to Sydney on *Changsha* to transfer on arrival to *Soochow* on the NGAL run. He was Chief Officer of *Shansi* when Mike Carolin joined as Third Mate in 1966. Their recollections of the 'S'-class and NGAL are drawn from the book *In Coral Seas* (Part III: Seagoing Memories).



SHANSI off Watson's Bay on arrival at Sydney in later NGAL years (J. Mathieson/NAA).

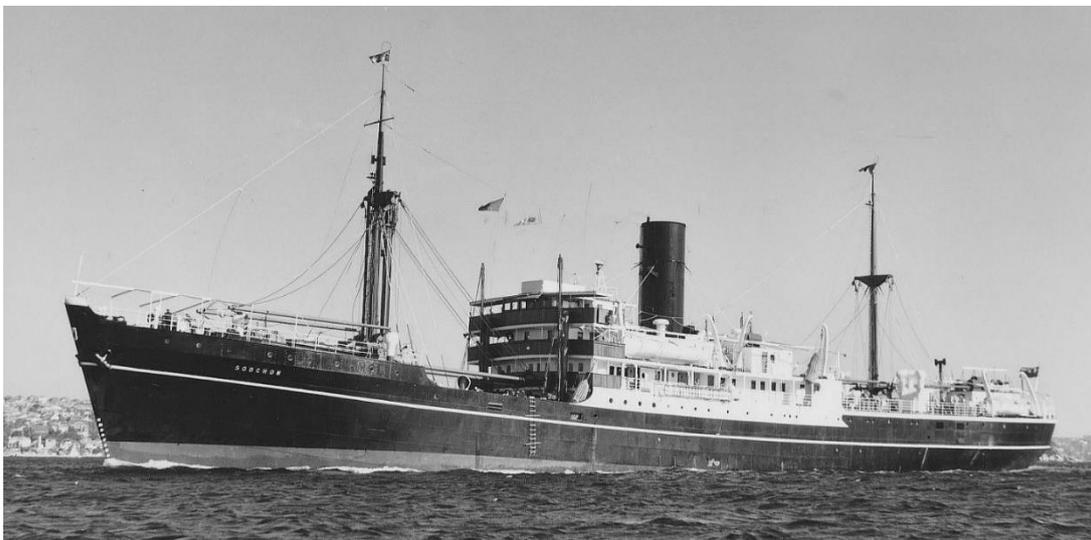
In the 28-day schedule for the Port Moresby 'shuttle', the actual voyage was about a three-weekly round trip: from Sydney to Brisbane about two days at sea; two to three days at Brisbane; four-and-a-bit days at sea to Port Moresby; three to four days in Port Moresby; one day in Samarai; and then a straight run of five to six days at sea back to Sydney. The ship by then had radar – not a fixture as built – but no gyro. The log was streamed from a boom with a bridge-wing log clock. Navigation through the Coral Sea was by sextant, weather permitting!



SHANSI berthed at 9 Walsh Bay, Sydney. The Swire houseflag has been added as an emblem on the stem (S. Kentwell).

At Sydney, the first day or so was spent discharging and the last three days loading. The spare days were to cover delays, whether caused by wharf strikes, mechanical failure or bad weather, in order to guarantee a fixed-day, fortnightly sailing by alternate ships. The ships departed Sydney every second Monday afternoon, with reefer cargo, fresh fruit, vegetables and mail being loaded that day. Return cargoes out of PNG were scarce, especially while Burns Philp had the copra monopoly, and usually consisted of a little coffee, rubber, timber, empty pallets, and returning passengers' effects, including cars.

The eleven passengers were a goodly mix. There was a missionary family from the USA who had had enough of the Highlands after the second body was carried into their compound on a stretcher for the various bits to be put back together. We had a London missionary on his first leave in twenty years, patrol officers, traders, and of course 'Steamies' (Steamship Trading Company people) – Burns Philp folks travelled in their own ships. The officers' and passengers' lounge across the forward end of the Promenade deck was a delight, with parquet flooring, timber panelling, and wooden windows with louvered shutters. The wheelhouse was timber, as were the bridge front bulwarks: all in all a very good effect!



SOOCHOW departing Sydney, missing second boat amidships (J. Mathieson/NAA).

Another unusual feature was the anti-piracy grilles that still existed at the aft end of the accommodation to the height of the Boat Deck. After World War I, China coasters had become easy targets for pirates, who either boarded from junks or, more usually, concealed themselves amongst the deck passengers. Ships were seized and held for ransom, sometimes also the officers and passengers. Countermeasures involved carrying armed Sikh guards to man a series of lockable grilles fitted to secure the centre accommodation and especially the bridge and engine room. As late as the 1960s a revolver and ammunition were still part of the fit out of this old China coaster. One of the Third Mate's occasional duties was to check and clean them and report this back to Hong Kong.



SOOCHOW departing Sydney. White plating now extends no further aft than the centre castle, giving a more conventional look (R. Wilson/NAA)

PNG in the mid-1960s was still a fairly primitive place. Most ports were a combination of import centres for much needed essentials, and export points for the small but growing range and tonnage of export cargoes - nearly all agricultural products plus some timber. Mining and minerals developed later. The ports were small and unsophisticated, with small, basic wharves, few navigation marks, no tugs, few pilots, and inadequate charts and surveys. They also served as administrative centres for large areas of the country, and staging points for shipment to and from the hinterland, as for example, Lae, for the highlands of Goroka and Mt Hagen. The local populations were largely uneducated and, in most cases, tribal to the point of being primitive. Tribal warfare still flared up, and relations between different areas and islands were often strained, Bougainville being a notable example.

The administrators, police chiefs, harbour masters, and managers of big firms like Steamships and Burns Philp were mostly expatriate Australians. There was a frontier or mining town atmosphere, and some of the 'expats' were certainly "rough, tough, Aussie characters" - as they needed to be to cope with the conditions. From the 1970s after self-government and independence, they had to cope with increasing violence towards the white population, and the growing 'raskol' problem (gangs of unemployed males or criminals.). All this in a country that was always very hot, very humid, and often wet!

Captain Coy recalled 'In Coral Seas' the situation at the various ports of call:

In the early 1960s *Soochow* called at Port Moresby, Samarai, Lae, Madang, Kavieng, and Rabaul on a five to six-week voyage that was more extended than the Port Moresby 'shuttle'. Port Moresby was the biggest port, but even in 1966 still only had a basic 'T'-shaped jetty. *Changsha* and *Shansi* together would fill the wharf, with sterns overhanging. Cargo landed onto the narrow concrete wharf had to be transported to the Steamships warehouse off the end of the 'T', often causing congestion. A lot of the labour was conscripted from the Highlands, sometimes never having seen a ship before.



SHANSI discharging at the 'T' Wharf, Port Moresby, mid-1966. The Swire houseflag is recently emblazoned on the funnel (M. Carolin).

Samarai was probably the most unusual outpost, situated in the China Strait, Milne Bay area. A teardrop-shaped island, it was about a mile long and one could walk around it in twenty minutes. Export cargoes of copra, coffee and rubber were brought in by boat - and sometimes by canoe - from all over the tip of Papua. They took Australian goods to the plantations, farms and villages. Samarai once had the best cricket team in the South Pacific and the rocks round the oval were whitewashed every Saturday. The oval was also used for the Southern Papua 'sing-sing', when tribes dressed in regalia of feathers and paint would gather for singing and dancing. The District Commissioner lived in a splendid house on top of a hill. One of these gentlemen thought it would be a good idea to dig a tunnel under the hill down to the edge of the oval. His idea was to bring the southeast trade wind to the cricketers. When the powers-that-be in Port Moresby discovered that he had spent a large portion of his budget doing so, the DC was sent on leave 'south'. Samarai closed in the early 1970s when the administration was shifted to Alotau on the mainland in Milne Bay.

Lae is the main port and administration/distribution centre for the northeast portion of New Guinea. Originally the port had been at Salamaua, close by to the south but, during World War II, the Americans constructed at Lae a long two-ship wharf built out parallel to the shore, with a ramp at each end. This enabled Lae to become PNG's second largest port and town. In the early 1960s there were still nearby wartime wrecks, also a large Australian war graves cemetery just out of town. NGAL agents in Lae were Colyer, Watson & Co., and later the big trading company Collins & Leahy, who went on to become the leading trader, road transport and regional airline from Lae into the New Guinea Highlands.

Along the northeast coast from Lae, Madang was a delight. Its attractive little harbour had one 'overseas' wharf, a small coastal jetty, and many small jetties used by various church-owned trading boats. The main cargo out of Madang was bagged copra. Without air-conditioning, one soon learnt to keep a drink mat on top of the gin and tonic or it would be covered with bugs. On *Shansi* an unusual cargo from Madang was frozen passionfruit pulp in five-gallon drums brought down out of the Highlands. The Harbour Master was 'Frog' Evans, who ruled supreme in his port. Pilotage was not compulsory and most CNCo masters handled their own ships in and out of the port. If we were leaving at night, 'Frog' Evans would leave a hurricane lamp at the end of his lawn, right at the water's edge.

This somewhat primitive navigation light was the turning mark to swing into the very narrow Dalman Passage.

Near Madang in the Vitaz Strait is the island of Umboi, a very active volcano that is always smoking and frequently erupts. This whole area is volcanic, and the coastline of the Bismarck Sea was extremely poorly surveyed, with some of the charts dating back to 1860: the north coast of New Britain was just a dotted line. All ships trading regularly to the area had their own hand-drawn charts with their plotted positions of landmarks and soundings overlaying the original ones. These could differ from the charted positions by as much as five miles.

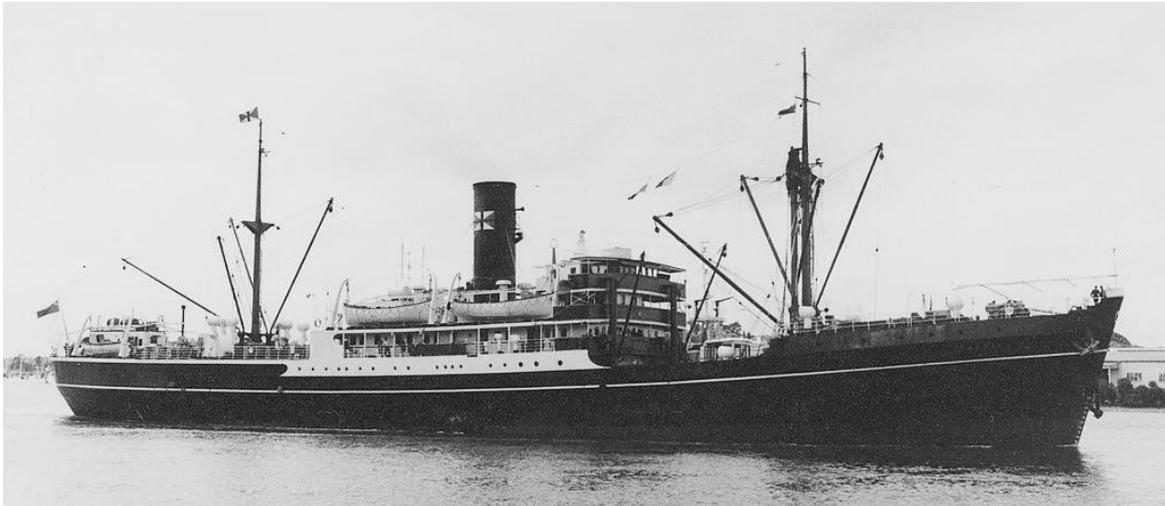
Wewak was the last outpost on the north coast before the West Irian border, near the mouth of the Sepik River. When I first called there in the early 1960s on *Chefoo*, we anchored off, after which one small barge and several surfboats came alongside. We had a general cargo, plus cars (Datsun utilities) and a large amount of bagged cement. The ship's crew discharged the cars without incident, but the cement was another matter. With the ship rolling to the northwest monsoon swell, and a bit of a swing on with the union-purchase derricks, the slings of cement quite often went into the sea on one side of the surfboats; hoisted up, then into the sea on the other side, and if we were lucky, into the surfboat on the third attempt. Eventually, in the 1960s, a long wooden finger wharf was built – it was later upgraded for containers.

Rabaul was the main port on the island of New Britain and one of the most impressive natural harbours in the world, being in fact the crater of a volcano with sheer sides plunging into very deep water. During World War II it was an important port for the Japanese and many wrecks remained. It was also a submarine base: pens and several wrecked submarines existed in the cliff face until the 1960s. Rabaul then had two wharves, a small wooden one and another made from a sunken Japanese freighter that had been concreted over at deck level. A new concrete wharf was built in the late 1960s.

Another outpost that was special was Kavieng, at the top end of New Ireland. There were no navigation lights or marks there for the 12-mile passage in through the reefs. For the first few years I was running there, they were salvaging World War II wrecks from reefs along the entrance passage. If we did not finish cargo by 1730 hours, we would stay alongside till first light, so that we could find our way out by various palm trees in line with drying reefs or sandy coves.

By the mid-1960s, the 'S' class had become too small for the expanded trade and too slow and expensive in their cargo-handling. (Sir) Adrian Swire in London was attracted by the palletised system of cargo-handling used by Norwegian shipping line Fred. Olsen in its shortsea trades. In July 1966 consultants Norconsult reported favourably on the scope for palletising the NGAL service by means of sideport loading and discharge. Fred. Olsen's 3868-dwt, 14-knot engines aft motorship *Bahia* was deemed suitable for such conversion and as *Papuan Chief* arrived at Taikoo Dockyard in Hong Kong on 23 March 1967. With faster turnaround, she would replace both *Shansi* and *Soochow*, which were then sold to Pacific International Lines of Singapore for July delivery. Capt. Chris Coy was relieved on *Shansi* and sent up to Hong Kong to stand by the conversion. Unfortunately, as the conversion neared completion, PRC-inspired riots broke out in Hong Kong and, after a series of rolling strikes, Taikoo reluctantly imposed a lock-out. All this delayed completion so that not until early July was *Papuan Chief* ready to sail for Sydney with its complement of forklift trucks and a load of empty pallets. In the interim, *Shansi* and *Soochow* had to make extra June sailings, which brought them dangerously close to missing their contracted delivery dates in Singapore. After presale fumigation in Sydney (436

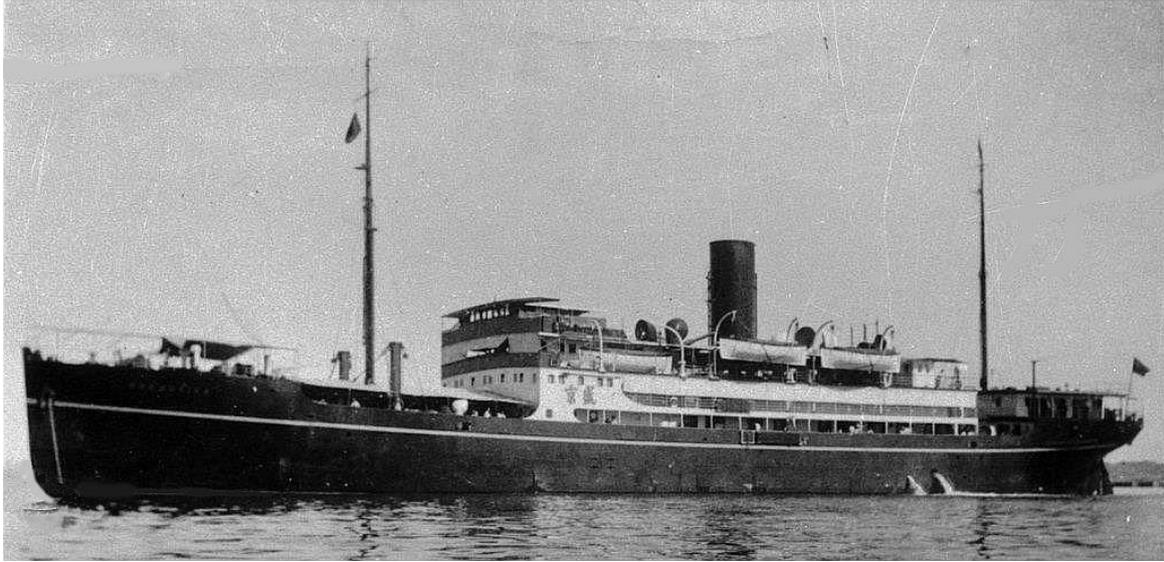
mice, 1 rat), *Shansi* departed Sydney on her last northbound sailing on 3 June 1967 and, having left Samarai cargo on the wharf at Port Moresby, was delivered just a few hours ahead of the nominated cancellation time. *Soochow* took her last departure from Sydney on 18 June. They had both served twenty years in the CNCo fleet and the last fifteen years in NGAL with an excellent reputation for reliability.



SHANSI on last call at Brisbane, 5 June 1967 (Rod Ambrose/Chris Gee).

### ***Szechuen* and the Taiwan run**

*Szechuen* was the only one of the quartette not to be placed in the New Guinea Australia Line and the only one never to visit Australia. Instead she remained on the Japan-Hong Kong-Straits run with some diversions to Bangkok. In mid-1954 she was advertised for 5/7-day cruises on the turnaround from Singapore to Penang, Belawan (Sumatra) and return but after the August sailing for Hong Kong was switched to the Bangkok line. A few months later it was decided that she would replace the larger and faster turbine passenger liner *Shengking* in the Hong Kong-Keelung line. *Szechuen* arrived from Bangkok on 24 January 1955 and after a few days at Taikoo Dockyard took her first sailing for Keelung at noon on the 30<sup>th</sup>. *Shengking* was promptly sold to Shun Cheong S.N. Co. of Hong Kong and put in service in what had been the CNCo line between Swatow, Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang, Voyage 1 in February 1955 still as *Shengking*, then from May as *Taioosek*. [see separate PDF on Shun Cheong S.N. Co.]



Turbine liner SHENKING which SZECHUEN replaced on the Hong Kong-Keelung line (Wikiwire).

John Asome recalls that the voyage of 470 nautical mile voyage involved a Saturday evening departure from Hong Kong's West Point wharf (Sai Ying Poon) with arrival at Keelung early on Monday morning, then a Tuesday evening departure to arrive back in Hong Kong early on Thursday morning, all fairly leisurely but to a steady rhythm.



SZECHUEN at West Point Wharf, Hong Kong, late 1950s (<https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-uEipgyvwm6s/WOoGM1XMI1I/AAAAAAAAzG0/vM4yNv9DSnYlwCNcdPHOQxfFPbRkc4ghwCLcB/s1600/Hong%2BKong%2Bin%2Bthe%2B1950s%2B%252863%2529.jpg>)

Passengers were a mix of cabin-class and deck, including a lot of students. Deck passengers slept on the deck and either had to provide their own food or pay someone to do it. They had no separate eating space. Because she plied up the China Coast and through Taiwan Strait, *Szechuen* retained her piracy grilles. At sea the entrances to the midships accommodation were locked. According to Chris Coy, guards were no longer employed, so two seamen, usually the quartermaster and extra lookout, would come down to open up when required. Deck crew berthed forward in the forecabin, engine crew aft.



SZECHUEN arriving Hong Kong, December 1964, on one of her last voyages, passengers gathered on the after deck, still with Union Jack on the hull (Dr George Wilson).

A notable aspect of the Taiwan run that distinguished it from CNCo's NGAL and other foreign-going lines was that most of the cargo was not manifested by CNCo office but ticketed by the ship's comprador. This was a hangover from the old China Coast practice, as described by Robert Bickers in *China Bound*, and was condoned by the Company.

There were some unusual cargoes. Chris Coy remembers that in February 1962 there were two large diameter wooden tubs, some three meters in diameter and one-and-a-half meters tall, on deck beside No. 3 hatch. They were filled with fresh water and across the top was a pole with two paddles attached one each side of the pole. Two men, in shifts, stood on a platform attached to the pole and rocked it back and forth so that the paddles splashed the top of the water and gave the thousands of small fish enough air for the 40-hour journey to Keelung, from where they would be transported into the mountains to restock the lakes.

Crew also had their perks. In Keelung all the crew and especially the catering department went ashore many times. Whereas going down the gangway, they would be dressed to the nines in suits and puffed up in multiple layers like Mr. Michelin, on the way up they would be wearing just shorts and a singlet, everything else having been sold at a profit. Crew also took back big wicker baskets of fresh vegetables for the family or restaurant or sale in Hong Kong.

*Szechuen* carried on the Taiwan shuttle like clockwork for ten years through typhoons and occasional political turmoil without any significant mishap. Then at the end of 1964 it was decided to replace her with the much larger and more luxurious *Anking*, which since 1960 had been operating between Hong Kong and Sydney [see separate PDF feature article on *Anking* and *Anshun*]. *Anking* had a certificate for 40 First-, 72 Second- and 455 Fourth-class (dormitory style) passengers as well as a much greater cargo capacity. *Szechuen* would be redeployed with *Sinkiang* to a new monthly direct line from Japan and Hong Kong to Fiji (Suva and Lautoka, Levuka on inducement), returning via Honiara, thereby cutting out the roundabout route via New Guinea.

'Pacific Islands Monthly' (March 1965) reported that *Sinkiang* would make the first sailing from Japan on 28 February, Hong Kong on 10 March. *Szechuen* took her final departure for Keelung on 22 March 1965, then proceeded to Japan to commence loading for Fiji. Nevertheless, this was just a swansong. In the latter half of 1965 CNCo introduced two much bigger ships into the South Pacific Line, namely the 9,640-dwt, 14-knot cargo liners *Yochow* (ex *St Thomas*) and *Yunnan* (ex *St Essylt*), both built in 1948 for South American Saint Line. Not long afterwards, the Fiji line was merged back into the South Pacific circuit and in mid-1966, after twenty years of continuous service, *Sinkiang* and *Szechuen* were both sold to a Panamanian subsidiary of Kie Hock Shipping Co. Ltd of Singapore.

## The Singapore Years

The mid-1960s were a remarkable time in Singapore. On 9 August 1965 Singapore was expelled from the Federation of Malaysia and became an independent republic and city-state. Then in August 1966 agreement was reached between Singapore and the new military government of Indonesia to end the three-year campaign of Confrontation by which Indonesia had sought to suppress the new Federation. Through 1964 and 1965 trade between Indonesia and the entrepot of Singapore has either to be smuggled through the blockade or at least nominally re-routed through third ports such as Hong Kong or Bangkok. In August 1966 trade was 'normalised' to resume its usual course and Singaporean shipowners, now sailing under the Republic of Singapore flag, were keen to buy secondhand tonnage. One such company was Kie Hock Shipping, registered in Singapore in September 1950 by the Indonesian-Chinese Tay family. Another was Pacific International Lines (Pte) Ltd (PIL), established in Singapore in March 1967 by Y.C. Chang, who until the previous month had been General Manager of Kie Hock, which he had built into a substantial regional operation.

**Kie Hock** evolved from three sons of a Hokkien father who had been a fish merchant in prewar Palembang. Tay Kie Hock, after whom the firm was named, died in 1946. Of his two brothers Tay Kie Guan (b. c.1918), better known as Tay Hock Gwan, also as Lineng Cheng, moved to Singapore while Tay Kie Thay moved to Jakarta. Between Palembang, Singapore and Java, they did well from import-export and blockade running during the Indonesian revolution and in 1950 used some of the proceeds to establish the family company Kie Hock Shipping Co. Ltd in Singapore with Hock Gwan as Managing Director to develop regular lines between Singapore and Indonesia under the British flag. Early in 1957, a line was opened with China. Expulsion of the Dutch-flag KPM from Indonesia in December 1957 gave further opportunity and allowed Kie Hock to buy a number of KPM ships laid up in Singapore and transfer warbuilt tonnage (mainly converted landing ships) to the Indonesian flag. The China line and fleet expansion along with the outbreak of regional rebellions in Indonesia during 1958 gave Kie Thay reason to move from Jakarta to Singapore, where he became Managing Director of Kie Hock. Then on 28 May 1961 he was shockingly kidnapped outside his home. A ransom was paid but instead of being handed back he was gruesomely murdered, though his remains were not recovered until January 1966. By this dramatic turn of events, the sole surviving brother Hock Gwan/Kie Guan became Chairman while his fellow Hokkien and almost exact contemporary Teo Woon Tiong was promoted from Manager to General Manager.

In mid-1966 when, as mentioned, Kie Hock acquired *Sinkiang* and *Szechuen*, Teo was still General Manager and playing an active role in normalizing commercial relations with Indonesia (Straits Times, 15/8/66). In mid-September Kie Hock's *Megama* became the first Singaporean ship to load a commercial cargo (flour and textiles) for Jakarta. Then, as of 1 February 1967 Teo suddenly resigned

from Kie Hock after 18 years working for the Tay family and the following month set up his own firm Pacific International Lines Ltd (PIL), contributing S\$3 million of his own capital and bringing in 10 associates who each contributed \$250,000 to a total amount of almost \$6 million in paid up capital. The Government of newly independent Singapore was offering generous tax concessions and other incentives to firms registering their ships under the Singapore flag. In May Y.C. Chang, as henceforth he preferred to be known in Mandarin style, took delivery of the ex-KPM freighters *Sinabang* (*Kota Naga*) and *Siberoet* (*Kota Singa*) and then in July, now acting on his own behalf as Pacific International Lines, added *Shansi* and *Soochow*. Thus, within the space of a year, Chang had bought all four 'S'-class ships but, as things worked out, was able to keep under his own control only the latter two, which became rivals for the other two, both pairs henceforth sailing under different owners, nomenclature and liveries and, in consequence, also having quite different appearances.

Of the two Kie Hock ships, *Sinkiang* at first became *Tong Jit* and *Szechuen* became *Tong Bin*, 'Tong' ('East') being Kie Hock's standard nomenclature. Nevertheless, because Confrontation was not yet formally ended and the new Singaporean flag was still problematic for local trading, they were both registered to the Panamanian subsidiary Asia Selatan Enterprises Ltd, translating from Malay as South Asia Enterprises or, in Chinese, Nan Yang Enterprises but denoting Southeast Asia and the intent of regional trading. Within a few months, however, they were transferred again to another Panamanian subsidiary Africa Shipping Co. Ltd and renamed *Gamsolo* and *Gambaris* respectively, obscure names of no obvious derivation. Then in 1967 they were transferred again to single-ship Panamanian companies with the equally obscure names of *Kadina* and *Karingo*. All this made no difference to the ships' appearance for they continued throughout to wear Kie Hock's plain white funnel with black top, which seemed like an inversion after the familiar CNCo black. Their trading pattern is also largely unreported. Kie Hock ships traded primarily with Indonesia, but in July 1969 Kie Hock opened a joint service with Compass Agencies Pte Ltd (est. September 1967) between Port Swettenham (soon to become Port Kelang), Singapore and East Malaysian ports, for which *Kadina* and *Karingo* with their passenger accommodation would prove well suited.



Kie Hock's KARINGO at Singapore, undated, Panamanian flag on hull (coll. H. Dick).

By the 1970s, Kie Hock was showing signs of the loss of Y.C. Chang's guiding hand. On 27 November 1970 the company was restructured as Kie Hock Shipping (1971) Pte Ltd and on 1 January 1971 commenced trading as such at the old address of 48 Cecil Street. Nominal capital of S\$2 million was 50% paid up with the shares held by Tay Hock Guan, his second wife Kwok Poh Yin, his sons Tay Chew Chuan and Tay Jin Chuan and the Hong Kong-registered family company Good Fortune

Enterprises Ltd. Nephew Tay Beng Chuan, son of the deceased founder Tay Kie Hock (d. 194?), had only a small holding but took over day-to-day management from his uncle and Managing Director Tay Hock Gwan. At first things went well. In 1974 the company and its fleet of almost 40 ships turned in a profit of S\$9.6 million. Thereafter the escalation in fuel prices combined with increasing competition from other Singaporean and Indonesian firms squeezed profitability, such that in 1976 the operating result was a profit of just \$146,000 and by 1977 a loss of S\$3.7 million.



Kie Hock' KADINA ex GAMSOLO ex TONG JIT ex SINKIANG in Malacca Strait, now apparently cargo only with just two midships boats (P. Foxley).

There was a further complication. Around the same time, Tay Hock Guan took a third (some accounts say fourth) and much younger wife and became increasingly distracted from Kie Hock's Singaporean operations. When his other wives made life difficult in Singapore, Tay moved his domicile to Hong Kong. In June 1975 he had registered Kie Hock (1975) Hong Kong Ltd, which the following year took over from his holding company Good Fortune Enterprises Ltd of Hong Kong a 55% controlling shareholding in Kie Hock Shipping of Singapore. With most of the ships registered offshore to Panamanian affiliates, he then borrowed through Kie Hock against mortgages on those ships. Within two years, the Singapore company had been systematically hollowed out and was unable to pay its current debts. Despite rumours, none of this was publicly known but there was an inkling when on 1 May 1978 *Business Times* carried a long article headlined 'Rift behind the phase out at Kie Hock', which pointed to a split in the Tay family. While Kie Hock's usual advertisements no longer appeared, some former Kie Hock ships were now sailing under the flag of a new firm Kie Gwan Shipping (Pte) Ltd set up in December 1977 with Hock Gwan's son Tay Chye Chuan as Managing Director while other ships were sailing for Pacific Ocean Lines (Pte) Ltd set up in January 1978 with nephew Tay Beng Chuan as Managing Director. The whereabouts of Hock Gwan were said to be unknown but by rumour he was in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, it still came as a terrific shock in Singapore when 'Straits Times' of Saturday 27 May 1975 reported that on the previous day the High Court had granted a petition for insolvency and ordered Kie Hock (1971) Pte Ltd to be wound up. Some 22 firms were party to the petition for a total amount of S\$900,000. The Official Receiver was appointed as liquidator. Subsequently nine

other external parties petitioned for claims of S\$5 million. Bankruptcy of this well-established Singaporean firm was a massive embarrassment to the Singaporean Government, whose Minister of Finance commissioned a thorough investigation that eventually reported back in June 1981, whereupon the inside shenanigans became public knowledge. The headline in 'Straits Times' of 8 June read 'Tycoon's marital woes led to company disaster', under which it was explained that, after Tay Hock Gwan had moved to Hong Kong with his fourth (sic) wife, he had tried to run the Singapore company by telephone and telex and occasional visits but, according to his nephew, increasingly become indifferent to it. The last AGM had been held in November 1975, two and a half years before the bankruptcy.

Next day came more financial detail. The company had been trading while insolvent since late 1977, at which time it was owed more than S\$10 million by 13 of Tay's Panamanian shipowning companies – by May 1978 that amount had accumulated with interest to S\$11.5 million. The Singaporean company had control of most of the ships but allowed them to be transferred or sold for further trading or for scrap without insisting upon repayment. In absentia, Tay Hock Gwan, now aged 64, faced 24 summonses should he ever return to Singapore. In September 1981 he pleaded guilty to 23 of those charges and paid a token fine of S\$31,000. His nephew Tay Beng Chuan, aged 43, who had been left to manage the Singapore firm, admitted later that month to six charges against him, all relating to failures to act in the best interests of the company by consenting to improper disposal of vessels to the disadvantage of the Singapore firm and failing to properly disclose and record the various transactions. It was accepted that he had been beholden to his strong-willed uncle, who had raised him from the age of three. Beng Chuan paid a fine of S\$12,500 and in due course was rehabilitated, even becoming a member of parliament in 1997 as well as active in various charities. On 30 July 1988 'Straits Times' reported that Hock Gwan, aged 72, had that week and at the same time divorced his first wife Madam Lim Chui Gim, aged 69, whom he had married in 1939, and second wife Madam Kwok Poh Yin, aged 61, whom he had married in 1946 and born four daughters and two sons, and would shortly legalise his marriage to Yiu Luen Kam, aged 33, by whom he already had four daughters aged between nine and thirteen. All told, it was a clear case that multiple wives and many children are not, in the long term, good for a family business. The stable marriage of Teo Woon Tiong/Y.C. Chang with Madam Yap Hong (d. 1990) is a clear example of the opposite.

This messy background is necessary to understand what happened to the Panamanian-flag *Kadina* ex *Sinkiang* and *Karingo* ex *Szechuen*, both operated from Singapore by Kie Hock Shipping but beneficially owned by Tay Hock Guan. While older tonnage had been laid up and rather haphazardly sold off, these two vessels were kept in commission. At the end of April 1977, *Kadina* arrived at Singapore for floating repairs and laid up in the Eastern Anchorage. There in the early hours of 18 September she was struck by a fierce Sumatran squall, took on water through unsecured openings, listed to port and at 05.30 hours sank on her side as the 21 crew hurriedly abandoned ship (New Nation, 19/9/77). Salvage operations were begun promptly but were then abandoned when Kie Hock could not provide the necessary funds. Eventually the wreck was taken over by the Port of Singapore Authority, which signed a \$250,000 contract with Jurong-based Selco Salvage to raise the wreck and clear the fairway. Refloating was finally achieved on 2 September 1978, a year after the sinking, and the hulk was immediately removed to Jurong for demolition.



KADINA laid up in Singapore's Eastern Anchorage, 27 April 1977, 3 weeks before capsizing (C. Gee).



Cut-down KADINA hulk on 1 March 1978, righted but not yet refloated (C. Gee).

At the time of *Kadina's* sinking, *Karingo ex Szechuen* was also laid up in Singapore for repairs and maintenance. Photos taken a year later show her still unfinished, implying that she had not been operational in the interim, no doubt reflecting Kie Hock's parlous financial position. During 1977 her ownership was transferred to Tay Hock Gwan's son Tay Chye Chuan under the Malaysian flag, implying that she was intended for operation by Kie Gwan, perhaps in its line to to East Malaysia, but by October of that year she had been delivered to shipbreakers in Hong Kong and was under demolition, thus in the same month that the hulk of *Kadina* went under the hammer in Singapore.



KARINGO under repair at Singapore, 26 April 1977, possibly after Guan Guan charter (C. Gee).



KARINGO laid up at Singapore, 1978, newly painted Kie Hock funnel (D. Brown).

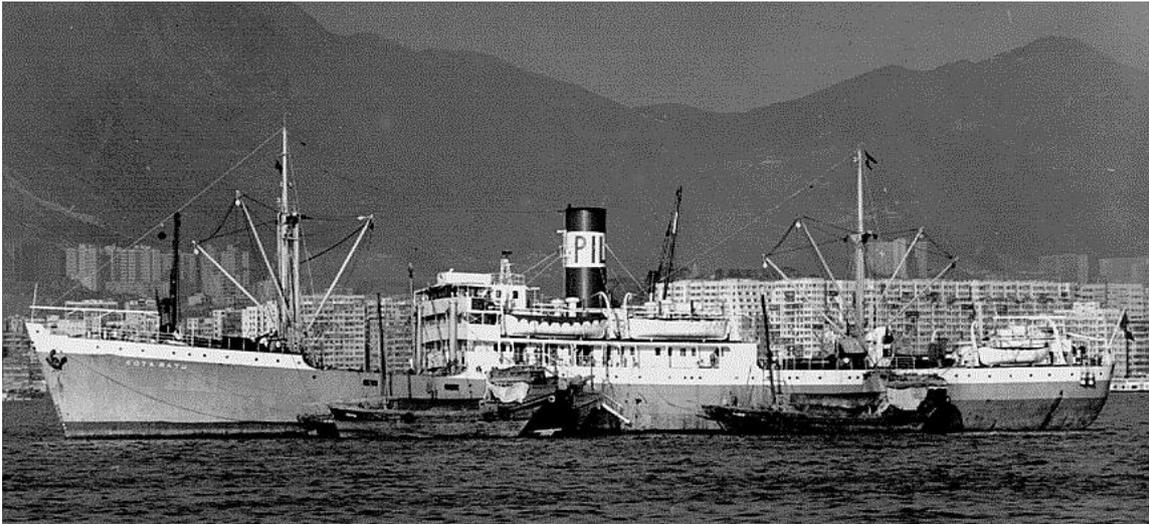
***Pacific International Lines'*** *Shansi* and *Soochow* were delivered in Singapore in July 1967 and immediately docked for cleaning and repainting and change of name to the Malay *Kota Rajah* ('King City') and *Kota Ratu* ('Queen City') respectively. Correct Malay would have been 'Kota Raja' but in Indonesia with Dutch spelling that would have been read as 'Kota Raya' ('Great City'), so 'H' must have been added to remove ambiguity.



SHANSI in Keppel Dock, Singapore, 15 July 1967, a few days after delivery, funnel already repainted in PIL colours, new lettering on bow reads 'Kota Raja', 'H' yet to be added (M. Carolin).

Their initial disposition is not documented. In PIL's early months Chang concentrated on shortsea lines to Indonesia and Bangkok but he had much bigger ambitions to open lines across the Indian Ocean to the Middle East, Red Sea and East Africa. In October of that year he finalised agreement with the People's Republic of China to run a liner service from Chinese ports to the Middle East and subsequently also to East Africa. It was a bold and seemingly risky move but Chang had established contacts with the Chinese Government as far back as September 1956, when he had been a member of a Singapore trade mission to the PRC prior to opening Kie Hock's China line early the following year. As Chang observed years later, 'shippers had to channel all their cargo through the China Import-Export Corporation. You register your ship with that company in Beijing. Every month they allocate certain cargo to you. It was very regulated, very prompt. Freight payment was also very prompt'. He might have added that prompt payment in hard currency was often not forthcoming in the more familiar trade with Indonesia.

Lloyd's Shipping Index records *Kota Ratu* as making an early voyage to Red Sea ports, returning in September 1967 from Port Sudan and Massowah to Singapore. Besides Karachi and the Persian Gulf, this became PIL's first liner trade beyond Southeast Asia. Then in January 1968 *Kota Ratu* was deployed to open a line between Penang/Singapore and Hong Kong/Swallow, the route that Chang had pioneered for Kie Hock in 1957, subsequently buying the Australian coastal liner *Duntroon* and bringing her into South China-Straits-Indonesia service in October 1961 as *Tong Hoo*. In April 1969 PIL registered Pacific International Lines (Hong Kong) Ltd and in mid-1969 bought CNCo's much larger *Changsha* to be used for the same purpose as *Kota Panjang* [see separate PDF feature article on *Changsha* and *Taiyuan*]. That released *Kota Ratu* to make at least one voyage to Dar-es-Salaam and Mombasa, sailing on 6 September from Singapore, quite probably en route from Hong Kong and Whampoa. On 25 January 1970 there was a last sailing from Hong Kong and Swallow to the Straits, then in May 1970 a rice loading from Rangoon to Singapore, in June to Colombo and Turicorin and in August from Bangkok (destination unknown). Surprisingly, in the New Year of 1970 she turned up back in Brisbane, departing on the 4<sup>th</sup> for Lae. *Kota Rajah's* movements, by contrast, are barely reported. Nevertheless it may be said that, despite their limitations of size and speed, *Kota Ratu* and *Kota Rajah* played an important role in establishing PIL's liner network, just as previously they had helped to pioneer CNCo's postwar liner network.



KOTA RATU at Hong Kong, 11 December 1969, with light grey hull. Stern knuckle visible (W. Schell).



KOTA RAJAH ex SHANSI at Port Kelang, awnings rigged aft for deck passengers (Airtoto).

By 1974, however, PIL had greatly expanded its fleet with modern secondhand tonnage and its two 'S'-class were no longer front-line vessels. The luxury liners *Kota Bali* (ex *Tjiwangi*), *Kota Singapura* (ex *Tjiluwah*) and *Kota Panjang* (ex *Changsha*) offered more and passenger better accommodation [see separate PDF feature article on *Changsha* and *Taiyuan*], which was now redundant in a small, 12-knot cargo vessel. Accordingly, in 1974 *Kota Rajah* was transferred to become the first ship of a new Malaysian entity, Malaysia Shipping Corporation Sdn Bhd (MSC), as *Sang Suria* ('Noble Sun'). *Kota Ratu* followed in mid-1975 as *Sang Fajar* ('Noble Dawn'). Not to be confused with the state-owned Malaysian International Shipping Corporation (MISC), MSC was not a wholly owned PIL subsidiary but an affiliate with significant Malaysian equity (not identified). Corporate data identify the firm as registered in April 1963, that is before PIL, which must have bought in later and probably used MSC as agent in Malaysia. The ships were registered in Penang and traded under the Malaysian flag, but just where they traded is not known. The <clydeships.co.uk> website refers to them as being used as troopships, if so presumably on charter to the Malaysian Government, but the source for this is unknown.



Malaysian-flag SANG SURIA ex SHANSI at Singapore, 29 April 1977, only a year before demolition but still well kept with varnished bridgework (C. Gee).



SANG SURIA, an earlier but undated view without aft shade awnings (Don Brown).

*Sang Suria* ex *Shansi* lasted only until May 1978, when she was delivered to breakers at Gadani Beach. As already mentioned, *Kadina* and *Karingo* went to breakers in the second half of the same year. That left only *Sang Fajar* ex *Soochow*, by a few months the newest of the quartette but also the one with the most powerful (secondhand) engine. She arrived at Kaohsiung for demolition on 5 November 1984 and work commenced 11 days later. By then she was just one month short of 37 years in service. There is some uncertainty as to the fate of several other Swire and Jardine China Coasters under the PRC flag but *Soochow* may well have been the last survivor of this once common and versatile type.



SANG FAJAR ex SOOCHOW at Singapore, 29 March 1976 (D. Salisbury).

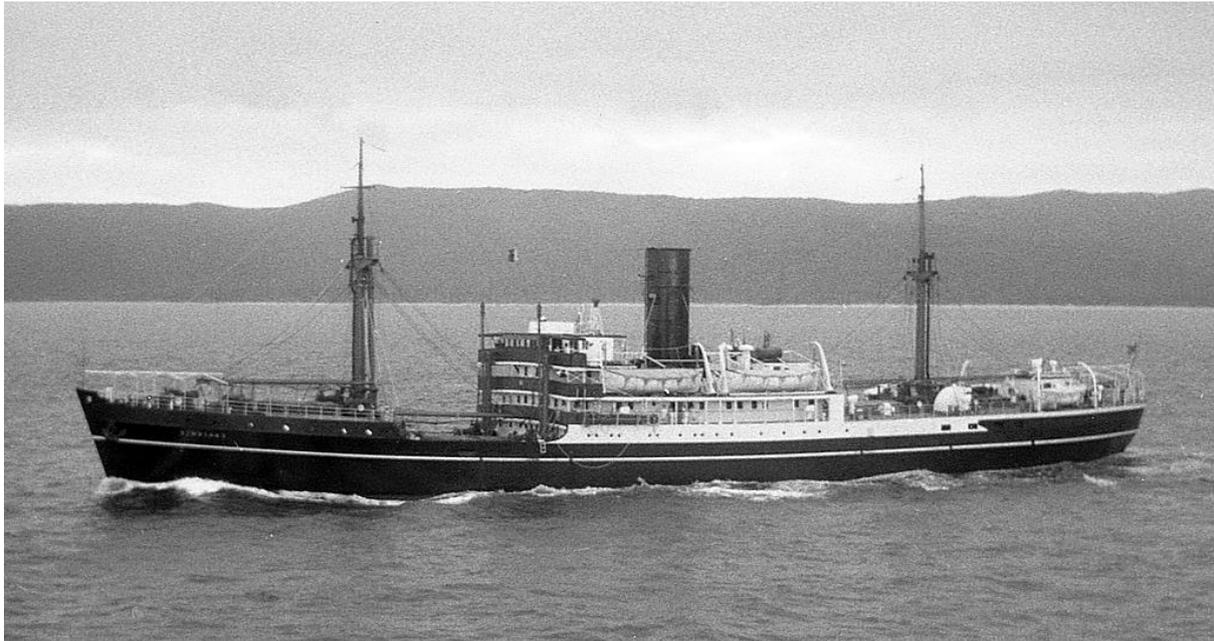
### Other sources

Technical details from Lloyd's Register and Wikisire, also the annual Schell registers and the Clydeships website; the China-Straits section draws on shipping information from the Singapore press at [eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers); that on Australian Oriental Line draws on that post at <oldchinaships.com>; the material on NGAL from *In Coral Seas* is supplemented by shipping information from the *Daily Commercial News & Shipping List* (at Trove); the 'Singapore years' section also draws on [eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers](http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers) and to unpublished notes on Kie Hock compiled by Nigel Kirby and Howard Dick with material from the official report on the bankruptcy of the Singapore firm, detail on Y.C. Chang and PIL from ('The Secret of Our Success', *PSA PortView*, Aug. 2003). Also [www.clydemaritime.co.uk/troon\\_shipbreaking/statira/](http://www.clydemaritime.co.uk/troon_shipbreaking/statira/) with thanks to Graham Thursby. Cross-references are made to other posts on at <oldchinaships.com>

### Ship details

**SINKIANG** (1946-66) 3020/46-7 (307.2 x 46.3', M4cy/12½k, 27/-/82 pass)

Built by Scotts' S.B. & Eng. Co. Ltd, Greenock (#638) for and 31/7 del. to CNC. 6/66 sold to Asia Selatan Ent. Ltd (Kie Hock Shg Co. Ltd), Panama r. TONG JIT. 10/66 t/f to Africa Shg Co. Ltd r. GAMSOLO. 1969 t/f to Kadina Ent. Co. Ltd S.A., Panama r. KADINA. Late 4/77 arrived Singapore for repairs, 18/5/77 (02.30) in Eastern Anchorage struck by sudden squall, listed to port and 05.30 sank on side, 21 crew abandoned ship; 2/9/78 refloated by Selco Salvage under \$250,000 contract to PSA, 3/9 del. at Jurong to National Shipbreakers (Pte) Ltd and 6/10 under demolition.



SINKIANG 'full and down' at sea, March 1960 (Dr George Wilson).

**SZECHUEN** (1946-66) 3034/46-7 (307.2 x 46.3', M4cy/12½k, pass)

Built by Caledon S.B. & Eng. Co. Ltd, Dundee (#424) with engine by A. Stephen & Sons Ltd, Glasgow for CNC. 1955-65 on Hong Kong-Keelung service. 3/65 t/f to Japan-Fiji service. 5/66 sold to Asia Selatan Ent. Ltd (Kie Hock Shg Co. Ltd), Panama r. TONG HIN. 10/66 t/f to Africa Shg Co. Ltd, Panama r. GAMBARIS. By 10/67 t/f to Karingo Shg Co. Ltd S.A., Panama r. KARINGO. By 4/77 laid up at Singapore, now t/f to Tay Chye Chuan (Malaysian flag). 10/78 under demolition at Hong Kong by Ming Hing & Co.

**SHANSI** (1947-67) 3147/47-2 (307.2 x 46.3', M4cy/12½k, pass)

Built by Scotts' S.B. & Eng. Co. Ltd, Greenock (#641) for and 25/2 del. to CNC. 5/47-9/49 on charter to AOL. 12/52-6/67 Sydney-New Guinea trade. 6/67 sold to Pacific Int. Lines (Pte) Ltd, Singapore r. KOTA RAJAH. 1974 t/f to Malaysia Shg Corp. Sdn Bhd, Penang r. SANG SURIA. 5/78 breaking up began at Gadani Beach.

**SOOCHOW** (1947-67) 3137/47-12 (307.2 x 46.3', M3cy/12½k Doxford, pass)

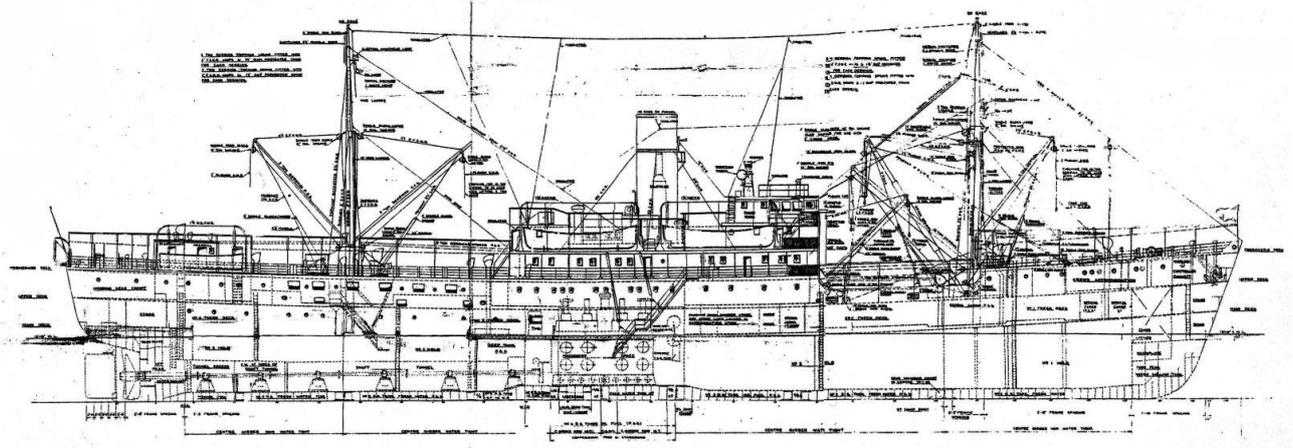
Built by A. & J. Inglis Ltd, Glasgow (#1353) with engine from *Statira* (4852/1937), 18/12 del. to CNC. Mid-1953-6/67 in Sydney-New Guinea line. 6/67 sold to Pacific Int. Lines (Pte) Ltd, Singapore r. KOTA RATU. Mid-1975 t/f to Malaysian Shg Corp. Sdn Bhd, Penang r. SANG FAJAR. 5/11/84 arrived at Kaohsiung for breaking up by Nan Sin Steel Ent. Co., 16/11 work began.



SOOCHOW beside Mercantile Wharf and Wool Stores, Brisbane on 21 August 1962, fully loaded and about to depart northbound, taken from *Tjiluwah*. Bulimba ferry in foreground (A.J. Kentwell).

**M. V. "SINKIANG"**  
**GENERAL ARRANGEMENT OF PROFILE & TOP DECKS**  
**(AS FITTED) MAR 1924**  
**SCALE: 1/8"=ONE FOOT**

22-37201  
 Approved for the  
 U.S. Navy  
 12-2-24



**PARTICULARS OF MASTS**

Mast	Type	Height	Top	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
1	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'
2	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'

**PARTICULARS OF DECKS**

Deck	Area	Length	Width	Area	Area
1	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'
2	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'
3	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'
4	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'
5	100'	100'	100'	100'	100'

