

CHINA NAVIGATION'S EARLY-POSTWAR 'F'-CLASS QUINTETTE

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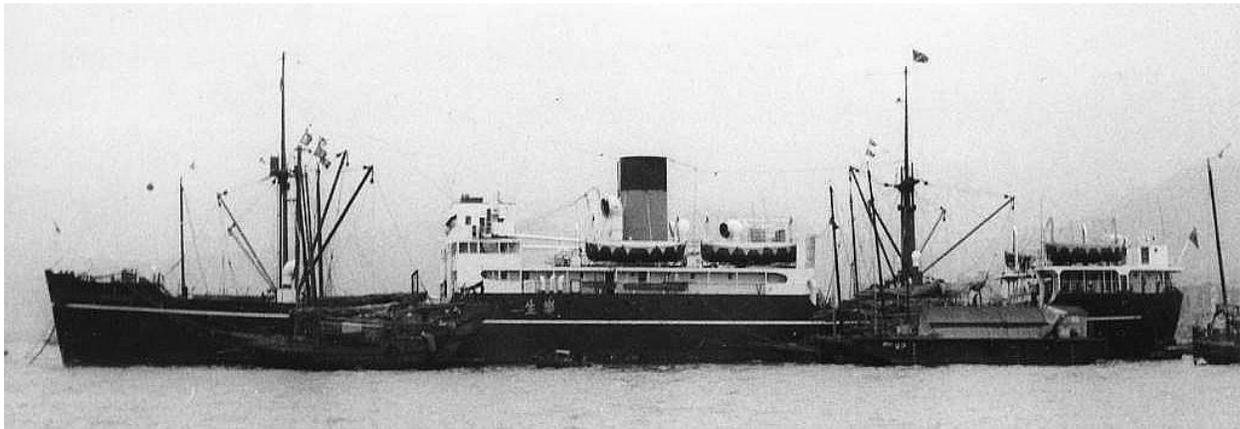
China Navigation's (CNCo) heavy war losses meant that by 1943 a rebuilding program would be essential to any proper restoration of postwar lines, even allowing for the end of extra-territoriality and the loss of the domestic China Coast business. Notwithstanding, British yards, including CNCo's affiliated yard of Scotts at Greenock, were fully occupied with naval and standard-type construction. Replacement China coasters were therefore not an immediate priority. However, as attention turned to the reoccupation of Burma and Malaya, there was more flexibility. Displaced China coasters were rendering sterling service on the Indian Coast and in the Indian Ocean, as also in Australian waters, and their utility had become apparent. Accordingly, the Ministry of War Transport (MOWT) took the design of the Lithgow-built *Taksang* (1935) and Hong Kong-built *Wing Sang* (1938), both built for Jardine's Indo-China S.N. Co. Ltd, as the prototype for a class of five vessels designated to become storeships for the military campaign in Southeast Asia. When it became apparent that the ships would not be ready in time, the building berths were reallocated, two to Jardines, for construction by Short Brothers at Sunderland, and three to CNCo for construction by William Gray at West Hartlepool. Neither yard had previously built for these owners, nor had they experience in building China coasters. To the extent allowed, each owner modified the fit-out to suit their postwar needs but there were no frills. The most substantive difference was that quadruple-expansion engines were substituted by standard triple-expansion units.

The lead ship became CNCo's *Foochow*, launched first on 24 August 1945, within days of Japan's surrender, and delivered that December, followed by Jardine's *Taksang* (launched 9 September 1945, delivered January 1946), then *Fengtien* and *Fukien* (both February 1946) and finally *Loksang* (March 1946). They were all five-hatch, two-deck freighters with a deadweight of just over 3,700 tons, for some reason almost five feet shorter between perpendiculars and one foot narrower in beam than the prototype *Taksang*. Their triple-expansion delivered a service speed of 11-12 knots. A subsequent pair of *Funing* (November 1950) and *Fengning* (February 1951) had the same layout and engines but were three feet longer overall (a more raked bow) and with an extra 100 tons deadweight. Visually they had more varnished woodwork around the bridge. The latter pair were usually deployed in the Japan-Straits line, though in mid-1951 *Fengning* made her first CNCo round trip between Japan and Australia.

Each carried six boats (four amidships, two aft) and had some accommodation, probably having been built to accommodate twelve passengers but by 1958 advertised as only six (seven for *Funing/Fengning*). In 1955 all five ships were stiffened by Taikoo to allow a deeper draft with an extra amount spent to rearrange the crew's quarters of *Fengtien* and *Fukien*, the total cost being almost HK\$1.7 million.



FUNING (1950) departing Hong Kong, 11 April 1961, as yet without radar mast (Dr George Wilson).



Early LOKSANG of Jardines at Hong Kong (T. Rayner*).

During 1955 CNCo took delivery from Taikoo of the freighters *Chungking* (IV) and *Chengtu*, 6830-dwt, 5-hatch motorships with a speed of 16 knots (service speed 14½ knots) [see separate study on Taikoo-built 'C' and 'K' class cargoliners of 1955-62 accessed from the 'Big 5' page at oldchinaships.com]. This new 'C' class was a marked improvement on the old China coasters, including the postwar 'F' and 'S' classes, and though able to carry a few passengers demonstrated the shift in focus towards freight. Both were placed in service from Japan, Shanghai and Hong Kong to Singapore and Indonesian ports. *Chekiang* followed in November 1957 and *Chefoo* in August 1958. These new ships allowed *Fengning*

and *Funing* to be switched in early 1956 to a new monthly Japan-Hong Kong-Papua New Guinea line, returning via Australian ports direct to Japan with wool on the Australian-Oriental Line berth.



FENGNING at (West) Circular Quay, Sydney, 5 May 1956, on her first northbound loading for Japan. The Sailors' Home is behind the bow, the Harbour Bridge pylons far right (David Finch/NAA).

After CNCo took delivery of new ships, most notably *Anking* and *Anshun* in 1950-51 for the Straits line and then from 1955 the 'C' class, sailings to Indonesia increasingly became a separate operation rather than just an extension. By 1955 CNCo no longer advertised onward sailings from Singapore to Indonesian ports, while vaguely advising 'carrier's option to proceed via other ports to load and discharge cargo'. Indonesian sailings now bifurcated into two lines. From Japan there were fortnightly sailings via Hong Kong and Singapore to Palembang (on inducement), Jakarta, Semarang, Surabaya and Makassar, then direct back to Japan, often via Sandakan for timber logs. The other service was from North China (on inducement), Shanghai and Hong Kong/Whampoa, advertised as 'regular sailings', approximately monthly, with the ports of call and frequency according to inducement. The vessels employed on both these lines continued to be the reliable five 'F'-class.

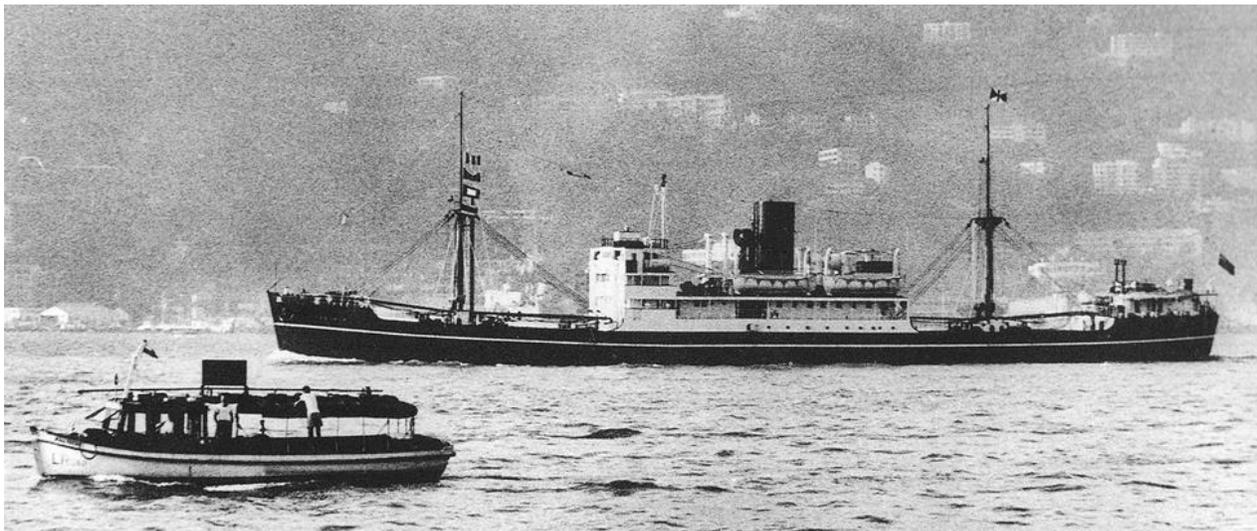
It was therefore awkward timing that in December 1957 Dutch assets were seized throughout Indonesia and all Dutch nationals ordered to leave. Then in March 1958 a secessionist rebellion broke out in Indonesia and quickly led to armed conflict. Ships were sunk in various locations. In light of the economic and political disruption, combined with war risk, in August CNCo suspended calls at Indonesian ports by the new 'C'-class and instead extended the Japan-China-Bangkok-Straits line from Singapore through to Western Australia (Fremantle) in a joint service with Blue Funnel, which contributed one ship (initially *Asphalion*, then from 1959 *Sarpedon*) alongside CNCo's two 'C' (and later 'K') class. From October, *Chengtuo*, *Chungking* and the new *Chefoo* were switched to the Japan-Hong

Kong-Papua New Guinea line, now extended eastwards to Suva and, on inducement, to Noumea, then on to Sydney to load mainly wool back to Japan. *Fengning* and *Funing* reverted to the Japan-Indonesia line while the original 'F'-class trio carried on the China-Hong Kong-Indonesian line.

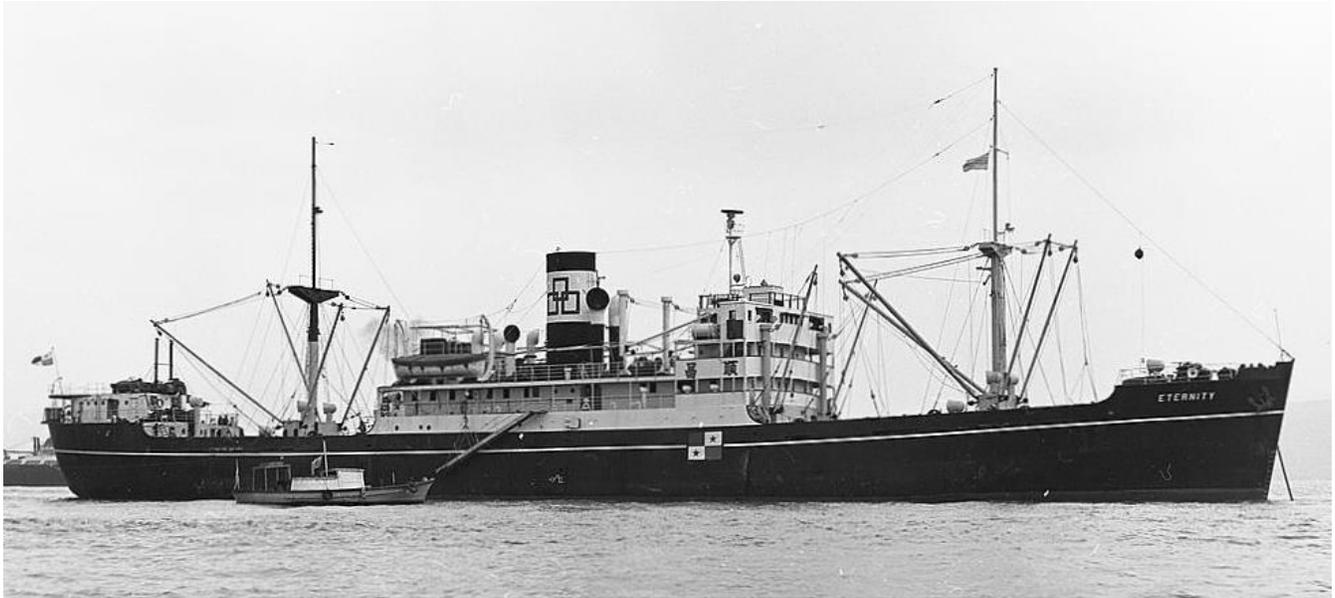
After September 1963, Indonesia's campaign of Confrontation against Malaysia led to difficulties for British shipping trading to Indonesian ports. The China-Indonesia line was suspended and *Funing*, *Fengning* and *Fengtien* were switched to a direct Japan-Bangkok line. *Foochow* and *Fukien* carried on the Japan-Indonesia line for a few months longer but in August 1964 *Fukien* took the last sailing from Hong Kong. The newer *Fengning* (1951) and *Funing* (1950) were sold in September and October 1964 to the PRC flag-of-convenience entity Ocean Tramping Co. to become *Wishford* and *Starford* before passing in 1972 to Chinese registry at Shanghai (name and fate unknown) [see separate study by the same author on Ocean Tramping Co. Ltd. accessed via PRC page at oldchinaships.com]. The other three were all sold in 1965: *Fengtien* became the Panamanian-flag *Chung Lien* before being broken up at Kaohsiung in September 1969 as *Tung Ho No. 1*; *Foochow* as *Eternity* sank in the South China Sea on 12 March 1970 en route from Phnom Penh to Hong Kong with rice and buffaloes; *Fukien* traded for the same Hong Kong firm as the Panamanian-flag *Felicity* until broken up at Whampoa in May 1975.

Below is a selection of 'F'-class photos in CNCo service and in later guise. Because these ships spent so much time in Indonesian ports, they were perhaps the least photographed of CNCo ships. Nevertheless, they did make occasional voyages to Australia and were also seen in Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan.

FOOCHOW 福州 (1945-65) 3394/45-12 (328.6 x 47.1', T3cy by Central Marine Eng. Wks/11½ knots)
Built by William Gray & Co. Ltd, West Hartlepool (#1185) for CNCo, London. 10/65 sold to Prosperity S.S. Co. S.A. (Winley S.S. Co. Ltd, Hong Kong), Panama r. ETERNITY. 12/3/70 capsized and sank S. of Hong Kong in 22.2N, 114.17E o/v Phnom Penh-Hong Kong with bagged rice and buffaloes.

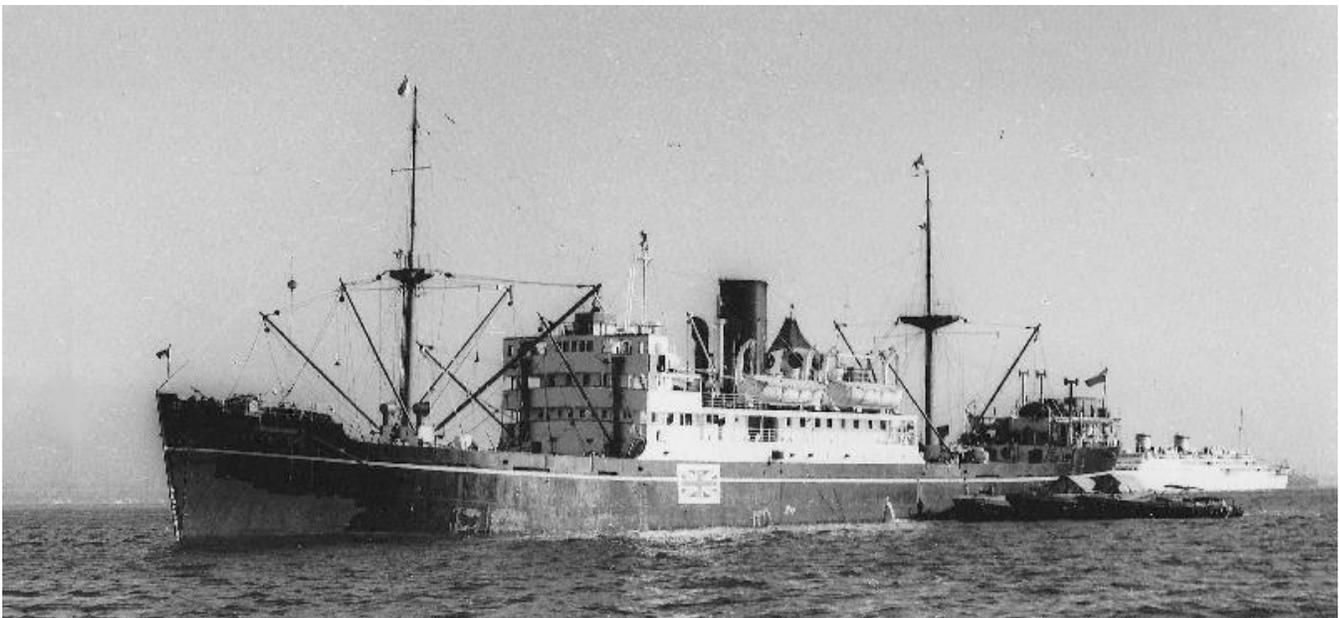


FOOCHOW at Hong Kong (Wikiswire).



ETERNITY ex FOOCHOW at Danang, 7 November 1970, now only one boat either side (W.A. Schell).

FENGTIEN 奉天 (1945-65) 3394/46-2 (328.6 x 47.1', T3cy by Central Marine Eng. Wks/11½ knots)
 Built by William Gray & Co. Ltd, West Hartlepool (#1186) for CNCo, London. 11/65 sold to Chung Lien
 Nav. Co. S.A. (Great Pacific Nav. Co., Taipeh), Panama r. CHUNG LIEN I. 1969 r. TUNG HONG No. 1.
 QIII/1969 broken up at Kaohsiung.



FENGTIEN at Singapore c.1961, KOAN MARU (1936) astern (probably R. Gabriel).



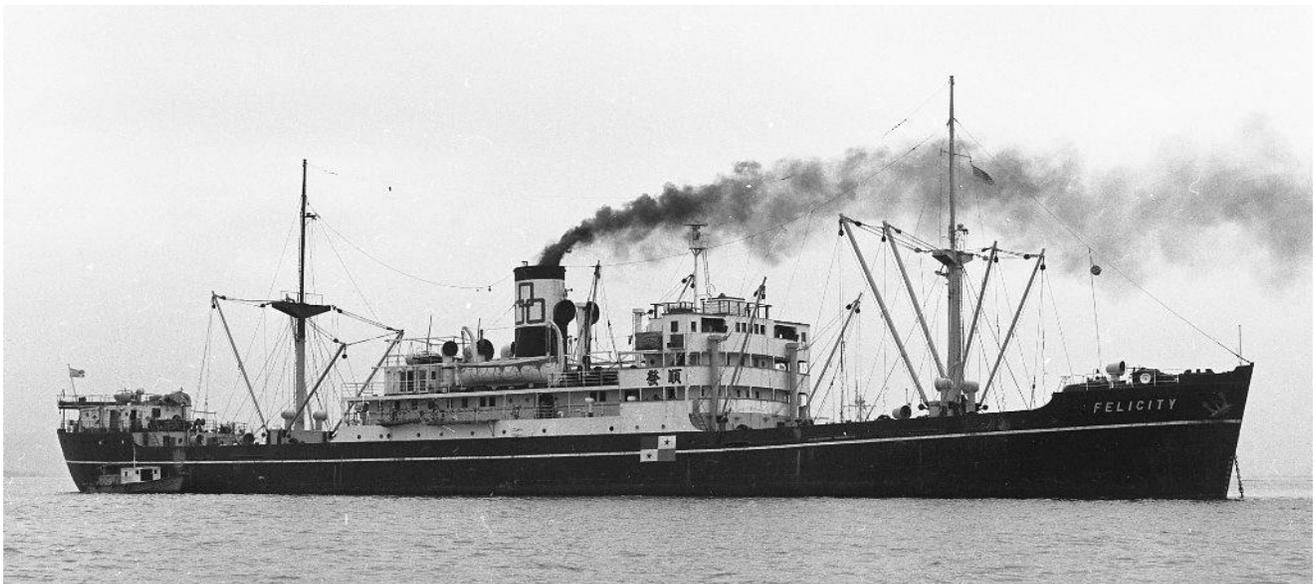
FENGTIEN with original six boats. No. 3 was a small trunked hatch
The Union Jack on the side was for safe passage through Taiwan Strait (Miles Dodd/rhiw.com).

FUKIEN 福建 (1946-65) 3394/46-2 (328.6 x 47.1', T3cy by Central Marine Eng. Wks/11½ knots)
Built by William Gray & Co. Ltd, West Hartlepool (#1187) for CNCo, London. 8/65 sold to Prosperity S.S.
Co. Ltd (Winley S.S. Co. Ltd, Hong Kong), Panama r. FELICITY. 23/5/75 left Hong Kong for Whampoa to
be broken up.





Two views of FUKIEN (1946). Upper: arriving Melbourne and showing the simpler bridgework of the original trio (unknown/NAA*). Lower: arriving Newcastle and showing the boat at the stern (Roger Martin/NAA).

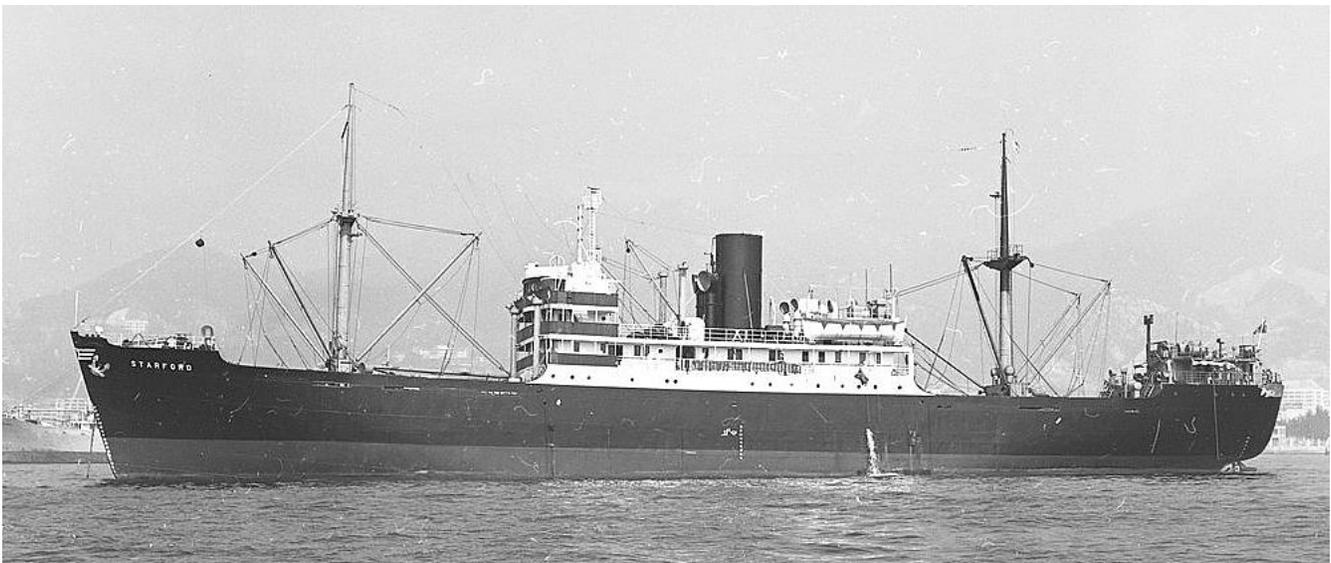


Panamanian-flag FELICITY (1965-75) ex FUKIEN anchored off Danang, 28 February 1970, boat more amidships than ETERNITY ex FOCHOW above (W. Schell).

FUNING 卓寧 (1950-64) 3464/50-11 (331.7 x 47.0', T3cy by Central Marine Eng. Wks/11½ knots)
Built by William Gray & Co. Ltd, West Hartlepool (#1244) for CNCo, London. 10/64 sold to Ocean Tramping Co. Ltd (ben. owner People's Republic of China), Hong Kong (reg. London) r. STARFORD. 1972 t/f to People's Republic of China, Shanghai for coastal trade and may have been renamed in 'Zhan Dou' series. 1992 RLR but may still have been trading.



FUNING arriving at Hobart without Union Jack (Capt. John Solomon/NAA).



British-registered STARFORD (1964-72) ex FUNING at Hong Kong, 9 December 1969 (W. Schell).



STARFORD ex FUNING at Yokohama, August 1971, shortly before transfer to PRC flag (M. Cranfield coll.).

FENGNING 豐寧 (1951-64) 3464/51-2 (331.7 x 47.0', T3cy by Central Marine Eng. Wks/11½ knots)
Built by William Gray & Co. Ltd, West Hartlepool (#1245) for CNCo, London. 9/64 sold to Ocean Tramping Co. Ltd (ben. owner People's Republic of China), Hong Kong (reg. London) r. WISHFORD. 1972 t/f to People's Republic of China, Shanghai for coastal trade and may have been renamed in 'Zhan Dou' series. 1992 RLR but may still have been trading.



FENGNING (1951) arriving at Hobart. With FUNING (1950), differed from the original trio only in the woodwork around the bridge, heavier masts and greater bows rake (K. Barr/NAA).



WISHFORD ex FENGNING discreetly loading rubber for China in Western Roads, Singapore, 14 December 1964, soon after passing to PRC control (Dr George Wilson).



WISHFORD ex FENGNING off Malacca. Single boat each side, woodwork painted over (Airfoto*).



Shanghai's Nantao bund in 1973: second from right is ex STARFORD ex FUNING transferred to Shanghai in 1972, presumably to the Shanghai Shipping Bureau and numbered in the 'Zhandou' series [compare with same angle of FUKIEN arriving at Melbourne]. Other vessels (R to L) can be identified as *Zhandou 6*, *Chang Shan*, *Gong Nong Bing 17* and *Gong Nong Bing 4* (ex CNCo TSINAN of 1930) (Harrison Forman - UWM Libraries).

Sources

Daily Commercial News and Shipping List (Sydney), *Pacific Islands Monthly*, *Straits Times*, W.A. Schell registers, Nautical Association of Australia (NAA) photo archive; wikiswire.com.