

# Australian-Oriental Line Ltd

**G.S. Yuill & Co. Ltd, Managers, Sydney**

(From 1920 vessels registered in Hong Kong)

## ILLUSTRATED FLEET LIST

by H.W. Dick & S.A. Kentwell

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This edition published 1 January 2025

Text and ship histories by Howard Dick, first published 1971, 1988 revised 2020.

Illustrations arranged by Stephen Kentwell 2020, 2023 and 2025

George Skelton Yuill, youngest son of an Aberdeenshire Free Church minister, was born at Peterhead on 29 February 1848. His mother was an Anderson and he began his career in shipping by working for his cousins in the London office of Anderson, Anderson & Co., later joint owners of the Orient Line. In 1872 he went out to Hong Kong to the shipping department of Butterfield & Swire, who the following year became agents for the new China Navigation Co. (CNC). He returned home in 1877 and married the sister of J.H. Scott of the family of Greenock shipbuilders and also Director of CNC. Then in 1880 he came out to Australia as General Manager of the Orient Line in Australia and from June 1881 took over from Gilchrist, Watt & Co. as Agent in Sydney, serving as such until March 1892. Around 1885, after an approach from John Turnbull of The Adelaide S.S. Co. Ltd, he was instrumental in achieving agreement between local and foreign lines to stabilise passenger fares between Adelaide and Melbourne. The agreement was shortlived, but Yuill gained the confidence of the Adelaide Company: in 1890 he was invited onto the board and in November 1892 he was appointed Agent in Sydney, initially as G.S. Yuill & Co. at 17 Bridge Street, then from April 1896 as G.S. Yuill & Co. Ltd of 6 Bridge Street. To maintain a reliable supply of ships' bunkers, in 1892 Yuill also took over management of the Corrimal Coal Co. Ltd and its mine on the South Coast of NSW – in January 1912 he took delivery in Sydney of the new 1,140-ton, Grangemouth-built, 3-masted collier *Corrimal* designed for direct ship-to-ship bunkering in Sydney Harbour and so used until sale in 1926.

In April 1900, flowing from his former employment with Butterfield & Swire and family ties with Scotts, Yuill became Australian agent in Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne for CNC's four clipper-bowed sisterships of the China-Australia Line. Following the American seizure of the Spanish Philippines in 1898, there had emerged a good demand in Manila for frozen meat, which at first was met by U.S. Navy supply ships loading from Sydney and Brisbane. According to Marriner & Hyde, 'The Senior' (1967), in mid-1899 B&S had decided to upgrade their service by installing refrigerating machinery in *Changsha* and *Taiyuan* and in the following year formed a three-way venture with Yuill & Co. and local merchant house Smith, Wood & Co. to open cold stores in Manila and Iloilo. In 1907 Yuill gained control of Queensland Meat Export & Agency Co. Ltd and thereby also Singapore Cold Storage Co. Ltd, then proceeded to buy out the one-third holding of B&S in the Philippines venture. In mid-1908 the other two unrefrigerated sisters, *Chingtu* and *Tsinan*, were withdrawn and B&S seem to have considered disengaging completely from the trade, in which they were being worsted by stiff competition from E&A, NYK and NDL, to concentrate upon the China Coast.

Early in 1912 Yuill visited London, returning home via the United States, Japan and Hong Kong, and the future of the China-Australia service may well have come under discussion. In February Yuill & Co. acquired *Guthrie* (1884) from Burns, Philp & Co. and on 6 April despatched her to Manila and Hong Kong on their own account. In July it was announced that G.S. Yuill & Co. Ltd had formed the Australian-Oriental Line Ltd and had bought the two CNC ships to run under its managing agency. From 6 August all three ships were advertised under the Australian-Oriental Line. A three-ship service was not justified, however, and on her return to Australia in November *Guthrie* was chartered back to Burns, Philp & Co. for a roundtrip to Singapore. Returning to Sydney in January 1913 she seems to have been laid up, before sailing for the last time on 4 July for Hong Kong and delivery to new owners.

Despite having their engines tripled and being fitted with new refrigerating machinery, *Changsha* and *Taiyuan* were now rather out-classed on the route and it may well be that new building plans were overtaken by the First World War. In September 1921 the company was reported to have purchased the Russian-flag sisters *Emperor Alexander III* (5153/14) and *Emperor Nicholas I* (5642/13), 13-14-knot ships with accommodation for 80 first and 52 second-class passengers (compared with only 15, 12 and 28 on the two old ships). A few weeks later, however, the deal fell through because of a mortgage on the ships held by the builders and a lien by French interests. *Changsha* and *Taiyuan*, which in August 1920 had both been transferred to Hong Kong registry to avoid the manning requirements of the Navigation Act, therefore sailed on, but were both to suffer serious mishaps. In March 1923 *Taiyuan* was badly damaged after striking a rock near Bowen (Qld), then in August *Changsha* stranded en route to Hong Kong and was out of service for three months. To maintain the service the elderly *Kut* (3513/82), originally Lund's 'Blue Anchor Line' emigrant ship *Warrnambool*, was taken on 12-month charter from Kaye, Son & Co. of London.

After many conflicting rumours, in May 1924 it was confirmed that Yuills had contracted with the Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock for two 4,300-ton triple-expansion steamers. The builders specialised

in the construction of China coasters and the new ships were in essence enlarged China coasters, with an extra deck and an extra hatch for a cargo deadweight of 4,000 tons, including 500 tons refrigerated. Comfortable accommodation was provided for 48 first, 50 second and 200 third-class passengers with some limited provision for deck passengers over short legs. Speed was cited as 15 knots, service speed more likely about 14 knots. With a slight rake to the masts, a white line around the hull, and a buff funnel instead of the former black, the new ships looked very smart indeed and in terms of comfort were a good match even for the NYK rivals. First to be delivered was *Changte* (彰德 = 'show virtue'), which sailed from Hong Kong on her maiden voyage on 30 September 1925, taking over from the old *Taiyuan* which had arrived northbound several days previously and, after discharging in Shanghai, proceeded to Japan for breaking up. Completion of *Taiping* (太平 = 'peace and security'), however, was delayed by the anti-British boycott and she did not begin her maiden voyage until January 1926. Although sold to breakers in August 1925, *Changsha* therefore had to make another roundtrip and was not delivered to breakers until the end of December.

A regular monthly service was maintained until the outbreak of World War II, and then disrupted for a decade. *Changte* was immediately requisitioned by the Royal Navy as a naval stores issuing ship, followed by *Taiping* in January 1942. Before they could resume normal postwar service, both required major refits, which included raising their passenger capacity to 91 first and 100 third-class (in dormitories). *Changte* returned from Colombo on 9 February 1946 and was placed in the hands of Poole & Steele of Balmain (Sydney) for work that should have been completed by the following September at a cost of £100,000; in the event she was not available until March 1948 at a cost three times greater. *Taiping* returned from Colombo on 6 July 1946 but was then used as a supply ship for Australian forces at Kure in Japan until early 1947. On release she made one commercial voyage to the Far East and was then entrusted to Mort's Dock for a refit which ultimately cost £0.5 million and was not completed until September 1949. Part of the reason for the prolonged refit was that the wooden deck cladding had rotted above the steel plate, but the slow working rate in Australia was also to blame. In the interim, as mentioned above, a monthly service was maintained by the motorships *Yochow* and *Yunnan* on charter from CNC, then from mid-1947 *Yunnan* and the new *Shansi*.

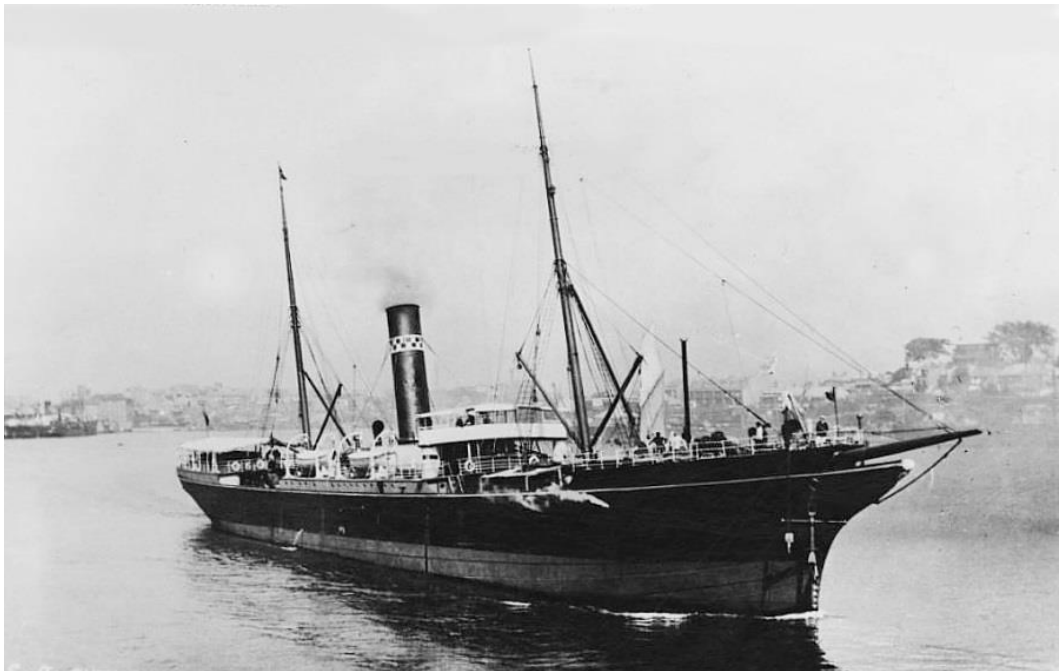
The high costs of new tonnage and the huge over-runs on the costs of refitting the two existing ships put paid to any ideas Yuills may have had to expand the service. An amicable agreement was therefore able to be reached with CNC, which was now looking to re-enter the Australian trade, and the latter ordered two new ships to run a joint service. *Changsha* and *Taiyuan* came into service during 1950, reviving the names of the two original A-O Line vessels, which had been built for CNC. The joint service was maintained until the delivery of *Changte* and *Taiping* to breakers in the second half of 1961, after which the A-O Line was disbanded and CNC took over the full service in its own right. Swire & Yuill (in March 1969 restyled Swire & Gilchrist Pty Ltd) continued, however, to serve as CNC agents in Sydney until placed in liquidation in December 1977, after which the business was taken over by Nedlloyd Swire Pty Ltd.

G.S. Yuill died in Sydney on 10 October 1917 in his 70<sup>th</sup> year and had remained active in his various businesses until suffering a stroke a few days earlier (SMH, 11/10/17). His wife having long predeceased him, he had maintained his quarters in the Union Club on Bligh Street, just around from the company's office. His daughter and only child, Winnifreda, had on 2 February 1907 in London married Lionel Arthur Henry Seymour Dawson-Damer, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Portarlington (1883-1959), who through his wife duly inherited the Yuill estate and its diversified interests, most notably in the meat and livestock trade. Before World War I, Yuills had already been involved in the Queensland Meat & Livestock Co. Ltd and Australian Stockbreeders Co. Ltd. Indeed, one of the objects in starting the Australian-Oriental Line had been to develop the market for frozen meat in Manila and Hong Kong. In 1965 Yuill Properties Ltd bought out the controlling interest in Australian Stockbreeders, which controlled six cattle stations - the deal was financed by the sale in February 1964 to BHP of the Corrimal Colliery. Mainly through the Australian & Oriental Trading Company Ltd, registered in Nassau, the group also held interests in export trading in Britain, cold stores and food processing in Singapore and Malaya, and trading and engineering activities in Australia. The 7<sup>th</sup> Earl, George Lionel Yuill Seymour Dawson-Damer (b. 1938), and also his heir, perpetuate the family name and business connection.

## Fleet List

**GUTHRIE** (1912-13) 2338/84-3 (314.0' x 38.3', C2cy/308 nhp)

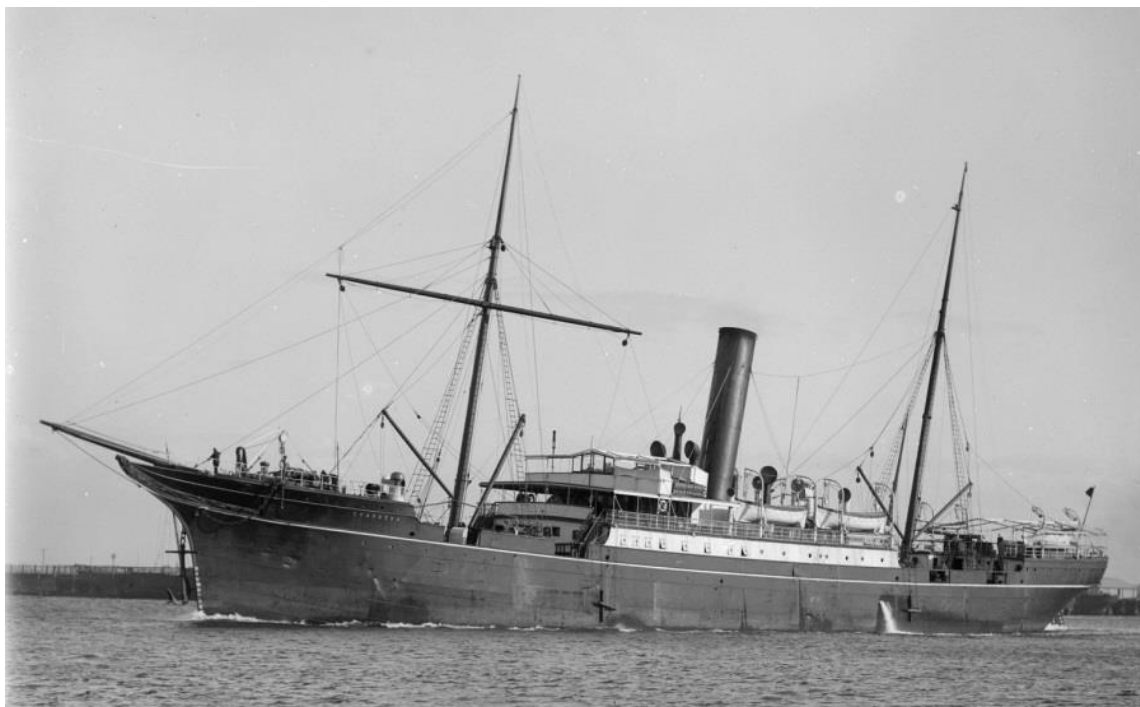
Built by Wm Doxford & Sons Ltd, Sunderland (#157) for W. Mactaggart, London. 1891 t/f to Eastern & Australian S.S. Co. Ltd, London for Australia-China trade. 1904 sold to Burns, Philp & Co. Ltd, Sydney for Sydney-Java-Singapore trade. 2/12 sold to G.S. Yuill & Co. Ltd, Sydney. 6/13 sold to White Cross S.S. Co. Ltd (A. Gallussen mgr), Tientsin. 3/11/14 wrecked on Tientsin Bar outbound for Vladivostok.



GUTHRIE at Sydney in Burns, Philp colours (ANMM).

**CHANGSHA** 長沙 (1912-25) 2269/86-7 (315.2' x 38.2', T3cy/266 nhp)

Built by Scott & Co., Greenock (#246) for China Navigation Co. Ltd, London for Australia trade. 8/12 sold to A-O Line, Sydney. Engines tripled and refrig. fitted. 8/20 reg. t/f to Hong Kong. Mid-8/23 ashore on sandbank N. of Celebes - late 9/23 refloated by Taikoo (366/11). 11/23 repairs completed at Hong Kong. 8/25 sold to Chinese shipbreakers - 23/12/25 arrived at Hong Kong for delivery to breakers.



CHANGSHA (A.C. Green@SLV).

**TAIYUAN** 太原 (1912-25) 2269/86-9 (315.2' x 38.2', T3cy/266 nhp)

Built by Scott & Co., Greenock (#248) for China Navigation Co. Ltd, London for Australia trade. 7/12 sold to A-O Line, Sydney. Engines tripled and refrigeration fitted. 8/20 reg. t/f to Hong Kong. Mid-3/23 seriously damaged when struck Naves Rock near Bowen - to Sydney for repairs. 8/25 sold to Chinese breakers - 19/10 arrived at Shanghai and thence to Japan for breaking up.



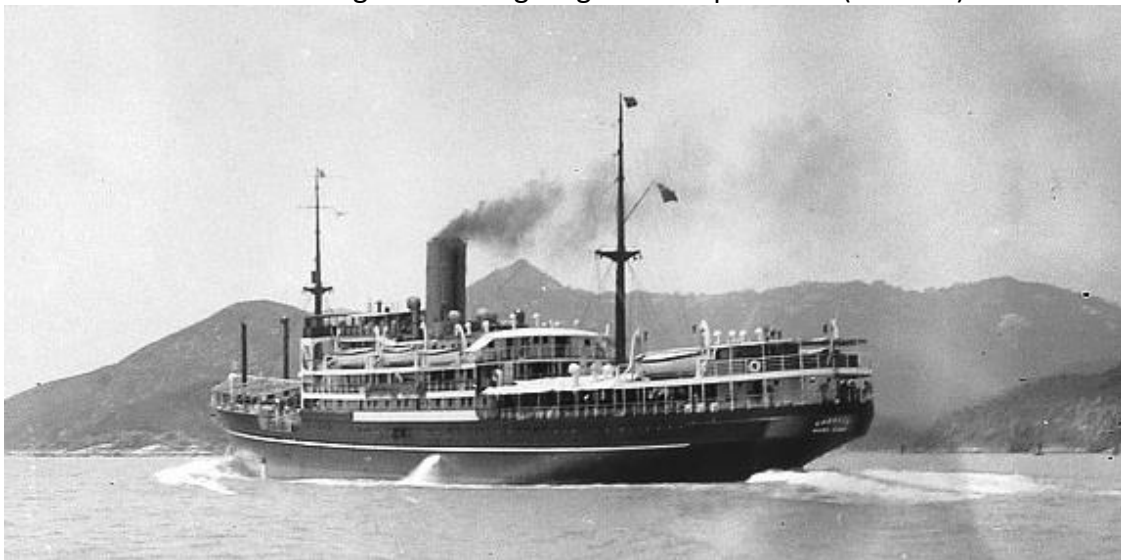
Left: TAIYUAN at No.3, Circular Quay, Sydney on 15/3/24, having just arrived from Hong Kong (F. G Wilkinson@ANMM). Right: TAIYUAN's stern showing home port Sydney (NT Library).

**CHANGTE** (1925-61) 4324/25-9 (352.3' x 48.2', T3cy/638 nhp, pass)

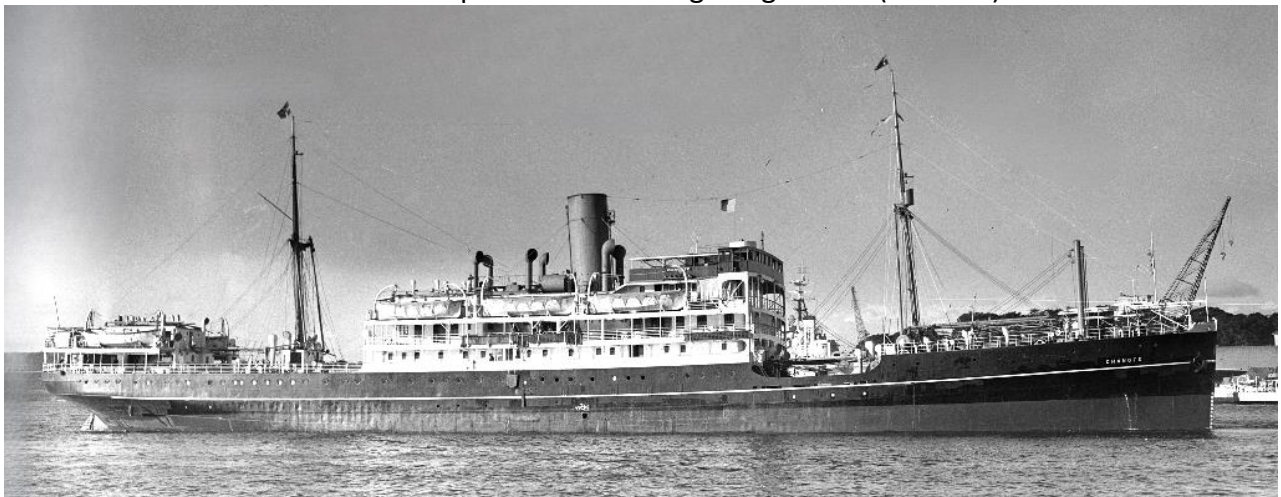
Built by Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co. Ltd, Hong Kong (#618) for AOL (reg. Hong Kong). 27/8/39 req. at Sydney by R.N. and conv. to naval stores issuing ship Y1-9 for use mainly in Indian Ocean/Red Sea, by 1945 Ceylon and Bay of Bengal. 4/46 redel. to owners and after refit by Poole & Steele Pty Ltd, Sydney, 3/48 resumed service. 7/61 del. to shipbreakers at Hong Kong.



CHANGTE fitting out at Hongkong & Whampoa Dock (builders).



CHANGTE on speed trials in Hong Kong waters (builders).



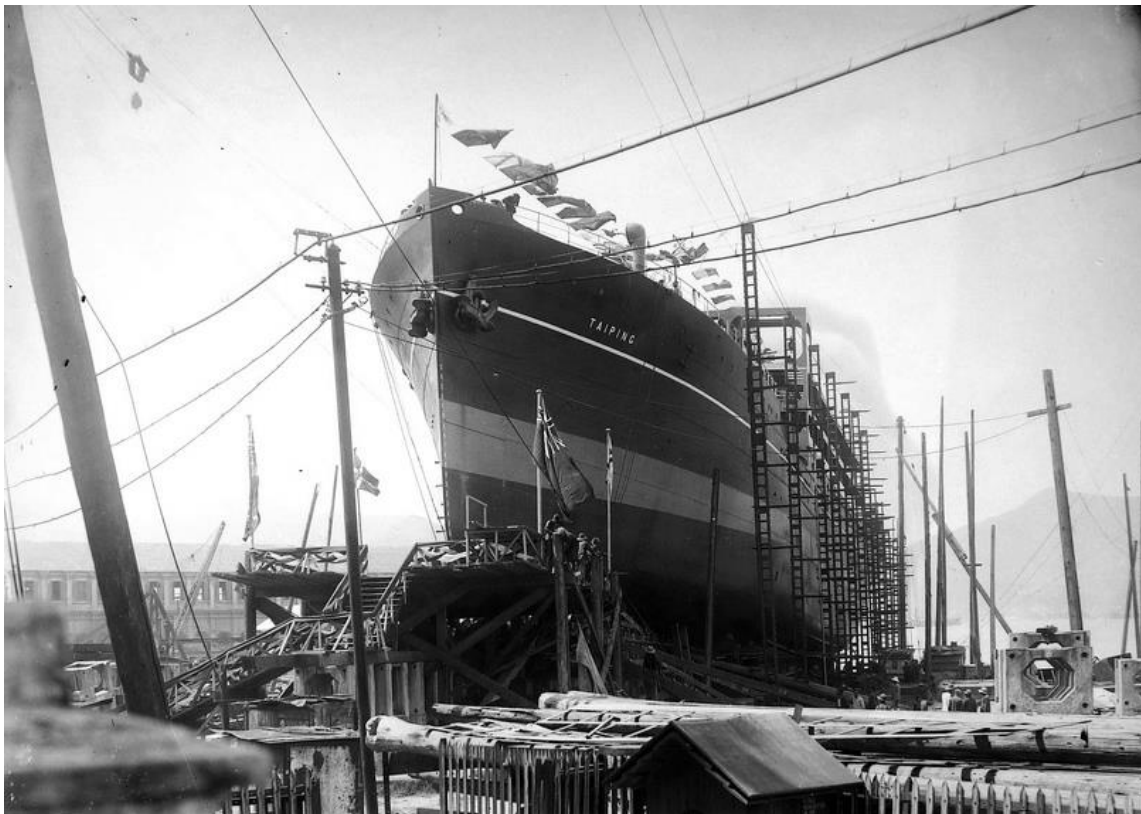
CHANGTE postwar maneuvering at Woolloomooloo, Sydney (coll. C. Gee).



CHANGTE at Prince's Wharf, Hobart on a rare visit near end career, 3 July 1960 (L.D. Rex).

**TAIPING** (1926-61) 4234/26-1 (352.3' x 48.2', T3cy/638 nhp, pass)

Built by Hong Kong & Whampoa Dock Co. Ltd, Hong Kong (#619) for AOL (reg. Hong Kong). 4/12/41 HK via Manila, Singapore, Fremantle to Sydney (31/12). 1/42 at Sydney req. by R.N. and conv. to naval stores issuing ship. 13/2/42 to Trincomalee (3/3) for service in Indian Ocean. 12/43-9/44 under repair at Mombasa, then at Durban (to 2/45) and Cape Town. 3/45 to Ceylon. 5/45 to Burma. 10/45 to Ceylon and Straits. 3/46 Ceylon and repairs. 15/6/46 sailed Colombo in ballast for Sydney (6/7), then 3/8 to Kure on supply run [BT 389/29/100]. 26/7/47 redel. at Sydney for refit by Mort's Dock - 9/49 resumed service. 3/10/61 arrived at Hong Kong for breaking up.



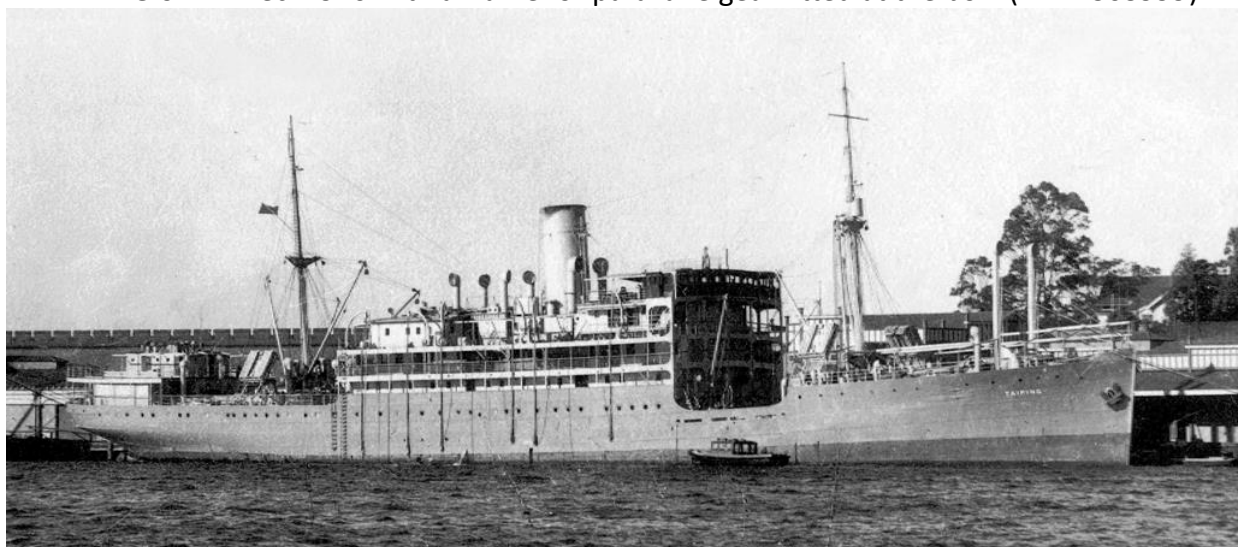
TAIPING on launch day 11 June 1925 (builders).



TAIPIING at Melbourne (A.C. Green@SLV).



TAIPIING on 21 Dec. 1940 with a frame for paravane gear fitted at the bow (AWM303999)



TAIPIING at Circular Quay, Sydney c.1946 (Maritime Studios/HD).





TAIPING at Nagoya postwar (Hinomaru/shipspotting.com).



Engine plate of CHANGTE or TAIPING (HD)

### Chartered ships

**KUT** (charter, 1923-24) 3513/92-8 (360.0' x 43.5', T3cy/445 nhp, Wigham Richardson & Co., Newc.) Built by Sunderland S.B. Co., Sunderland (#173) for William Lund (Blue Anchor Line), London for UK-Cape-Australia emigrant trade as WARRNAMBOOL. 1900 sold to British & South American S.N. Co. Ltd, Liverpool r. HARMODIUS. 1919 sold to The 'K' S.S. Co. Ltd (Kaye, Son & Co. Ltd, Mgrs), London r. KUT. 11/23 on charter at Melbourne to AOL for 12 months. 16/11/26 arrived at Briton Ferry for demolition.



KUT (A.C. Green@SLV).

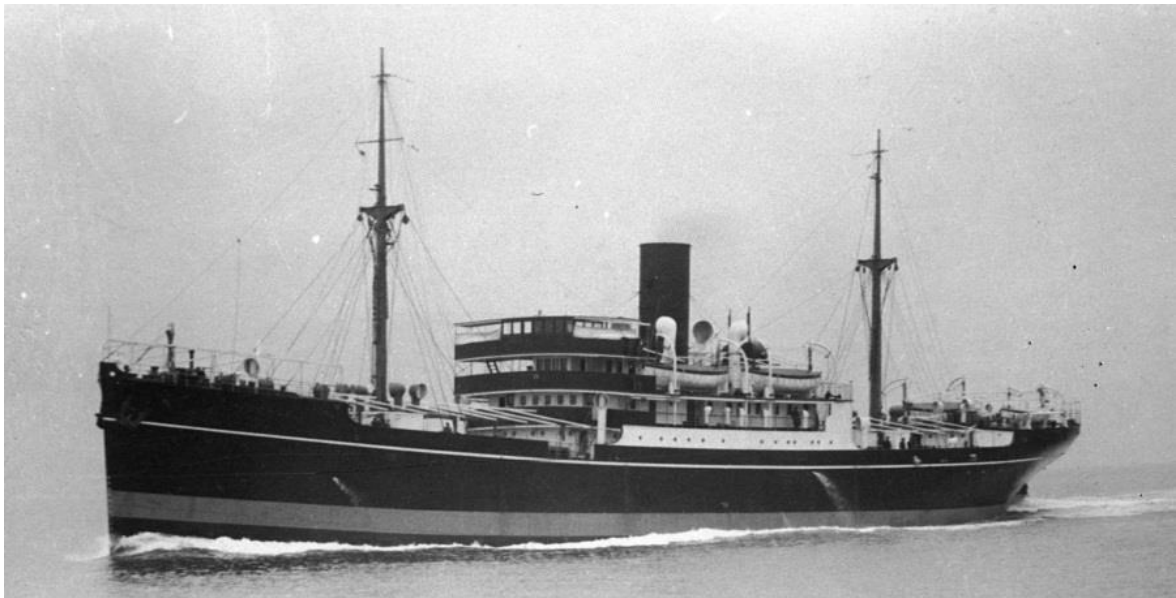
**YUNNAN** 云南 (charter 1946-47) 2812/34-8 (299.9 x 44.2' , M5cy/425nhp/12½k, 4/17/47 plus deck) Built by Scotts' S.B. & Eng. Co. Ltd, Greenock (#560) for and 29/8 del. to CNC, 25/10 at Shanghai (rep. 48 third, 207 deck passengers). By 1/40 to at least 8/40 special route HK-Saigon-Sandakan-Tarakan (or Miri) for bunkers-New Guinea-Rabaul-Tulagi-Rabaul-HK [BT 389/17/134]. 22/6/42 requisitioned by RAN with Chinese crew for use as supply ship N. Qld-PNG (Milne Bay), local crew signed on at Brisbane after mutiny. 20/9/44 comm. by RAN as armament stores issuing ship HMAS YUNNAN (FL-151) for Leyte invasion. 31/1/46 returned to CNC at Sydney for refit by Poole & Steel Ltd prior to charter to Australian Oriental Line, 4/46 on charter sailing delayed until 1/6. 3/49 maiden northbound CNCo voyage from NZ. 10/49 off charter. 8-12/50 AOL charter for military supplies Australia to Kure (2 voyages). Postwar HK pass. certificate 14 cabin, 336 deck. 9/59 sold to On Thai Nav. Co. Ltd, Hong Kong r. HOCK ANN. 5/63 sold to Guan Guan Enterprises (H.K.) Ltd and t/f to Guan Guan Shg Ltd, Singapore r. KIM HOCK. 10/63 t/f to Hong Kong South Sea Shg Co. Ltd, Hong Kong. 5/64 r. KARIO. 8/64 to Tptes Maritimos de San Blas S.A., Panama. 1965 t/f to Cia de Nav. Santos S.A., Panama r. BAKANA. 1966 r. KARIO. 1966 r. MURCIA. 1966 t/f to King Line S.A., Panama r. KING EAGLE. 1968 t/f to Guan Guan Shg (Pte) Ltd, Singapore r. KIM HOCK. 2/71 r. KIM HAI. 9/6/71 arrived at Hong Kong for demolition by Leung Yau Shipbreaking Co. Ltd.



YUNNAN at Melbourne 19 Feb. 1949 with AOL funnel (A.C. Green@SLV).

**YOCHOW** 岳州 (charter 1946-47) 2810/33-11 (312.0' x 42.2', M5cy)

Built by Taikoo D.Y. & Eng. Co. Ltd, Hong Kong (#558) for China Nav. Co. Ltd, London. 1942-45 served in Australia-New Guinea waters. 4/46-5/47 on charter to AOL. 29/10/42 disabled off Hervey Bay (Old) - towed to Sydney. 11/60 sold to Guan Guan Ltd, Singapore r. KUDA MAS. 10/63 t/f to Hong Kong South Sea Shg Co. Ltd, Hong Kong. 11/66 r. KING BAY. 5/69 t/f to Guan Guan Shg (Pte) Ltd, Singapore. 21/12/69 stranded on reef in Sulu Sea (8.54N, 120.1E) on voyage Bali-Hong Kong. Refloated and end-9/70 arrived at Cebu under tow. Sold to Chandler Enterprises for scrapping as lay (in progress 5/72).



YOCHOW running trials off Hong Kong (Wikiswire).



YOCHOW in camouflage as a transport 24/12/41 (AWM303946).

**SHANSI** 山西 (charter 1947-49) 3152/47-2 (321.0' x 46.4', M4cy, pass)

Built by Scotts' S.B. & Eng. Co. Ltd, Greenock (#641) for China Nav. Co. Ltd, London. 5/47-9/49 on charter to AOL. 12/52-6/67 in 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.



SHANSI at Melbourne 24/3/48 wearing AOL funnel (A.C. Green@SLV)

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